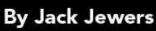
THE MOST TRUSTED NAME IN TRAVEL





Frommer's Ireland





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ISBN 978-1-62887-212-5 (paper), 978-1-62887-213-2 (e-book)

Editorial Director: Pauline Frommer Editor: Holly Hughes Production Editor: Erin Geile Cartographer: Roberta Stockwell Photo Editor: Meghan Lamb Cover Design: David Riedy

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FROMMER'S STAR RATINGS SYSTEM

Every hotel, restaurant and attraction listed in this guide has been ranked for quality and value. Here's what the stars mean:

- \star Recommended
- ★★ Highly Recommended
- ★★★ A must! Don't miss!

HOW TO CONTACT US

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to: Support@FrommerMedia.com

AN IMPORTANT NOTE

The world is a dynamic place. Hotels change ownership, restaurants hike their prices, museums alter their opening hours, and busses and trains change their routings. And all of this can occur in the several months after our authors have visited, inspected, and written about, these hotels, restaurants, museums and transportation services. Though we have made valiant efforts to keep all our information fresh and up-to-date, some few changes can inevitably occur in the periods before a revised edition of this guidebook is published. So please bear with us if a tiny number of the details in this book have changed. Please also note that we have no responsibility or liability for any inaccuracy or errors or omissions, or for inconvenience, loss, damage, or expenses suffered by anyone as a result of assertions in this guide.



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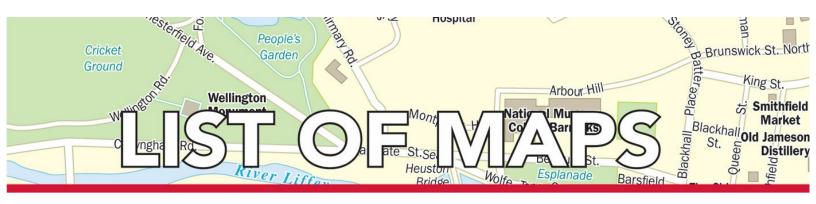
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jack Jewers has written about Ireland for Frommer's since 2006. Born and raised in England, he loved listening to his great-aunt's tales about life in Dublin during the civil war. Jack proposed to his Irish-American wife at a spa on the ring of Kerry. It gets a great review in this book.

ABOUT THE FROMMER TRAVEL GUIDES

For most of the past 50 years, Frommer's has been the leading series of travel guides in North America, accounting for as many as 24% of all guidebooks sold. I think I know why.

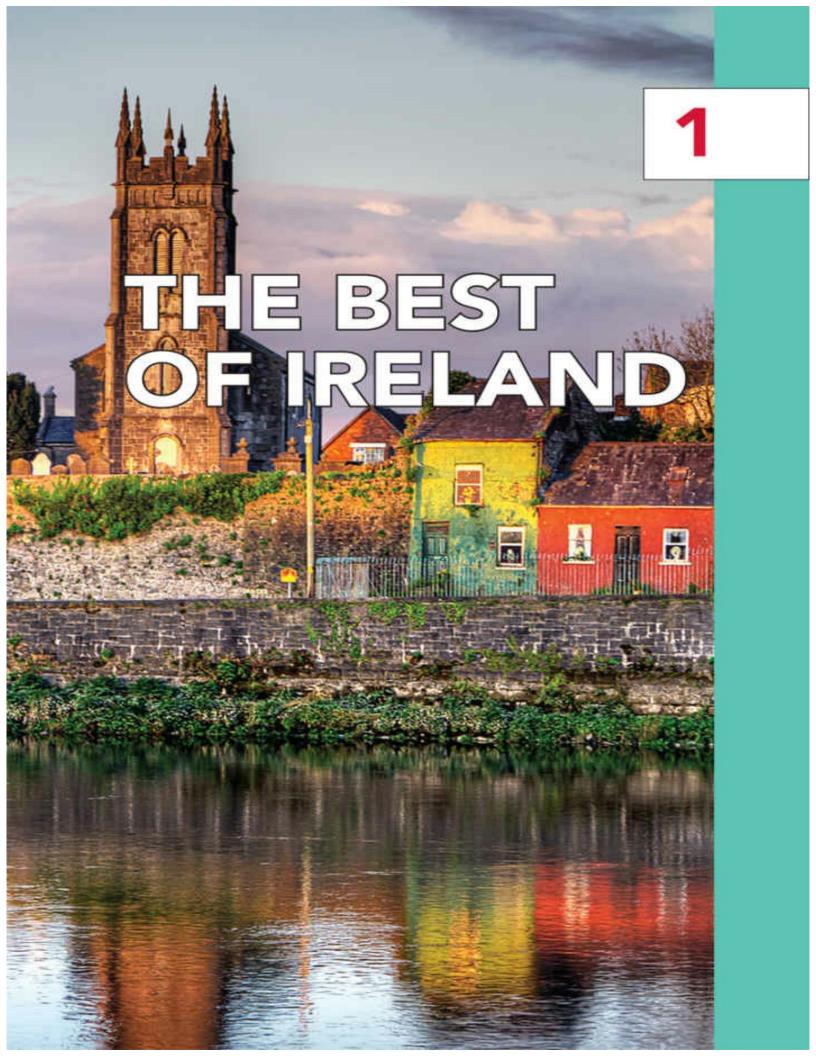
Though we hope our books are entertaining, we nevertheless deal with travel in a serious fashion. Our guidebooks have never looked on such journeys as a mere recreation, but as a far more important human function, a time of learning and introspection, an essential part of a civilized life. We stress the culture, lifestyle, history, and beliefs of the destinations we cover, and urge our readers to seek out people and new ideas as the chief rewards of travel.

We have never shied from controversy. We have, from the beginning, encouraged our authors to be intensely judgmental, critical both pro and con—in their comments, and wholly independent. Our only clients are our readers, and we have triggered the ire of countless prominent sorts, from a tourist newspaper we called "practically worthless" (it unsuccessfully sued us) to the many rip-offs we've condemned.

And because we believe that travel should be available to everyone regardless of their incomes, we have always been costconscious at every level of expenditure. Though we have broadened our recommendations beyond the budget category, we insist that every lodging we include be sensibly priced. We use every form of media to assist our readers, and are particularly proud of our feisty daily website, the award-winning Frommers.com.

I have high hopes for the future of Frommer's. May these guidebooks, in all the years ahead, continue to reflect the joy of travel and the freedom that travel represents. May they always pursue a cost-conscious path, so that people of all incomes can enjoy the rewards of travel. And may they create, for both the traveler and the persons among whom we travel, a community of friends, where all human beings live in harmony and peace.

Arthur Frommer



T iny, and with ever-changing scenery, Ireland is an addictive place to explore. Within a few miles you can travel from plunging cliffs and flat pastureland to towering mountains and gloomy peat bogs. You can spend the night in ancient castles or state-of-the-art spa hotels, dine on fine Irish cuisine or snack on crispy fish and chips served in a paper bag. The sheer number of sights, little villages, charming pubs, and adorable restaurants and shops is overwhelming—you always feel that you might be missing something. So it's nice to have somebody to help you focus, and that's why we've put together this list of some of our favorite places and things to do in Ireland. We hope that while you're exploring this magical country, you'll find a few of your own.

THE best AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

- Seeing a Traditional Music Session at a Proper Irish Pub: It's not hard to track down live music in Irish pubs, and while there are plenty of shows for the tourist crowd, nothing beats the energy, atmosphere, and authenticity of a genuine small-town traditional music session. The instructions for getting the most out of a session are simple: Buy a pint, grab a seat (preferably one near a smoldering peat fire), and wait for the action to begin. We've listed some of the best places in this book, including pubs such as the Long Valley in Cork (see p. 259) or Gus O'Connor's and McGann's in little Doolin, County Clare (see p. 365).
- Getting Lost Down the Back Roads of County Kerry: It's Ireland's most visited county by far, and if you stick to the beaten path (especially in summer), it's impossible to escape the tourist throngs. Instead, veer off onto the winding back roads and allow yourself to get gloriously, hopelessly lost. Forget the clock and embrace a sense of serendipity. There are always new discoveries to be made down its breathtaking byways. See p. 290.
- Touching the Bullet Holes in the Walls of the General Post Office (Dublin, County Dublin): It's hard to overstate what a potent national symbol the G.P.O. is. Yes, it's still a working post office, but Patrick Pearse read his independence proclamation from its front steps in 1916 (the original document is now displayed inside) and it was the scene of fierce fighting during the civil war of 1922. Bullet scars from that battle still pock the facade. Touch them and you touch history. See p. 111.



The Temple Bar nightlife area in Dublin.

- Walking Down the Long Stone Passage at Newgrange (County Meath): Sacred to the ancients, this passage tomb is more than 5,000 years old—that's older than the Egyptian pyramids or Stonehenge. Wander down the long, atmospheric central tunnel and try to visualize just how many generations have passed since it was built—it's a mind-blowing exercise, a real time-warp experience. See p. 192.
- Browsing the Old English Market in Cork (County Cork): Cork is a county made for foodies. In addition to Kinsale, a small coastal village that's grown to become something of a hub for top restaurants, the eponymous main city is home to one of the country's finest (and oldest) food markets. A walk through here is a feast for the senses. See p. 253.
- Driving Through the Burren (County Clare): Ireland is full of memorable landscapes, but this is the most unique. For miles, this exposed coastal countryside has a haunting, alien feel, although it's strikingly beautiful too. Try to be here as the sun goes down, when the craggy limestone planes turn an evening shade of red. See chapter 9.

Ireland

To Rescott

Sheep's Maad Crookhover Mizen Head Cape Clear

CELTIC SEA

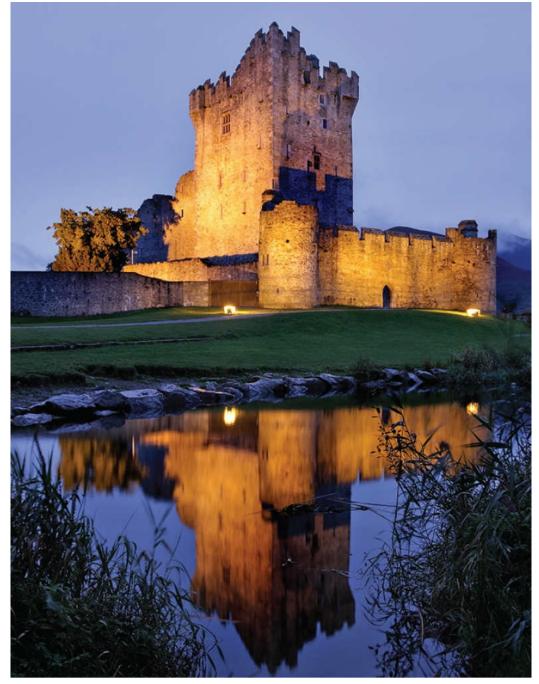
To Rescort :

30 km

To Swansea

SCOTLAND

• Taking Afternoon Tea at The Shelbourne (Dublin, County Dublin): You don't have to be an overnight guest to sink into a huge leather armchair at this classic Dublin hotel and demolish a tower of cakes and daintily cut sandwiches. If you're in the mood for a history fix afterward, sneak upstairs to find room no. 112. This is where the Irish Constitution was written in 1922. If nobody's booked the room—and the concierge is in a good mood—you might even get to peek inside. See p. 140.



Ross Castle in Killarney National Park, County Kerry.

- Photographing the Murals in Belfast and Derry (County Antrim/County Derry, Northern Ireland): Half a generation has grown up in Northern Ireland without knowing full-on sectarian bloodshed firsthand. Yet the long, ugly "peace wall" dividing Catholic neighborhoods from near-identical Protestant streets in Belfast is still covered in political street art, much of it preaching nonviolence. Likewise, the so-called "People's Gallery" murals in Derry testify how "the Troubles" affected ordinary citizens. See chapter 14.
- Hiking the Path Down to the Giant's Causeway (County Antrim): It's like hiking through a

fantasy landscape to take the half-mile walk down to this extraordinary natural wonder—37,000 columns of basalt sitting at the base of cliffs along the Antrim Coast. Geologists claim these mystical rocks were formed millions of years ago by cooling volcanoes. But don't you prefer to believe they were really made by giants, as the ancient belief would hold? See p. 540.

THE best HOTELS

- Monart Spa (Enniscorthy, County Wexford): A sumptuous countryside retreat, this pampering paradise is consistently rated among the top spas in Ireland. It's a serene, adults-only zone in a beautiful setting. See p. 232.
- **Temple House** (Ballymote, County Sligo): Proving that not all the best overnight stays are to be found in luxury hotels, Temple House is an historic countryside B&B that feels like it's in a world of its own. See p. 459.
- Wicklow Way Lodge (Oldbridge, County Wicklow): It's hard to fault this lovely B&B with spectacular views of the Wicklow Mountains. So we won't. It's just gorgeous. See p. 189.
- Aghadoe Heights (Killarney, County Kerry): Another of Ireland's top spas, this one overlooks the Lakes of Killarney from a high vantage point just north of the town. See p. 300.
- Ashford Castle (Cong, County Mayo): Live like royalty for a night at this fairytale castle in County Mayo. The great and the good have been coming here for decades to see what the fuss is about. The fuss, it turns out, is justified. See p. 444.
- The Bervie (Keel, County Mayo): Overlooking the Atlantic Ocean on an island off the Mayo coast, the Bervie is a haven of magnificent views and gourmet food. See p. 445.
- **Dolphin Beach House** (Clifden, County Galway): This incredibly special B&B on the Galway coast is a converted early-20th-century homestead with amazing views, gorgeous food, and gregarious hosts. See p. 406.
- Gregan's Castle Hotel (Ballyvaughn, County Clare): J. R. R. Tolkien took inspiration for *The Lord of the Rings* while staying at this elegant country house surrounded by the lunar landscape of Burren. See p. 370.
- Rathmullan House (Rathmullan, County Donegal): Remote and windswept, County Donegal attracts a fraction of the visitors of Dublin or Kerry. That's good news for those that make the journey to enjoy a night at this incredible 18th-century mansion. See p. 484.

THE best RESTAURANTS

- Chapter One (Dublin, County Dublin): In the vaulted basement of the Dublin Writers Museum, this is one of the capital's very best restaurants. It's quite a splurge, but come at lunchtime to experience the same wonderful food at almost half the price. See p. 153.
- Fishy Fishy Café (Kinsale, County Cork): Kinsale is Ireland's unofficial gourmet capital, and the delightful Fishy Fishy is among its best restaurants. The seafood is so local that the menu tells you who caught it—and we're talking dish by dish, name by name. See p. 269.
- Crackpots (Kinsale, County Cork): Another Kinsale favorite, Crackpots is a charming combination of designer pottery shop and outstandingly good restaurant. It's one of the very best places to eat in a town where the competition is stiff. See p. 269.

- Aniar (Galway, County Galway): Galway City's most sought-after table has a tiny but impeccably judged menu of innovative, modern Irish cuisine. Aniar is one of just a handful of Michelin-starred restaurants in Ireland. See p. 389.
- Wilde's at Lisloughrey Lodge (Cong, County Mayo): On the grounds of Ashford Castle, Wilde's is a joyous restaurant run by a real star in the making. The dining room has an amazing view of Lough Corrib. See p. 447.



The pours are as perfect as the seafood at Moran's Oyster Cottage in County Galway.

- **Richmond House** (Cappoquin, County Waterford): One of the real destination restaurants of the southeast, the Richmond House is a converted 18th-century mansion. They serve exquisite, seasonal meals, with many of the ingredients sourced from their own garden. See p. 222.
- The Lime Tree (Kenmare, County Kerry): This has long been one of the most respected restaurants

in County Kerry, and with good reason—the sophisticated modern Irish menu, full of local flavors, is impressive but still surprisingly affordable. See p. 310.

- **Doyle's Seafood Bar** (Dingle, County Kerry): Dingle isn't short of places offering super-fresh, local seafood, and it's hard to pick between them, but this is probably the best. What you find on the menu will depend on the catch of the day, and it's all impeccably done. See p. 329.
- Gallagher's Boxty House (Dublin, County Dublin): Think again if you assume that the best meals always require the deepest pockets. A local man who wanted to preserve the culinary traditions of his childhood started this hugely popular restaurant in Dublin's Temple Bar. The result is captivating. See p. 146.

THE best PICTURE-POSTCARD TOWNS

- Adare (County Limerick): This really is a picture-postcard town, its image having been reproduced alongside a hundred thousand "Wish You Were Heres." Unfortunately the secret is very much out, but if you manage to visit when the roads aren't clogged with tour buses, you'll leave with a memory card full of photos. See p. 342.
- Athlone (County Westmeath): Sitting at the edge of the River Shannon, its streets curving around a sturdy, fortresslike castle, Athlone is a charmer with a real spirit of fun. Houses are painted in bright hues, and streets are lined with funky boutiques, good restaurants, and lively pubs. See chapter 11.
- **Dalkey** (County Dublin): The cutest of a string of upscale seaside towns unfurling south from Dublin, Dalkey is both a short drive and a million miles away from the busy city. With a castle, a mountaintop folly, lovely beaches, and some fine restaurants, it tempts you to settle into its comfortable affluence. See p. 129.
- **Kinsale** (County Cork): Kinsale's narrow streets all lead to the sea, dropping steeply from the hills around the harbor. The walk from Kinsale through Scilly to Charles Fort and Frower Point is breathtaking. Kinsale has the added benefit of being a foodie town with no shortage of good restaurants. See p. 263.
- Kenmare (County Kerry): It's easy to fall in love with Kenmare, with its stone cottages, colorful gardens, and flowers overflowing from window boxes. It's also home to several elegant hotels, so it makes an enchanting base when exploring the Ring of Kerry. See p. 307.
- **Dingle (An Daingean)** (County Kerry): Dingle is a charming hilltop medieval town. Stone buildings ramble up and down hills, and the small population is relaxed about visitors. It has lots of little diners and picturesque pubs, plus a lovely, historic church. See p. 325.
- Ardara (County Donegal): On the southwest coast of County Donegal, the tiny town of Ardara looks as if it were carved out of a solid block of granite. Its streets undulate up and down the rocky hills and are lined with little boutiques and charming arts shops, many selling clothes made of the famed Donegal wool. See p. 478.

THE best NATURAL WONDERS

• Giant's Causeway (County Antrim): At the foot of a cliff by the sea, this mysterious mass of tightly packed, naturally occurring hexagonal basalt columns is nothing short of astonishing. This volcanic

wonder, formed 60 million years ago, looks even better when negotiated (cautiously) on foot. See p. 540.

- The Burren (County Clare): We can guarantee this: The Burren is one of the strangest landscapes you're likely to see anywhere in the world. Its stark limestone grassland is spread with a quilt of wildflowers from as far afield as the Alps, and its inhabitants include nearly every species of butterfly found in Ireland. See p. 358.
- Mizen Head (County Cork): While most travelers flock to the overcrowded Cliffs of Moher (p. 364), these stunning sea cliffs form the extreme southwest tip of Ireland. Watch the waves crash against spectacular 210m (689-ft.) cliffs from the excellent visitor center. See p. 280.
- Malin Head (County Donegal): From one extreme to the other—literally! The Malin Head promontory, in the remotest part of Ireland's remotest country, looks out over a seemingly unending sea. Next stop: New York. See p. 487.
- The Twelve Bens (County Galway): Amid Connemara's central mountains, bogs, and lakes, the rugged Twelve Bens range crowns a spectacular landscape. Some of the peaks are bare and rocky, others clothed in peat. The loftiest, Benbaun in Connemara National Park, reaches a height of 729m (2,392 ft.). See p. 399.
- Slieve League (County Donegal): As the Slieve League peninsula stretches for 48km (30 miles) into the Atlantic, its pigmented bluffs rise to startlingly high sea cliffs. They can also be walked along, if you dare. See p. 472.
- MacGillycuddy's Reeks (County Kerry): A mountain range on the Iveragh Peninsula, MacGillycuddy's Reeks not only has the best name of any mountain range in Ireland, it also has the highest mountain on the island, Carrantuohill (1,041m/3,414 ft.). The Reeks are among Ireland's greatest spectacles. See p. 298.



Giant's Causeway.



Hikers on the Slieve League coastal walk in County Donegal.

THE best CASTLES & STATELY HOMES

- Kilkenny Castle (County Kilkenny): Although parts of this stout towered castle date from the 13th century, the existing structure looks more like a 19th-century palace. Exquisitely restored, it also has extensive gardens; the old stables now hold art galleries and shops. See p. 234.
- Bunratty Castle & Folk Park (County Clare): This grand old castle has been well restored and filled with a curious assortment of medieval furnishings, offering a glimpse into the life of its past inhabitants. This is the first stop for many arrivals from Shannon, so expect crowds. See p. 363.
- **Powerscourt Estate** (County Wicklow): Restored at last to its former glory (at least on the outside) after decades of misfortune and neglect, the magnificent Palladian house lies at the heart of the Powerscourt estate and is surrounded by some of the most exquisite gardens in Ireland. See p. 183.
- Charleville Castle (County Offaly): Sometimes the castles that leave the biggest impression aren't those in the most impressive states of repair. Not only is Charleville one of the most atmospheric castles in Ireland, it is also reputed to be among its most haunted. See p. 416.

- Carrickfergus Castle (County Antrim): This huge Norman fortress on the bank of Belfast Lough is surprisingly intact and well-preserved, complete with an imposing tower house and a high wall punctuated by corner towers. See p. 510.
- **Castletown House** (County Kildare): This grand, whitewashed mansion was built in the early 18th century and soon became one of Ireland's most imitated buildings. The grounds house the most wonderfully named barn in Ireland. See p. 201.
- **Dunluce Castle** (County Antrim): Set atop a razor-sharp promontory jutting into the sea, these castle ruins are picturesque and evocative. Unlike many other castles, it wasn't demolished by human enemies, but had to be abandoned after a large section collapsed and fell into the breakers below. See p. 540.

THE best PREHISTORIC SITES

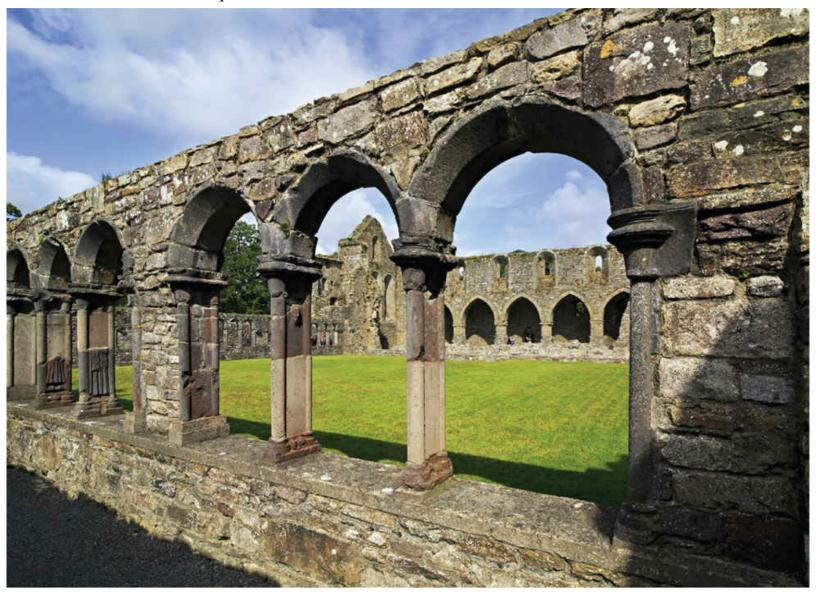
- Hill of Tara (County Meath): Of ritual significance from the Stone Age to the early Christian period, Tara has seen it all and kept it a secret. This was the traditional center and seat of Ireland's high kings. Although the hill is only 154m (512 ft.) above sea level, from here you can see each of Ireland's four Celtic provinces on a clear day. The site is mostly unexcavated and tells its story in whispers. It's a place to be walked slowly. See p. 191.
- Newgrange (County Meath): One of the archaeological wonders of Western Europe, Newgrange is the centerpiece of a megalithic cemetery dating back 5,000 years. Its massive mound and passage tomb are amazing feats of engineering. But the question remains: What was it all for? See p. 195.
- Knowth (County Meath): Another great passage tomb, Knowth's awesome presence is matched only by its inscrutability. Hundreds of prehistoric carvings were discovered here when the site was first excavated in the 1960s. And yet, nobody seems to quite understand it to this day. See p. 192.
- Dún Aengus (County Galway): The eminent archaeologist George Petrie called Dún Aengus "the most magnificent barbaric monument in Europe." No one knows who built this massive stone fort or what year it was constructed. Facing the sea, where its three stone rings meet steep 90m (295-ft.) cliffs, Dún Aengus still stands guard today over the southern coast of Inishmore, the largest of the Aran Islands. See p. 381.
- Carrowmore & Carrowkeel (County Sligo): These two megalithic cities of the dead (Europe's largest) may have once contained more than 200 passage tombs. The two together—one in the valley and the other atop a nearby mountain—convey an unequaled sense of the ancient peoples' reverence for the dead. Carrowmore is well presented and interpreted, while Carrowkeel quietly awaits those who seek it out. See p. 452.
- Corlea Trackway (County Longford): The amazing thing about this simple wooden trackway in a remote bog is just how unbelievably old it is—people were walking its well-preserved planks well over 2,000 years ago. See p. 417.

THE best EARLY CHRISTIAN RUINS

• Glendalough (County Wicklow): Nestled in "the glen of the two lakes," this remote monastic settlement was founded by St. Kevin in the 6th century. Today its atmospheric ruins preside over an endlessly scenic setting with lakes and forests surrounding it. It's quite simply one of the loveliest

spots in Ireland. See p. 181.

• The Rock of Cashel (County Tipperary): In name and appearance, "the Rock" suggests a citadel, a place designed more for power than prayer. In fact, Cashel (or *Caiseal*) means "fortress." The rock is a huge outcropping—or an *up*cropping—of limestone topped with spectacularly beautiful ruins, including what was formerly the country's finest Romanesque chapel. This was the seat of clerics and kings, a power center to rival the Hill of Tara. Now, however, the two sites vie only for the attention of tourists. See p. 352.



Jerpoint Abbey is a ruined Cistercian abbey.

- Jerpoint Abbey (County Kilkenny): Jerpoint is the finest of many Cistercian abbeys whose ruins dot the Irish landscape. Somehow, hundreds of years of rain and wind have failed to completely wipe away its medieval carvings, leaving us a rare chance to glimpse how magnificent these abbeys once were. Don't miss the splendid, richly carved cloister. See p. 237.
- Skellig Michael (County Kerry): Thirteen kilometers (8 miles) offshore of the Iveragh Peninsula, early Irish monks built this hermitage dedicated to the archangel Michael on a remote, rocky crag rising sharply 214m (702 ft.) out of the Atlantic. Today both the journey to Skellig across choppy seas and the arduous climb to the island's summit are challenging—and unforgettable. See p. 317.
- Clonmacnoise (County Offaly): The old Irish high kings came to this place to find spiritual solace, and it's still a profound and thought-provoking place to visit. Don't leave without checking out the

ancient monumental slabs, inscribed with personal messages in ancient Celtic script. See p. 416.

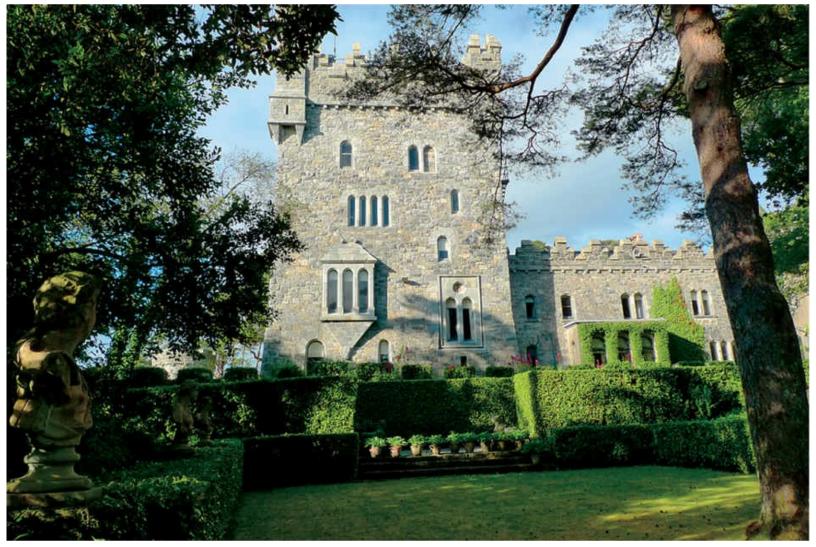
• **Inishmurray** (County Sligo): This uninhabited island off the Sligo coast holds another striking monastic ruin, this one surrounded by what appears to be the walls of an even more ancient stone fort. Despite its remoteness, the Vikings sought out this outpost of peace-seeking monks and destroyed it in A.D. 807. Today its circular walls and the surrounding sea create a stunning view, well worth the effort required to reach it. See p. 454.

THE best FOR LOVERS OF LITERATURE

- **Dublin Writers Museum** (Dublin, County Dublin): Filled with letters, manuscripts, personal possessions, and other eclectic ephemera, this great museum in Dublin is a mecca for lovers of Irish literature. Naturally it also has a good bookshop. See p. 101.
- Davy Byrnes Pub (Dublin, County Dublin): After a stop at the James Joyce Centre (see p. 114), make a pilgrimage to this venerable pub, which crops up in Joyce's masterpiece *Ulysses:* The hero, Leopold Bloom, famously orders a lunch of burgundy and a Gorgonzola sandwich here. The pub is acutely aware of its heritage, but happily knows better than to ruin the appeal by being too touristy. See p. 171.
- County Sligo: With its many connections to the beloved poet W. B. Yeats, this county is a pilgrimage destination for poetry fans. The landscape shaped the poet's writing, and many of its landmarks—Lough Gill, Glencar Lake, Ben Bulben Mountain, Maeve's tomb—appear in his words. Several museums house first editions, photographs, and other memorabilia, and Yeats's dark and somber grave is in Drumcliffe. See chapter 12.
- **The Aran Islands:** Though playwright John Millington Synge was born in County Dublin, as a leading figure in the Irish literary revival of the late 19th century, he became passionately interested in these brooding islands off the Galway coast—which became the setting for his most famous play, *The Playboy of the Western World.* See p. 381.
- The Sperrin Mountains: Nobel prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney (1939–2013) was born in Northern Ireland, between the Sperrin Mountains and Lough Neagh. Even as his literary fame took him around the world, his poetry remained rooted in the boglands, cairns, and farms of his native Ulster. See p. 557.

THE best FAMILY ACTIVITIES

• **Dublin Zoo in Phoenix Park** (Dublin, County Dublin): Kids love this sympathetically designed zoo featuring wild creatures, animal-petting corners, and a train ride. The surrounding park has room to run, picnic, and explore. See p. 118.



Glenveagh Castle in Glenveagh National Park, County Donegal.

- Irish National Heritage Park (Ferrycarrig, County Wexford): Millennia of history are made painlessly educational for children and adults at this engaging "living history" museum. It's a fascinating, informative way to while away a couple of hours or more. See p. 223.
- Fota Island & Wildlife Park (Carrigtwohill, County Cork): In this wildlife park, rare and endangered animals roam freely. You'll see everything from giraffes and zebras to kangaroos, flamingos, penguins, and monkeys wandering the grassland. Add in a small amusement park for toddlers, a tour train, picnic tables, and a gift shop and you have the makings of a wonderful family outing. See p. 273.
- Muckross House & Gardens (Killarney, County Kerry): This impressive mansion acts as the gateway to Killarney National Park today, but the interior has been preserved in all its Victorian splendor. Nearby, people on the Muckross Historic Farms engage in traditional farm activities while dressed in authentic period clothes. See p. 295.
- Fungie the Dingle Dolphin Tours (Dingle, County Kerry): Everyday, fishing boats ferry visitors out into the nearby waters to see Fungie, the friendliest dolphin you're ever likely to meet, swim right up to the boat. You can even arrange an early-morning dolphin swim. The kid-friendly Dingle Oceanworld Aquarium is right by the harbor as well. See p. 326.
- Bunratty Castle & Folk Park (Bunratty, County Clare): Kids love Bunratty, which looks every bit as satisfyingly medieval as an old castle should. The grounds have been turned over to a replica 19th-century village, complete with actors playing Victorian residents going about their daily lives.

It's great fun to walk through. See p. 363.

• Galway Atlantaquaria (Galway, County Galway): Known more formally as the National Aquarium of Ireland, this is the place that your kids will remember long after memories of the hundredth dolmen you saw by the side of a windswept road have faded. Highlights include a tank full of small sharks and pools where kids can touch curious rays. See p. 393.

THE best MUSEUMS

- Chester Beatty Library (Dublin, County Dublin): Not just a library, this is one of Ireland's best museums, with a wealth of books, illuminated texts, and small art objects. Its collection of rare religious manuscripts is among the most unique in the world. See p. 97.
- National Museum of Ireland: Archaeology (Dublin, County Dublin): Ireland's National Museum is split into four separate sites, of which this is far and away the best. The collection dates back to the earliest settlers, but it's the relics from the Viking invasion and the early Christian period that dazzle the most. See p. 104.



The Titanic visitor attraction in Belfast.

• Irish National Famine Museum (Strokestown Park, County Roscommon): This reflective museum,

part of a grand historic estate, does a brilliant job of making the darkest period in Irish history seem immediate and real, including a collection of heartbreaking letters from destitute tenants to their callous landlords. See p. 419.

- Ulster Folk & Transport Museum (Cultra, County Antrim): Ireland has several so-called "living history" museums, where stories of people and times past are told through reconstructions of everyday life. This one, just outside Belfast, is one of the liveliest and most engaging. See p. 511.
- **Titanic Belfast** (Belfast, County Antrim): Belfast is incredibly proud of having built the most famous ocean liner in history, despite its ultimate fate—though, as they're fond of saying, "She was alright when she left here." This gleaming, high-tech museum is the best of several *Titanic*-related attractions in Belfast. See p. 507.

THE best DRIVING TOURS

• The Ring of Kerry (County Kerry): It's by far the most well-traveled of Ireland's great routes, but there's no denying the Ring of Kerry's appeal—it's a seductive combination of stunning countryside, charming villages, and inspiring historical sites. The road gets quite busy in summer, but come in the spring or autumn and it's a much more peaceful experience. See chapter 8.



Connor Pass in County Kerry on the Dingle Peninsula Drive.

• Antrim Coast: Sweeping views of midnight-blue sea against gray unforgiving cliffs and deep-

green hillsides make this 97km-long (60-mile) coastal route an unforgettable drive. Start in gorgeous Glenarm with its castle walls and barbican gate, then head north along the coast past Bushmills and the Giant's Causeway to Portrush. Best of all, you often have the road quite to yourself. See chapter 14.

- Horn Head: Drive pretty much anywhere in County Donegal and before long you'll be in beautiful, wild, unspoiled countryside—that's one reason why we never mind getting lost around here. One of the best drives is around Horn Head, near Dunfanaghy. Highlights to look out for include quartzite sea cliffs that glisten as if they're made of glass when the sun hits them just right. See chapter 13.
- Slea Head Drive (Dingle Peninsula): This drive, starting from Dingle Town and heading down the Ventry road, follows the sparkling sea past a series of ancient sites such as the Dunbeg Fort and the beehive-shaped Gallarus Oratory. At Dunquin, you can embark on boats to the mysterious abandoned Blasket Islands. See p. 330.
- Inishowen Peninsula (County Donegal): This far-flung promontory in Ireland's northern end stretches out from Lough Foyle to the east and Lough Swilly to the west toward Malin Head, its farthest point. Driving its perimeter, you'll pass ancient sites, pretty villages, and fine sandy beaches in fierce rocky coves. If you are looking to get lost, this is a great place to do it. See p. 485.

IRELAND'S best SHOPPING

- Avoca (County Kerry): One of the most Irish of Irish brands, Avoca sells beautiful blankets, clothes, and other woven fabrics made in their traditional workshop in the Wicklow Mountains. The flagship store is in Dublin (p. 160) but our favorite is the little branch clinging to a bend in the road near the Ring of Kerry. See p. 311.
- Mayfly (Dublin): Dublin's perpetually cool Temple Bar district is filled with creative, quirky little emporiums, and this is one of the best. They sell unique jewelry, vintage fashions, and other irresistible accessories. Plus it's always fun to ask the staff for directions on how to find the store: just look out for the cow in the buggy out front! See p. 160.
- Claddagh Records (Dublin): One of the best music stores in a country that takes its music very seriously, Claddagh Records is a must for lovers of traditional Irish music. In addition to instruments and sheet music, they also sell some great (and tuneful) souvenirs. See p. 159.
- **Brocade and Lime** (County Cork): This wonderful, vintage-style clothing boutique sells retro fashions by contemporary Irish designers. It's entirely unsurprising that they've grown a legion of celebrity fans. See p. 258.



Artsy shops and pubs line the cobblestone streets of thriving, prosperous Galway.

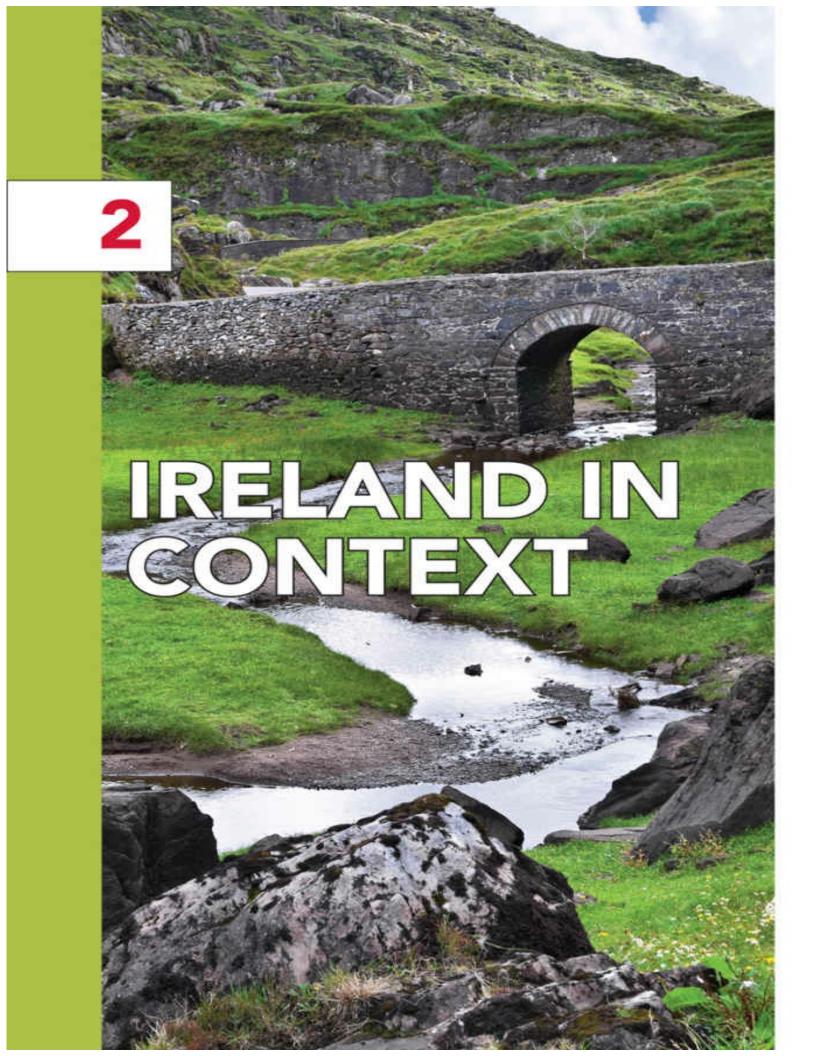
- Belleek China (County Fermanagh): The world-famous brand of fine china has been furnishing the tables of the upper crust since 1864. The visitor center, near Donegal, has a magnificent collection for sale—and they'll ship internationally if you can't face the responsibility of getting your selection home in one piece. See p. 562.
- Lorge Chocolatier (County Kerry): French chocolatier Benoit Lorge makes his exquisite creations from his workshop just south of Kenmare. The wrapped gift boxes are like little works of art in themselves. Sweet, delicious works of art. See p. 311.
- Coppermoon (County Antrim): This funky store in Belfast sells creative and interesting ceramics and homeware, from lampshades made of bottles to pillows embroidered with witty bon mots. They also do a great line in steampunk-influenced jewelry. See p. 521.

IRELAND'S most OVERRATED

• Blarney Castle (County Cork): Though a pretty impressive medieval castle in itself, Blarney has grown to become a veritable font of touristy tat. Before you say "I really must kiss the Blarney stone!" ask yourself this: Do you really want to stand in line for ages so that some strangers can

hold you upside down to twist around and kiss a piece of rock that thousands upon thousands of visitors have already kissed? See p. 248.

- Cliffs of Moher (County Clare): The cliffs themselves (pronounced "More") are one of Ireland's greatest natural wonders. But perhaps, given how they're managed, they'd be better off called the Cliffs of "Gimme More." In practice it's difficult to see them without entering through the gleaming, multimillion-euro visitor center, complete with steep parking charge and—*ker-ching!*—a very well-stocked gift store. See p. 364.
- The Book of Kells (County Dublin): No one's saying the book itself isn't beautiful. But to see it (or rather, the tiny portion on display) you'll have to crowd around a small display case with a room full of people who, like you, have paid handsomely for the privilege. See p. 96. Meanwhile, just around the corner, at the Chester Beatty Library (p. 97), you can see a stunning collection of illuminated gospels and other ancient religious texts, every bit as magnificent in their artistry—and for free.
- The Pub Crawl: The idea of the pub crawl, essentially, is to visit as many pubs in a single night as you possibly can, while drinking constantly along the way. At best they're jolly, collegial, well-lubricated affairs. In practice, they're usually loud, rowdy, and fun for no one who isn't several pints down already. You will inevitably encounter groups on pub crawls in big towns and cities, especially on weekends. (*Exception:* There are some fantastic pub crawls organized by tour groups, which are really more like walking tours in disguise—such as the Literary and Traditional Irish Music Pub Crawls in Dublin. See p. 110).
- The "Full Irish": It's amazing how many small B&Bs and hotels assume that everyone's going to like the "full Irish breakfast." Huge plates of sausage links, thick-cut bacon, and black pudding (made from blood—yum!) are among the meat-heavy delights that await on nearly all breakfast menus you will encounter during your stay. To be fair, they can be delicious. But boy, does it get tedious after a while, and it's surprising how many smaller places still don't offer much in the way of other choices. We've done our best to point you toward some of the best and most varied breakfast options among the "Where to Stay" listings in this book.



T his is a difficult time for Ireland, as it reels from an ongoing economic crisis and struggles to find political and financial equilibrium. The financial crash of 2008 hit Ireland harder than most other European nations (only Greece and Spain are generally considered to have come off worse) and in many ways the country is still recovering. But troubled though these days are, this is a fascinating time to visit and see Ireland in transition. A complex, small country with a tumultuous history, this is a land immensely rich with history, beauty, culture, and life.

IRELAND TODAY

The Irish boom economy of the late 1990s changed the country monumentally, resulting in an unprecedented spread of wealth and a huge amount of property development. The excess associated with the boom—business executives flying from Dublin to Galway in their private helicopters for lunch at a particularly good oyster bar, for example, and small apartments in Dublin selling for millions of euro—always seemed unsustainable. And so it was. As suddenly as the boom started, it ended. Over the course of a few weeks in 2008, the economy crashed, sending the country into an economic and political tailspin. Ireland's banks were faced with catastrophic levels of bad debt. As the wave of economic disaster crashed down across Europe, Ireland found itself among the very worst affected.

This all came as a shock to the Irish, who, after more than 15 years of European investment, had begun to believe their newfound affluence would last forever. The chatter of jackhammers formed a constant aural background in nearly every town in the Republic, and the dump truck seemed to be the national symbol of Ireland, as the huge vehicles trundled along by the dozen, carrying tons of gravel and sand to lay new roads and build new neighborhoods. But construction far outpaced demand. Entire subdivisions were built with nobody to live in them—thousands of new homes sat empty. Developers gambling on future growth built shining new ghost towns.

Now, it seems that at last birdsong is returning to Ireland. The worst years of the crash are over, and the economy is slowly turning a corner. But it is a changed country. Experts think this gradual process of recovery could take years, possibly decades. But Ireland will bounce back. It has been through worse.

THE MAKING OF IRELAND

The First Settlers

With some degree of confidence, we can place the date of the first human habitation of the island somewhere after the end of the last ice age, around the late 8000s _{B.C.} Ireland's first colonizers, Mesolithic Homo sapiens, walked, waded, or floated across the narrow strait from what is now Britain in search of flint and, of course, food.

The next momentous prehistoric event was the arrival of Neolithic farmers and herders, sometime around 3500 _{B.C.} Unlike Ireland's Mesolithic hunters, who barely left a trace, this second wave of colonizers began to transform the island at once. They came with stone axes that could fell a good-size elm in less than an hour. Ireland's hardwood forests receded to make room for tilled fields and

pastureland. Villages sprang up, and more permanent homes, planked with split oak, appeared at this time.

Far more striking, though, was the appearance of massive megalithic monuments, including court cairns, dolmens (stone tables), round subterranean passage tombs, and wedge tombs. Thousands of these tombs are scattered around Ireland, and to this day only a small percentage of them have been excavated. These megalithic monuments speak volumes about the early Irish. To visit **Newgrange ***** (see p. 195) and **Knowth ***** (see p. 192) in the Boyne Valley and **Carrowmore ***** (see p. 452) in County Sligo is to marvel at the mystical practices of the early Irish. Even today little is known about the meaning or purpose of these mysterious stone relics. Later Celtic inhabitants assumed that the tremendous stones and mounds were raised by giants, a race they called the people of the sí—a name which eventually became the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, and, finally, *fairies*. Over many generations, oral tradition downsized the mythical people into "little people," who were believed to have led a magical underground life in thousands of *raths* (earthwork structures) coursing the island like giant mole tunnels. All of these sites were believed to be protected by fairies. Tampering with them was thought to bring bad luck, so nobody ever touched them. Thus, they have lasted to this day—ungraffitied, undamaged, unprotected by any visible fences or wires, but utterly safe.

The Celts

Of all the successive waves of outsiders who have, over the years, shaped, cajoled, and pockmarked the timeline of Irish history, none have made quite such an impact as the Celts. They came, originally from Central Europe, in waves, the first perhaps as early as the 6th century _{B.C.} and continuing until the end of the first millennium. They fled from the Roman invasion and clung to the edge of Europe—Ireland being, at the time, about as far as you could go to elude a Roman force. In time, they controlled the island and absorbed into their culture everyone they found there.



Cliffs near Dún Aengus, Inishmore, Aran islands.

Despite their cultural potency, however, the Celts developed little in the way of centralized government, existing instead in a near-perpetual state of conflict with one another. The island was divided among as many as 150 tribes, grouped in alliances under five provincial kings. The provinces of Munster, Leinster, Ulster, and Connaught date from this period. They fought fiercely among themselves over cattle (their "currency" and standard of wealth), land, and women. No one tribe ever ruled the entire island, though not for lack of trying. One of the most impressive monuments from the era of the warring Celts is the stone fortress of **Dún Aengus**, on the wind-swept hills of the Aran Islands (see p. 381).

The Coming of Christianity

The Celtic chiefs neither warmly welcomed nor violently resisted the Christians who came ashore beginning in the 5th century A.D. Although threatened, the pagan Celts settled for a bloodless rivalry with this new religion. In retrospect, this may have been a mistake.

Not the first, but eventually the most famous, of these Christian newcomers was a man called Maewyn Succat, a young Roman citizen torn from his Welsh homeland in a Celtic raid and brought to Ireland as a slave, where he was forced to work in a place called the Forest of Foclut (thought to be

around modern County Antrim). He escaped on a ship bound for France, where he spent several years as a priest before returning to Ireland as a missionary. He began preaching at sacred Celtic festivals, a tactic that frequently led to confrontations with religious and political leaders, but eventually he became such a popular figure that after his death in 461, a dozen clan chiefs fought over the right to bury him. His lasting legacy was, of course, the establishment in Ireland of one of the strongest Christian orthodoxies in Europe—an achievement for which he was later beatified as St. Patrick.

Ireland's conversion to Christianity was a somewhat negotiated process. The church at the time of St. Patrick was, like the man who brought it, Roman. For Ireland, an island still without a single proper town, the Roman system of dioceses and archdioceses simply didn't make sense. So the Irish adapted the church to their own situation. They built isolated monasteries with extended monastic "families," each more or less autonomous.

For several centuries, Ireland flourished in this fashion, becoming a center of monastic learning. Monks and scholars were drawn here in droves, and they were sent out in great numbers as well, to Britain and the Continent, as emissaries for the island's way of thinking and praying.

Like their megalithic ancestors, these monks left traces of their lives behind, enduring monuments to their spirituality. Early monastic sites such as gorgeous **Glendalough** $\star\star\star$ in County Wicklow (see p. 181), wind-swept **Clonmacnoise** $\star\star\star$ in County Offaly (see p. 416), and isolated **Skellig Michael** off the Kerry coast (see p. 317) give you an idea of how they lived, while striking examples of their work can be seen at Trinity College (which houses the Book of Kells) and at the Chester Beatty museum at Dublin Castle.

The Viking Invasions

The monastic city-states of early medieval Ireland might have continued to lead the world's intellectual development, but the Vikings came along and ruined everything.

After centuries of relative peace, the first wave of Viking invaders arrived in Ireland in A.D. 795. The wealthy Irish monasteries were among their first targets. Unprepared and unprotected, the monasteries, which had amassed collections of gold, jewels, and art from followers around the world, were decimated. The round towers to which the nonviolent monks retreated for safety were neither high enough nor strong enough to protect them and their treasures from the onslaught.

Once word spread of the wealth to be had on the small island, the Scandinavian invaders just kept on coming. Though they were experts in the arts of pillage and plunder, however, they had no knowledge of or interest in literature. In fact, most didn't know how to read. Therefore, they paid scant attention to the magnificent books they came across, passing them over for more obvious riches. This fortunate quirk of history allowed the monks to preserve their dying culture—and their immeasurably valuable work—for the benefit of future generations.

monk-y **BUSINESS**

The Iliad and *The Odyssey* may have taken place on the turquoise deeps of the Aegean, but it was on the dark waters of the Irish Sea that many classics of Roman and Greek literature survived the sack of Rome and the ensuing Dark Ages. But how did it happen? How did—in the words of bestselling author and historian Thomas Cahill—the Irish save civilization?

The year is 464 A.D. The mighty Roman Empire is on its knees. The Eternal City is under eternal siege, and its great libraries and universities are about to be looted and burned. The world order is quite literally falling apart. Meanwhile, the far-flung backwater of Ireland is undergoing a spiritual revolution. The pagan Gaels are being converted to Christianity by an escaped Roman slave from Wales with a good line in stubbornness. They call him Patricio—known today as St. Patrick.

The Irish wholeheartedly embrace monastic life. Centers of Christian learning pop up across the island, including the remote **Skellig Islands** (see p. 317), where monks copy the Bible and other works. Masters of calligraphic arts, they produce beautiful illuminated texts such as the **Book of Kells** (see p. 96). Gaeilge becomes the first vernacular language (slang, effectively) in Europe to have been written down. Some of Europe's finest minds flee the continental anarchy for Ireland, bringing books and learning with them. Knowledge-hungry monks duplicate great Latin and Greek works of literature.

After St. Patrick, Irish missionaries such as Columcille and Columbanus began to look abroad. With the end the Roman Empire, Europe had become a fragmented patchwork of fiefdoms. The hardy Celtic monks set up new monasteries in France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy—and they took their skills with them. Beautifully decorated Irish manuscripts from this period have been found as far away as Russia, where the monks continued to advance the art of bookmaking.

After the Vikings left, Ireland enjoyed something of a renewal in the 11th and 12th centuries. Its towns grew, its regional kings continued to try (unsuccessfully) to unite the country under a single high kingship, and its church came under increased pressure to conform to the Vatican's rules. All of these factors ripened a prosperous and factionalized Ireland for the next invasion.

It was, tragically, an Irish king who opened the door to the next predator. Diarmait Mac Murchada, king of Leinster, whose ambition was to be king of all of Ireland, decided he could do it, with a little help. So he called on Henry II, the Norman king of England. Diarmait offered Henry a series of incentives in return for military aid: Not only did he bequeath his eldest daughter to whoever led the army, but he also offered them overlordship of the Kingdom of Leinster. To put it bluntly, he made Henry an offer he couldn't refuse. So it was that an English expeditionary force, led by the Earl of Pembroke, Richard de Clare—better known as Strongbow—was sent to Diarmait's aid. After a successful invasion, victorious Strongbow remained in Ireland as governor, and thus gave the English their first foothold in Ireland. What Diarmait did not realize, of course, was that they would never leave.



Dublin Castle became the seat of English power in Ireland in the Middle Ages.

The Norman Invasion

In successive expeditions from 1167 to 1169, the Normans, who had already conquered England, crossed the Irish Sea with crushing force. During the next century, the Norman-English settled in, consolidating their power in new towns and cities. Indeed, many settlers grew attached to the island and began to integrate with the local culture. Marriages between the native Irish and the invaders became commonplace. As time passed, the Anglo-Normans became more Irish and less English in their loyalties. Meanwhile, independent Gaelic lords in the North and West continued to maintain their territories.

By the late 1400s, English control of the island was effectively limited to the Pale, a walled and fortified cordon around what is now greater Dublin. (The phrase "beyond the pale" comes from this —meaning anything that is uncontrollable or unacceptable.)

English Power & the Flight of the Earls

During the reign of the Tudor monarchs in England (1485–1603), the brutal reconquest of Ireland was set in motion. Henry VIII was the first to proclaim himself king of all Ireland—something even his warlike ancestors had stopped short of doing—and later that century, the claim was backed up by

force. Elizabeth I, Henry's daughter, declared that all Gaelic lords in Ireland must surrender their lands to her, with the dubious promise that she would immediately grant them all back again. Unsurprisingly, the proposition was hardly welcomed in Ireland, and a rebel army was raised by Hugh O'Neill and "Red" Hugh O'Donnell, two Irish chieftains. They scored some significant victories early on in their decade-long campaign, most notably over a force led by the Earl of Essex, whom Elizabeth had personally sent to subdue them. Still, by 1603 O'Neill was left with few allies and no option but to surrender, which he did on March 23rd, the day before Elizabeth died. In 1607, after failing to win back much of their power and prestige, around 90 of O'Neill's allies fled to mainland Europe, hoping Spain would try to invade again. This never happened. The "Flight of the Earls," as it became known, marked a crucial turning point in Irish history, as the point at which the old Gaelic aristocracy effectively came to an end.

The Coming of Cromwell

By the 1640s, Ireland was effectively an English plantation. Family estates had been seized and foreign (Scottish) labor brought in to work them. A systematic persecution of Catholics, which began with Henry VIII's split from Rome but did not die with him, barred Catholics from practicing their faith. Resentment against the English and their punitive laws led to fierce uprisings in Ulster and Leinster in 1641, and by early 1642 most of Ireland was again under Irish control. Unfortunately for the rebels, any hope of extending the victories was undermined by internal disunion, and then by a fatal decision to support the Royalist side in the Civil War that had just broken out in England. After King Charles I of England was beheaded in 1648, Oliver Cromwell, the commander of the parliamentary forces, was installed as England's ruler. It wasn't long before Cromwell's supporters took on his enemies in Ireland. A year later, the Royalists' stand collapsed in defeat at Rathmines, just south of Dublin.

Defeat for the Royalist cause did not, however, mean the end of war. Cromwell became paranoid that Ireland would be used to launch a French-backed insurgency; he also detested the country's Catholic beliefs. So it was that as the hot, sticky summer of 1649 drew to a close, Cromwell set sail for Dublin with an army of 12,000 men, and a battle plan so ruthless that it remains notorious to this day.

In the town of Drogheda, more than 3,552 Irish soldiers were slaughtered in a single night. When a group of men sought sanctuary in the local church, Cromwell ordered the church burned down with them locked inside—an act of such monstrosity that some of his own men risked a charge of mutiny and refused the order. On another day, in Wexford, more than 2,000 were murdered, many of them civilians. The trail of destruction rolled on, devastating counties Galway and Waterford. When asked where the Irish citizens could go to be safe from him, Cromwell famously suggested they could go "to hell or Connaught"—the latter being the most far-flung, rocky, and unfarmable part of Ireland.

After a rampage that lasted 7 months, killing thousands and leaving churches, monasteries, and castles in ruins, Cromwell finally left Ireland in the care of his lieutenants and returned to England. Hundreds of years later, the memory of his infamous violence lingers painfully in Ireland. In certain parts of the country, people still spit at the mention of his name.

The Anti-Catholic Laws

Cromwell died in 1658, and 2 years later the English monarchy was restored. Still, anti-Catholic oppression continued in Ireland. Then in 1685 something remarkable happened: The new Stuart king,

James II, refused to relinquish his Catholic faith after ascending to the throne. It looked for a while as if Catholic Ireland had found a royal ally at last. However, such hopes were dashed 3 years later, when James was ousted from power, and the Protestant William of Orange installed in his place.



Trim Castle on the banks of the Boyne River.

James fled to France to raise support for a rebellion and then sailed to Ireland to launch his attack. He struck first at **Derry** (see p. 547), laying siege for 15 weeks, before finally being defeated by William's forces at the **Battle of the Boyne.** The battle effectively ended James's cause, and with it, the hopes of Catholic Ireland for the best part of a century.

After James's defeat, English power was once more consolidated across Ireland. Protestant landowners were granted full political power, while laws were enacted to tamp down the Catholic population. Being a Catholic in late-17th-century Ireland was not exactly illegal per se, but in practice life was all but impossible for those who refused to convert to Protestantism. Catholics could not purchase land, and existing landholdings were split up unless the families who owned them converted to Protestantism. Catholic schools were banned, as were priests and all forms of public Catholic worship. Catholics were barred from holding government office, practicing law, or joining the army. Those who refused to relinquish their faith were forced to pay a tax to the Anglican Church. And, because only landowners were allowed to vote, Catholics whose land had been taken away also

lost the right to vote.

The new British landlords settled in, planted crops, made laws, and sowed their own seeds. Inevitably, over time, the "Anglos" became the Anglo-Irish. Hyphenated or not, they were Irish, and their loyalties were increasingly unpredictable. After all, an immigrant is only an immigrant for a generation; whatever the birthright of the colonists, their children would be Irish-born and bred. And so an uncomfortable sort of stability set in for a generation or three, albeit of a kind that was very much separate and unequal. There were the haves, the wealthy Protestants, and the have-nots, the deprived and disenfranchised Catholics.

This unhappy peace held for some time. But by the end of the 18th century, the appetite for rebellion was whetted again—in the coffee shops and lecture halls of Europe's newest boomtown: Dublin.

The United Irishmen & the 1798 Rebellion

By the 1770s, Dublin was thriving as never before. As a center for culture and learning, it was rivaled only by Paris and London; thanks to the work of such architects as Henry Gratton (who designed the **Custom House \star, p. 108**, and the **Four Courts \star, p. 111**), its very streets were being remodeled in a grand, neoclassical style that was more akin to the great cities of southern Italy than of southern Ireland.

However, while the urban classes reveled in their newfound wealth, the stringent Penal Laws that had effectively cut off Catholic workers from their own countryside drove many of them to pour into the city, looking for work. Alongside Dublin's buzzing intellectual scene, political dissent soon brewed. Even after a campaign by Irish politicians succeeded in getting many of the Penal Laws repealed in 1783, Dublin was a breeding ground for radicals and political activists. The results were explosive.

reading LIST

If you want to know about Ireland and the Irish, plenty of talented writers in and out of the country are willing to tell you.

Jonathan Bardon's *A History of Ireland in 250 Episodes* is a good general introduction to Irish history. The book is broken up into 250 short chapters—learned without being too dense, and a very useful primer.

To understand more about the Famine, try the British author Cecil Woodham-Smith's *The Great Hunger*. Written in 1962, it's still viewed as the definitive, dispassionate examination of this dark period in Irish history.

The author **Tim Pat Coogan**, son of an IRA volunteer, has written two excellent books, *The Irish Civil War* (2001) and *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966–1996* (1997), both of which are essential reading for anyone wanting to understand the complexities of 21st-century Ireland. He also wrote a controversial biography, *Eamon de Valera*, criticizing the former Irish president's actions and legacy.

For a look at Ireland in recent history, try John Ardagh's Ireland and the Irish (1995) or F. S. Lyons's Ireland Since the Famine (1973).

The late Dublin-born journalist **Nuala O'Faolain** wrote two top-selling memoirs, *Are You Somebody*? (1996) and *Almost There* (2003), which give the reader an insider's view of living and growing up in modern Ireland.

The late Irish-born American writer **Frank McCourt** earned acclaim and won the Pulitzer Prize for *Angela's Ashes* (1996), his grim memoir of a childhood spent partly in Limerick and partly in Brooklyn. The book is very controversial in Ireland, however; many in Limerick claim it is not an accurate representation of the city during that time.

When war broke out between Britain and France in the 1790s, the United Irishmen—a nonviolent society formed to lobby for admission of Catholic Irishmen to the Irish Parliament—sent a secret delegation to persuade the French to intervene on Ireland's behalf against the British. Their emissary

in this venture was a Dublin lawyer named Wolfe Tone. In 1796 Tone sailed with a French force bound for Ireland, determined to defeat forces loyal to the English crown, but they were turned back by storms.

In 1798, full-scale insurrection led by the United Irishmen spread across much of Ireland, particularly the southwestern counties of Kilkenny and Wexford, where a tiny republic was briefly declared in June. But it was soon crushed by Loyalist forces, which then went on a murderous spree, killing tens of thousands of men, women, and children, and burning towns to the ground. The nadir of the rebellion came when Wolfe Tone, having raised another French invasion force, sailed into Lough Swilly in Donegal and was promptly captured by the British. At his trial, Tone wore the uniform of a French soldier; he slit his own throat while in prison waiting to be hung.

The rebellion was over. In the space of 3 weeks, more than 30,000 Irish had been killed. As a final indignity in what became known as "The Year of the French," the British tricked the Irish Parliament into dissolving itself, and Ireland reverted to strict British rule.

A Conflict of Conflicts

In 1828, a Catholic lawyer named Daniel O'Connell—who had earlier formed the Catholic Association to represent the interests of tenant farmers—was elected to the British Parliament as Member of Parliament for Dublin. Public opinion was so solidly behind him, he was able to persuade the British prime minister that the only way to avoid civil war in Ireland was to force a Catholic Emancipation Act through Parliament. O'Connell remained an MP until 1841, when he was elected Lord Mayor of Dublin, a platform he used to push for repeal of the direct rule imposed from London after the 1798 rebellion.

O'Connell organized enormous rallies (nicknamed "monster meetings") attended by hundreds of thousands, and provoked the conservative government to such an extent that it eventually arrested him on charges of seditious conspiracy. The charges were dropped, but the incident—coupled with growing impatience toward his nonviolent approach of protest and reform—led to the breakdown of his power base. "The Liberator," as he had been known, faded, his health failed, and he died on a trip to Rome.

The Great Famine

Even after anti-Catholic legislation began to recede, the vast majority of farmland available to Ireland's poor, mostly Catholic rural population was unfertile and hard to cultivate. One of the few crops that could be grown reliably was the potato, which therefore became the staple diet of the rural poor. So when, in 1845, a fungus destroyed much of the potato crop of Ireland, widespread devastation followed.

To label the Great Irish Famine of the 1840s and 50s as merely a "tragedy" would be inadequate. It was, of course, tragic—but at the same time, the word implies a randomness to the whole sorry, sickening affair that fails to capture its true awfulness. The fact is that what started out as crop failure was turned into a disaster by the callous response of the British establishment.

As the potato blight worsened, it became apparent to many landlords that their farm tenants would be unable to pay rent. Instead of helping to feed their now-starving tenants, these landlords shipped their grain overseas, determined to recoup what they were losing in rent. The British Parliament, meanwhile, was reluctant to send aid, putting the reports of a crisis down to, in the words of Prime Minister Robert Peel, "the Irish tendency to exaggerate." People started to die by the thousands.



The Irish Famine cottage, in Ventry, County Kerry, is a stark reminder of the Great Famine.

Eventually it became clear to the government that something had to be done. Emergency relief was sent to Ireland in the form of cheap, imported Indian cornmeal. However, this contained virtually no nutrients. Ultimately, it was malnutrition that spread such diseases as typhus and cholera, which claimed more victims than starvation itself.

To make matters worse, the cornmeal was not simply given to those in need of it. Fearful that handouts would encourage laziness among the "shiftless poor," the British government forced people to work for their food. Entirely pointless make-work projects were initiated, just to give the starving men something to do for their cornmeal; roads were built that led nowhere, and elaborate follies constructed that served no discernible purpose. Some of these still litter the countryside today, memorials to cruelty and ignorance.

One of the most difficult things to comprehend, more than a century and a half later, is the sheer futility of it all. For behind the statistics, the memorials, and the endless personal anguish, lies perhaps the most painful truth of all: that the Famine was easily preventable. Enormous cargoes of imported corn sat in Irish ports for months, until the British government felt that releasing them to the people would not adversely affect market rates. Meanwhile, huge quantities of meat and grain were exported from Ireland. (Indeed, in 1847, cattle exports went up 33% from the previous year.)

Given the circumstances, it is easy to understand why so many chose to leave Ireland. More than a million emigrated over the next decade, about three-quarters of them to America, the rest to Britain or Europe. They drained the country. In 1841, Ireland's population was 8 million; by 1851 it was 6.5 million.

The Struggle for Home Rule

As the Famine waned and life returned to something like normality, the Irish independence movement gained new momentum. New fronts, both violent and nonviolent, opened up in the struggle for what was now called Home Rule. Significantly, the Republicans now drew considerable support from overseas—particularly from America. There, groups such as the Fenians fundraised and published newspapers in support of the Irish cause, while more audacious schemes—such as an 1866 "invasion" of Canada with fewer than 100 men—generated awareness, if little else.

Back home in Ireland, partial concessions were won in Parliament. By the 1880s, nationalists such as Charles Stewart Parnell, the MP for Meath, were able to unite various factions of Irish nationalists (including the Fenian Brotherhood in America) to fight for Home Rule. In a tumultuous decade of legislation, Parnell came close to winning Home Rule—until revelations about his long affair with Kitty O'Shea, the wife of a supporter, brought about his downfall as a politician.

By 1912, a bill to give Ireland Home Rule was passed through the British House of Commons, but was defeated in the House of Lords. Many felt that the political process was all but unstoppable, that it was only a matter of time before the bill passed fully into law. Then World War I broke out in 1914, forcing the issue onto the back burner once again. Many in the Home Rule movement began to grow tired of pursuing their goal through legal political channels.

The Easter Rising

On Easter Monday 1916, a group of nationalists occupied the **General Post Office** \star (p. 111) in the heart of Dublin, from which they proclaimed the foundation of an Irish Republic. Inside were 1,500 fighters, led by schoolteacher and Gaelic League member Patrick Pearse and Socialist leader James Connolly.

The British government, panicking over an armed uprising on its doorstep while it fought a massive war in Europe, responded with overwhelming force. Soldiers were sent in, and a battle raged in the streets of Dublin for 6 days before the leaders of the rebellion were captured and imprisoned. (The walls of the post office and other buildings and statues up and down O'Connell Street still have bullet holes in them.) Pearse, Connolly, and 12 other leaders were imprisoned, secretly tried, and speedily executed.

Ultimately, though, the harsh British reaction was counterproductive. The ruthlessness with which the rebellion's ringleaders were pursued and dispatched acted as a lightning rod for many who were still on the fence about how best to gain Home Rule. It's a fact that has become somewhat lost in the ensuing hundred or so years: On that cold Monday morning when Patrick Pearse stood on the post office steps to read a treatise on Irish independence, a great many Irish didn't support the rebellion. Many believed that the best course of action was to lay low until the war had ended, when, they felt, concessions would finally be won. Others felt that the uprising was simply the wrong thing to do, as long as sons of Ireland were sacrificing their lives in the trenches of Europe.



The General Post Office in Dublin.

The aftermath of 1916 all but guaranteed, for better or for worse, that Ireland's future would be decided by the gun.

Rebellion & the Anglo-Irish Compromise

A power vacuum was left at the heart of the nationalist movement after the Easter Rising, and it was filled by two men: Michael Collins (see p. 282) and Eamon de Valera. On the surface, the two men had much in common; Collins was a Cork man who had returned from Britain in order to join the Irish Volunteers (later to become the Irish Republican Army, or IRA), while de Valera was an Irish-American math teacher who came back to Ireland to set up a new political party, *Sinn Féin*.

When de Valera's party won a landslide victory in the general election of 1918, its MPs took the provocative step of refusing to take their seats in London. Instead, they proclaimed the first Dáil, or independent parliament, in Dublin. De Valera went to rally support for the cause in America, while Collins stayed in Ireland to concentrate on his work as head of the Irish Volunteers. Tensions escalated into violence, and for the next 2 years, Irish nationalists fought a tit-for-tat military campaign against the British in Ireland. The low point of the struggle came in 1920, when Collins ordered 14 British operatives to be murdered in their beds. In response, British troops opened fire on the audience at a football game at Croke Park in Dublin, randomly killing 12 innocent people.

A truce was eventually declared on July 9, 1921. Six months later, the Anglo-Irish treaty was signed in London, granting legislative independence to 26 Irish counties (known together as the Irish Free State). The compromise through which that freedom was won, though, was that six counties in the north would remain part of the United Kingdom. Sent to negotiate the treaty, Collins knew that that compromise—which he felt was the best deal he could get at the time—would not be accepted by the more strident members of his rebel group. He also knew they would blame him for agreeing to it in the first place. When he signed the treaty he told the people present, "I am signing my own death warrant."

As he feared, nationalists were split between those who accepted the treaty as a platform on which to build, and those, led by the nationalist de Valera, who saw it as a betrayal. The latter group would accept nothing less than immediate and full independence at any cost. Even the withdrawal of British troops from Dublin for the first time in nearly 800 years did not quell their anger. The result was an inexorable slide into civil war. The flashpoint came in April 1922, when violence erupted around the streets of the capital, raging on for 8 days until de Valera's supporters were forced to surrender.

The government of the fledgling free state ordered that Republicans be shot on sight, leading to the deaths of 77 people. And Collins had been right about his own fate: Four months later he was assassinated while on a visit to his childhood home.

A Republic at Last

The fallout from the civil war dominated Irish politics for the next decade. De Valera split from the Republicans to form another party, Fianna Fáil ("the Warriors of Ireland"), which won the election of 1932 and governed for 17 years. Despite his continuing dedication to the Republican ideal, however, de Valera was not to be the one who finally declared Ireland a republic, in 1948. Ironically, that distinction went to a coalition led by de Valera's opponent, Douglas Hyde. Hyde's victory in the 1947 election was attributed to the fact that de Valera had become too obsessed with abstract Republican ideals to govern effectively.

One of the more controversial decisions that Eamon de Valera made while in office was to stay neutral during World War II. His reasons for this decision included Ireland's relatively small size and economic weakness, as well as a protest against the British presence in Northern Ireland. Although that may have made sense to some extent, it left Ireland in the peculiar position of tacitly favoring one side in the war, but refusing to help it. After the death of Adolf Hitler in April 1945, de Valera alienated the Allies further by sending his personal sympathies to the German ambassador.

His stance didn't find much favor among the Irish population, either. During the war, as many as 300,000 Irish men still found ways to enlist, in the British or U.S. armies. In the end, more than 50,000 Irish soldiers perished in a war their country had refused to join.

Trouble on the Way

After the war, 2 decades passed without violence in Ireland. Then, in the late 1960s, sectarian conflict erupted in the North. What started out as a civil rights movement, demanding greater equality for Catholics within Northern Ireland, soon escalated into a cycle of violence that lasted for 30 years.

It would be a terrible oversimplification to say that the Troubles were a clear-cut struggle between those who wanted complete Irish unification and those who wanted to remain part of the United Kingdom. That was, of course, the crux of the conflict. However, many other factors, such as organized crime and terrorism, together with centuries-old conflicts over religious, land, and social issues, make the conflict even harder for outsiders to understand.

The worst of the Troubles came in the 1970s. In 1972, British troops inexplicably opened fire on a peaceful demonstration in Derry, killing 12 people—many of whom were shot while they tended to the wounds of the first people injured. The IRA took advantage of the mood of public outrage to begin a civilian bombing campaign on the British mainland. The cycle of violence continued for 20 years, inexorably and depressingly. All the while, none of the myriad sides in the conflict would talk to each other. Finally, in the early 1990s, secret talks were opened between the British and the IRA, leading to an IRA cease-fire in 1994 (although the cease-fire held only shakily—an IRA bomb in Omagh 4 years later killed 29, the most to die on any single day of the Troubles).

The peace process continued throughout the 1990s, helped significantly by the mediation efforts of U.S. President Bill Clinton, who arguably became more involved in Irish affairs than any president before him. Eventually, on Good Friday 1998, a peace accord was finally signed in Belfast. The agreement committed all sides to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Northern Ireland, and reinstated self-government for the region in a power-sharing administration. However, it stopped short of resolving the territorial issue once and for all. In other words, Northern Ireland is still part of the U.K., and will be for the foreseeable future.



Belfast mural 1973.

To some extent, the conflicts rage more bitterly and more divisively than ever before. The difference is that, with notable exceptions, nowadays they are fought through the ballot box, rather

than the barrel of a gun. In 2005 the IRA fully decommissioned its weapons, and officially dissolved itself as a paramilitary unit.

Rebirth

While Northern Ireland struggled to find peace, the Republic of Ireland flourished. The 1990s brought unprecedented wealth and prosperity to the country, thanks in part to European Union subsidies, and partly to a thriving economy, which acquired the nickname "the Celtic Tiger" for its new global strength. Ireland became a rich country, widely seen as one of the best places in the world to live and work.

However, that boom came crashing down after the banking crisis of 2008. The Irish government was forced to seek financial aid from the European Union, a package worth more than 50% of the whole economy, to save the country from bankruptcy. The op-ed pages of Irish newspaper expressed real feelings of betrayal and a sense of opportunity lost.

Since then, things have once more begun to look up for the Irish economy—although the recovery will be a slow one.

And there is something to be said for the Irish spirit, for the ability to find humor in the darkest of places. Every new crisis brings fresh jokes alongside the rage. Every new leader is a target for general hilarity. And while nobody in the country would tell you there is not work to be done, you get the distinct impression that the people—if not the politicians and the bankers who got them into this mess—are ready to do that work.

IRELAND IN CULTURE

Literature

Ireland holds a place in literature disproportionate to its small size and modest population. Four writers from this tiny country have won the Nobel Prize for literature. Inspired by the country's unique beauty, the inequities of its political system, and its cruel legacy of poverty and struggle, Ireland's authors, poets, and playwrights wrote about the Irish for the Irish, and to raise awareness in the rest of the world. No matter where you live, you've probably been reading about Ireland all your life.

One of the country's best-known early writers was satirist **Jonathan Swift** (see p. 124), who was born in Dublin in 1667. Educated at Trinity College, he left Ireland for England in 1688 to avoid the Glorious Revolution. Though he spent much of his adult life in London, he returned to Ireland when he was over 50 years old, at which point he began to write his most famous works. Greatly moved by the suffering of the poor in Ireland, he translated his anger into dark, vicious humor. His tract *A Modest Proposal* is widely credited with inventing satire as we now know it. His best-known works have political undertones—even *Gulliver's Travels* is a political allegory.

Best known for his novel *Dracula*, the novelist and theater promoter **Bram Stoker** was born in Clontarf, a coastal suburb of Dublin, in 1847. As a young man fresh out of Trinity College, he began reviewing theater productions for local newspapers, which is how he met the actor Henry Irving. He spent much of his time promoting and working for Irving, writing novels on the side for extra money. He spent most of his life in England, which largely inspired his work, although it is said that **St. Michan's Church** $\star\star$ in Dublin (see p. 122), with its ghostly crypt, and **St. Mary's** \star in Killarney (see p. 298) helped to contribute to *Dracula*'s creepy feel.

Born in Dublin in 1854, **Oscar Wilde** was a popular and successful student at Trinity College, winning a scholarship to continue his studies in England at Oxford. After a flamboyant time there, he graduated with top honors and returned to Ireland, only to lose his girlfriend to Bram Stoker in 1878, after which he left Ireland forever. His writing—including the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* plays including *The Importance of Being Earnest,* and books of poetry—were often overshadowed by his scandalous personal life. Although a statue of him stands in Dublin in **St. Stephen's Green** \star (p. 119), his works were largely inspired by British and French writers, and he spent the majority of his life abroad.



Oscar Wilde statue in Merrion Square, Dublin.

George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin in 1856 and attended school in the city, but never went to college, as he came to loathe the organized education system. His literary style was, therefore, self-taught, and he spent his life studying and writing. He moved to England as a young man and lived much of his life in a village in Hertfordshire in England. As a result, many of his works have a distinctly English feel. His plays are known both for their sharp wit and for their sense of outrage over unfairness in society and the absurdity of the British class system. He is the only person ever to have won both the Nobel Prize and an Oscar (for *Pygmalion*).

William Butler Yeats was born in Sandy Mount outside Dublin in 1865, and attended the

Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin, but his poetry and prose were heavily inspired by County Sligo, where he spent much of his time (and where he is buried, in **Drumcliffe** churchyard, p. 455). One of the leading figures of the Irish literary revival in the early 20th century, he won the Nobel Prize in 1923.

James Joyce was born in the Dublin suburb of Rathgar in 1882 and educated at Jesuit boarding schools, and later at Trinity College. He wrote vividly—and sometimes impenetrably—about Dublin, despite spending much of his life as an expat living nomadically in Europe. His controversial and hugely complex novels *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* are his most celebrated (and least understood) works. They and his collection of short stories, *Dubliners*, touch deeply on the character of the people of Dublin. The **James Joyce Centre** \star (p. 114) is a mecca for Joyce fans.

The poet and playwright **Samuel Beckett** was born in 1906 in the Dublin suburb of Foxrock and educated at Trinity College. His work, however, was heavily influenced by German and French postmodernists, and he spent much of his life abroad, even serving with the Resistance in France during World War II. Best known for his complex absurdist play *Waiting for Godot*, he won the Nobel Prize in 1969.

The controversial writer, erstwhile terrorist, and all-round bon vivant **Brendan Behan** was born in Dublin in 1923. Behan came by his revolutionary fervor honestly: His father fought in the Easter Rising and his mother was a close friend of Michael Collins. When he was 14, Behan joined Fianna Éireann, the youth organization of the IRA. An incompetent terrorist, he was arrested on his first solo mission to blow up England's Liverpool Docks when he was 16 years old. His autobiographical book, *Borstal Boy*, describes this period in his life in exquisite detail. His play *The Quare Fellow* made him an international literary star, and he would spend the rest of his life as a jolly, hopeless alcoholic, drinking his way through London, Dublin, and New York, better known for his quick wit and bons mots than for his plays.

Among modern Irish writers, the best known is arguably the poet **Seamus Heaney.** Born in 1939 near a small town called Castledawson in Northern Ireland, as a child he won scholarships to boarding school in Derry and later to Queen's University in Belfast. His years studying classic ancient Greek and Latin literature and Anglo-Saxon writing heavily influenced his poetry, but all of his writing is marked by his life in the troubled region where he grew up. His works, including *The Cure at Troy* (based on the works of Sophocles), *The Haw Lantern, The Government of the Tongue,* and a modern translation of *Beowulf*, ultimately earned him the Nobel Prize in 1995. Heaney's death in the summer of 2013 brought an outpouring of affection from fans across the world.

Other contemporary Irish writers include Marian Keyes (whose hugely popular novels include *Lucy Sullivan is Getting Married* and *This Charming Man*); Roddy Doyle (*The Commitments, Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*), and the late Maeve Binchy (*A Week in Winter, Circle of Friends*).

Film

Many controversial, complex, and difficult Irish subjects have been tackled by an international array of directors and actors. Here are a few of the better known ones—and a few obscure gems worth seeking out.

Man of Aran (directed by Robert Flaherty, 1934) is a "docufiction" about life on the Aran Islands. Long respected as a documentary, it's now known that much of it was staged by its American director. Still, it's an interesting look at what the islands looked like in the early 20th century. Virtually unknown today, *Maeve* (directed by John Davis/Pat Murphy, 1982) is a fascinating piece of Irish independent film from the early 1980s, following an Irish expat in England who decides to return to strife-torn Northern Ireland.

The Commitments (directed by Alan Parker, 1991) may be the most famous Irish musical ever made. With its cast of young, largely inexperienced Irish actors playing musicians dedicated to American soul music, it's a delightful piece of filmmaking.

Michael Collins (directed by Neil Jordan, 1996) is a fine biopic about the Irish rebel, filmed largely on location and starring the Irish actor Liam Neeson.

Veronica Guerin (directed by Joel Schumacher, 2003) is a dark, fact-based film (with the Australian actress Cate Blanchett doing an excellent Irish accent) about a troubled Irish investigative reporter on the trail of a drug boss.

Intermission (directed by Jim Crowley, 2003) is a lively urban romance filmed on location in Dublin, featuring the Irish actor Colin Farrell (talking in his real accent for a change). A great look at Dublin right in the middle of its economic boom.

The Wind That Shakes the Barley (directed by Ken Loach, 2006), with a mostly Irish cast and English director, won the Palme d'Or at Cannes for its depiction of Ireland's early 20th-century fight for independence.

Once (directed by John Carney, 2007) is a touching, Oscar-nominated portrait of two struggling young musicians—an Irish singer (played by the Irish actor/musician Glen Hansard) and a Czech piano player trying to make it big in Dublin. The film was subsequently turned into a hit stage musical.

The little-seen, low budget *Wake Wood* (directed by David Keating, 2011) is a slice of pure Gothic horror fun. A young Irish couple moves to a new village when their daughter is tragically killed. Turns out the villagers can bring the girl back from the dead—but only for 3 days. When time's up, they refuse to let her go. What could possibly go wrong?

On the other end of the genre scale, *Silence* (directed by Pat Collins, 2012) is a meditative, dreamlike art film about a sound recordist who travels deep into the Irish countryside in search of places completely free of manmade sound. (Spoiler alert: He has a hard time finding any.)

Shadow Dancer (directed by James Marsh, 2012) is an exciting spy thriller set in early 1990s Belfast. The film, which was a hit at the Sundance Film Festival, pulls off the rare trick of being about the Troubles without getting bogged down in politics. Also, 71 (directed by Yann Demange, 2014) has been acclaimed as one of the best films about the Troubles of recent years.

The flipside to Northern Ireland in the '70s is beautifully portrayed in *Good Vibrations* (Glenn Patterson, 2013). The film tells the story of Terri Hooley, who opened a record store in the most bombed street in Belfast—the name reflected his optimistic hope that music could bring warring communities together. The store, which is still open on Winetavern Street in Belfast, went on to spawn a successful record label.

Calvary (directed by John Michael McDonagh, 2014) is a controversial drama about a small-town priest who receives a death threat from one of his parishioners, which leads him to discover dark truths about the community he lives in.

Based on a popular TV sitcom, *Mrs. Brown's Boys D'Movie* (directed by Ben Kellett, 2014) is a broad, slapstick comedy about a no-nonsense Dublin matriarch. The film became one of the most

successful Irish films of the decade at the box office, despite being almost universally derided as terrible by critics (spoiler alert: They're right).

Music

Music is inescapable in Ireland, and if you hear a band play in a bar and you like them, we strongly advise you to buy a CD from them.

In the days of Internet radio, the best way to discover new sounds is to tune in to Irish radio stations online. An excellent list of stations that stream live (including links) can be found at www.radiofeeds.co.uk/irish.asp. Good places to start are the stations run by **RTÉ**, the national broadcaster, particularly the music and entertainment-oriented **2FM** (www.rte.ie/2fm); **Today FM** (www.todayfm.com), a national station that's extremely popular with a young demographic; and **TXFM** (www.txfm.ie), a Dublin-based station that specializes in the latest indie and alternative sounds.

Some cool, quintessentially Irish names to check out, both in and out of the mainstream: Villagers, a young indie-folk duo who were nominated for the prestigious Mercury Prize in 2013; Lisa Hannigan, a singer-songwriter with a line in infectiously romantic indie-pop; Damien Rice, another soloist who has risen to huge chart success over the past decade; Cork-based electro-pop duo Young Wonder, who mix brash big beats with beautiful vocals; Rejjie Snow, an Irish hip-hop artist who has been compared to Kanye West; Hozier, a singer-songwriter from County Wicklow who began to make waves globally in 2014; and Soak, an absurdly talented young Derry native who has been wowing the music world with her simple but enchantingly beautiful ballads.



A session of traditional Irish music in Dublin.

Obviously, traditional music is still alive and well in Ireland, particularly in close association with Irish step dancing. The folk culture is primarily found outside of Dublin, although some pubs in the city do still showcase traditional music. The coastal village of **Doolin**, in County Clare (see p. 365), is well known for its concentration of pubs featuring traditional Irish music, but the city of **Cork** also has a number of lively music pubs (see p. 259), as does the town of **Ballyshannon** in County Donegal (see p. 469). Local pubs in small towns almost always can be counted on to host Irish music and sometimes dancing too.

Social Media

Users of social media, particularly Twitter, are uniquely placed to absorb a sense of what modernday Ireland is really like through the eyes of its journalists, thinkers—and just ordinary folk with something to say. Some excellent suggestions for where to start can be found at www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/the-twitter-feeds-you-need-202990.html and www.dailyedge.ie/funniest-irish-twitter-accounts-1216927-Dec2013.

EATING & DRINKING IN IRELAND

Restaurants

Restaurants in Ireland have become surprisingly expensive in recent years, and even with the economic crash the cost of eating out here is still well above the European average. On the plus side, Ireland's restaurants are varied and interesting—settings range from old-world hotel dining rooms, country mansions, and castles to sky-lit terraces, shop-front bistros, riverside cottages, thatched-roof pubs, and converted houses. Lately, appreciation has grown for creative cooking here, with an emphasis on locally grown produce and meat.

Before you book a table, here are a few things you should know.

RESERVATIONS Except for self-service eateries, informal cafes, and some popular seafood spots, most restaurants encourage reservations; most expensive restaurants require them. In the most popular places, Friday and Saturday nights are often booked up a week or more in advance, so have a few options in mind if you're booking at the last minute and want to try out the hot spots.

Tip: If you stop into or phone a restaurant and find that it is booked from 8 or 8:30pm onward, ask if you can dine early (at 6:30 or 7pm), with a promise to leave by 8pm. It works sometimes.

Dining Bargains

Despite the economic bust, restaurant prices are still generally high, largely because of taxes, but partly for reasons of hubris. Nobody is more aware of this than the Irish. Here are some strategies they use (and you can too) to keep meal costs down.

If you want to try a top-rated restaurant but can't afford dinner, have your main meal there in the middle of the day by trying the set-lunch menu. You'll experience the same great cuisine at half the price of a nighttime meal. The latest economic troubles have caused restaurants to compete for customers by offering more set-price meals, early-bird specials, and other discount enticements. Keep an eye out for them.

Alternatively, try an inexpensive lunch in a cafe or a pub. Pub food is usually a lot better than its name suggests; the menu likely will include a mix of sandwiches and traditional Irish food, including stews and meat pies. In recent years, many pubs have converted or expanded into restaurants, serving excellent, unpretentious meals at (somewhat) reasonable prices. Check the menu before you sit down at table (most places post them by their doors).

Supermarkets and grocery stores in Ireland sell good premade sandwiches (these are much better than similar supermarket sandwiches in the U.S.) for a few euro. These can make a good, cheap lunch or dinner. Coffee shops also sell sandwiches for a few euro, and muffins for even less (for a quick, cheap breakfast).



Two pints of beer served at the Guinness Brewery.

PRICES Meal prices at restaurants include national sales taxes (universally referred to as "VAT" which stands for Value Added Tax), at the rate of 13.5% in the Republic of Ireland and 20% in Northern Ireland. Many restaurants include the tip as a service charge added automatically to the bill (it's usually listed at the bottom, just before the bill's total). It usually ranges from 10% to 15%. When no service charge is added, tip around 12% or so, depending on the quality of the service. But do check your bill, as some unscrupulous restaurants do not make it clear that you have already tipped, thus causing you to inadvertently tip twice.

The price categories used in this book are based on the price of a complete dinner (or lunch, if dinner is not served) for one person, including tax and tip, but not wine or alcoholic beverages:

DINING TIPS Don't be surprised if you are not ushered to your table as soon as you arrive at some upscale restaurants. This is not a delaying tactic—many of the better dining rooms carry on the old custom of seating you in a lounge while you sip an aperitif and peruse the menu. Your waiter then comes to discuss the choices and to take your order. You are not called to the table until the first course is about to be served. You are not under an obligation to have a cocktail, of course. It's perfectly fine to order a soft drink or just a glass of water.

Pubs

The pub continues to be a mainstay of Irish social life. Every city, town, and hamlet has a pub. Most people have a "local"—a favorite pub near home—where they go for a drink and some conversation with neighbors, family, and friends. Pubs are not bars—they are more about socializing than drinking, and many people you see in the pub are just having a soft drink (lime cordial and soda water is a particular favorite, or orange juice and lemon soda). So feel free to go to the pub, even if you don't drink alcohol. It's a good way to meet locals.

PUB HOURS Pubs in the Republic set their own hours, although closing times are bound by the type of alcohol license they have. Those with a regular license must shut by 11:30pm, Monday to Thursday and Sunday, and 12:30am on Saturday. Those with late licenses can stay open until 2:30am, Monday to Saturday, and 2am Sunday. In Northern Ireland (which is governed by different laws), hours are slightly more restrictive, although this is currently the subject of some debate. On Friday and Saturday nights, many pubs stay open until midnight or 1am, and a few even later than that—particularly in large towns and cities. It should also be noted that legal closing times can be hard to police in rural areas.

You'll notice that when the dreaded "closing time" comes, nobody clears out of the pub. That's because the term is a misnomer. The "closing time" is actually the time when the barmen must stop serving alcohol, so expect to hear a shout for "Last orders!" or, occasionally, the marvelous if antiquated "Time, gentlemen, please!" Anyone who wants to order his or her last drink does so at that point. The pubs don't actually shut their doors for another 20 to 30 minutes. When the time comes to really close, the bartenders will shout "Time to leave!," lights will be turned up brightly, and people make their way to the doors.

TIPS ON ACCOMMODATIONS

Foreign visitors to Ireland should always have at least their first night's room booked, as you will be required to give an address at Immigration when you arrive at the airport. If you need help finding accommodations for subsequent nights once you're in Ireland, contact the local tourism office as soon as possible.

Booking in advance is your best strategy anyway, especially in the summer, when prices can spike up and fall within the course of a week. If you book a month or two in advance, you can often get a better rate at a 4-star hotel than at a 2-star guesthouse, as the most expensive hotels have been offering in-advance discounts of up to 50%. So before you book that cheap hotel with no services, just have a peek at your dream hotel's prices and see if it's not as cheap, or maybe even cheaper.

IRELAND'S NATIONAL parks

Ireland's six national parks offer some of the most spectacular scenery and best walking in the country, and all have free admission.

- The **Burren National Park**, Mullaghmore, County Clare (**www.burrennationalpark.ie**), holds fascinating landscapes—a series of limestone beds eroded during the Ice Age to form a barren, lunarlike landscape. The Burren is of particular interest to botanists, because it's the only place in the world where Arctic, Mediterranean, and Alpine species of wildflowers grow side by side in the fissures of the rock. See p. 358.
- Connemara National Park, Letterfrack, County Galway (www.connemaranationalpark.ie), is a rugged, heather-clad landscape of blanket bog and wet heath, encompassing some of the Twelve Bens mountain range. The nature trails have accompanying map/booklets (guided walks are available in summer); a visitor center is in Letterfrack. See p. 399.
- Glenveagh National Park, near Gweedore, County Donegal (www.glenveaghnationalpark.ie), is Ireland's largest national park and also its remotest wilderness—103,600 sq. km (40,000 sq. miles) of mountains, lakes, and natural woodlands that are home to a large red deer population. From the visitor center, you can grab a ride on a minibus along the shores of Lough Veagh to Glenveagh Castle, notable for its outstanding gardens. There are also a self-guided nature trail and a summer program of guided walks. See p. 481.
- Killarney National Park, Killarney, County Kerry (www.killarneynationalpark.ie), contains nearly 64,750 sq. km (25,000 sq. miles) of spectacular lake and mountain scenery. There are four self-guided trails, a visitor center with a restaurant, and two small lodges with tearooms. See p. 295.
- **Ballycroy National Park,** Ballycroy, County Mayo (**www.ballycroynationalpark.ie**), is the newest of the parks, centered in the Owenduff-Nephin Beg area. It features gorgeous bog landscapes. Along with a visitor center in Ballycroy, there are nature trails galore.
- Wicklow Mountains National Park, Glendalough, County Wicklow (www.wicklowmou4ntainsnationalpark.ie), is the only park of the six that's not on the west coast. At over 129,500 sq. km (50,000 sq. miles), it contains picturesque woodlands, moors, and mountains, and includes the atmospheric Glendalough monastic site and the Glenealo Valley. A park information office is at the Upper Lake, near the Glendalough car park. See p. 186.

In addition to national parks are 12 forest reserve parks, several of which were former private estates. Among the most enchanting is Lough Key Forest Park (www.loughkey.ie), in County Roscommon, which features a bog-garden, fairy bridge, and archaeological monuments.

Accommodations in Ireland range widely in quality and cost. Often these variations are due to location: a wonderful budget B&B in an isolated area of countryside can be dirt-cheap, while a mediocre guesthouse in Dublin or Cork can cost much more. Even in the same lodging, the size and quality of the rooms can vary considerably, especially in older hotels and houses converted to B&Bs. Don't be discouraged by this, but do a little research so you know what you're booking.

Among your various options, **B&Bs** are often hard to beat. These smaller lodgings, usually in residential areas, can be charming and home-like—we list several of the best in this book. Breakfast is included in the rate, and it's often hearty. Note that while most B&Bs are regulated and inspected by Ireland's Tourism Quality Services (look for the shamrock seal of approval), many perfectly fine establishments choose not to pay the annual fee that the stamp of approval requires, so don't assume that a place without the shamrock is shady or sub-par. Hidden Ireland (www.hiddenireland.com; **@** 98/666-50) is a collection of particularly elegant and unique B&Bs on the higher end of the price spectrum. Another interesting option if you're traveling in the countryside, especially if you're traveling with small children, is to stay in a farmhouse B&B on a family-run farm. Contact B&B Ireland (www.irishfarmholidays.com; **@** 071/982-2222) for an annual guide to farmhouse accommodations.

If you want to stay awhile and establish a base, you might consider renting a self-catering

apartment, townhouse, or cottage. Self-catering is a huge business in Ireland, both in urban and rural settings. The minimum rental period is usually 1 week, although shorter periods are negotiable in the off season. Families especially may appreciate the convenience of having a little more room to spread out and a kitchen to prepare meals, while forgoing the services of a traditional hotel. **Rent an Irish Cottage** (www.rentacottage.ie; © 061/411-109) offers a selection of traditional cottages all over Ireland, fully modernized. The Irish Landmark Trust (www.irishlandmark.com; © 01/670-4733) restores historic properties all over the island, refurbishing them in period style. It's a not-for-profit organization, so prices are lower than you might expect. On the pricier side, Elegant Ireland (www.elegant.ie; © 01/473-2505) offers anything from an upscale seaside bungalow to a medieval castle sleeping 20.

Nowadays, Ireland's **hostels** are redesigning to attract travelers of all ages, as well as families. Many have private rooms and they cost a fraction of even a modest bed-and-breakfast. Contact **AnÓige**, the Irish Youth Hostel Association (www.anoige.ie; © 01/830-4555) or, in the North, **HINI** (Hostelling International Northern Ireland, www.hini.org.uk; © 098/9032-4733) for listings.

WHEN TO GO

A visit to Ireland in the summer is very different from a trip in the winter. Generally speaking, in summer, airfares, car-rental rates, and hotel prices are highest and crowds at their most intense. But the days are long (6am sunrises and 10pm sunsets), the weather is warm, and every sightseeing attraction and B&B is open. In winter, you can get rock-bottom prices on airfare and hotels. But it will rain and the wind will blow, and many rural sights and a fair proportion of rural B&Bs and restaurants will be closed.

All things considered, we think the best time to visit is in spring and fall when the weather falls in between seasons, but you get lower-than-high-season prices and the crowds have yet to descend.

Weather

Rain is the one constant in Irish weather, although a bit of sunshine is usually just around the corner. The best of times and the worst of times are often only hours, or even minutes, apart. It can be chilly in Ireland at any time of year, so think *layers* when you pack.

Winters can be brutal, as the wind blows in off the Atlantic with numbing constancy, and strong gales are common. But deep snow is rare and temperatures rarely drop much below freezing. In fact, Ireland is a fairly temperate place: January and February bring frosts but seldom snow, and July and August are very warm but rarely hot. The Irish consider any temperature over 68°F (20°C) to be "roasting" and below 34°F (1°C) as bone chilling.

Average Monthly Temperatures in Dublin

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	ОСТ	NOV	DEC
TEMP (°F)	36-46	37–48	37-49	38-52	42-57	46-62	51-66	50-65	48-62	44-56	39–49	38-47
TEMP (°C)	2-8	3–9	3–9	3-11	6-14	8-17	11-19	10-18	9-17	7-13	4–9	3-8

Holidays

The Republic observes the following national holidays, also known as "Bank Holidays": New Year's Day (January 1); St. Patrick's Day (March 17); Easter Monday (variable); May Day (May 1); first Mondays in June and August (summer Bank Holidays); last Monday in October (autumn Bank Holiday); Christmas (December 25); and St. Stephen's Day (December 26). Good Friday (the Friday

before Easter) is mostly observed but is not statutory. All pubs must close on Good Friday, although this archaic (and famously detested) law is the subject of hot debate. In the North, the schedule of holidays is the same as in the Republic, with some exceptions: the North's summer Bank Holidays fall on the last Monday of May and August; the Battle of the Boyne is celebrated on Orangeman's Day (July 12); and Boxing Day (December 26) follows Christmas.

In both Ireland and Northern Ireland, holidays that fall on weekends are celebrated the following Monday.

Ireland Calendar of Events

For the most up-to-date listings of events, check out www.discoverireland.ie and www.entertainment.ie.

JANUARY

Funderland. Royal Dublin Society, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. An annual indoor fun fair, complete with white-knuckle rides, carnival stalls, and family entertainment (www.funderland.com; © 01/283-8188). December/January. (Also smaller events in Cork, Limerick, and Belfast later in the year; check the website for details.)

MARCH

St. Patrick's Dublin Festival. Held around St. Patrick's Day itself, this massive 4-day festival is open, free, and accessible to everyone. Street theater, carnival acts, sports, music, fireworks, and other festivities culminate in Ireland's grandest parade, with marching bands, drill teams, floats, and delegations from around the world (www.stpatricksday.ie). On and around March 17.

St. Patrick's Day Parades. Held all over Ireland and Northern Ireland, celebrating Ireland's patron saint. March 17.

Dublin International Film Festival. Irish Film Centre, Temple Bar, Dublin 2, and various cinemas in Dublin. More than 100 films are featured, with screenings of the best in Irish and world cinema, plus seminars and lectures on filmmaking, currently sponsored by Jameson whiskey (www.jdiff.com; © 01/662-4620). Late March.

APRIL

Pan Celtic Festival. County Donegal. For 5 days, the wider Celtic family (including Cornwall, Isle of Man, Scotland, Wales, and Brittany) unites for culture, song, dance, sports, and parades with marching bands and pipers. Fringe events range from nature walks to poetry readings (www.panceltic.ie; © 028/7126-4132). Mid-April.

World Irish Dancing Championships. Gleneagle Hotel, Killarney. The premier international competition in Irish dancing features more than 4,000 contenders from as far away as New Zealand (www.clrg.ie; © 01/814-6298). April.

MAY

May Day Races. Down Royal Racecourse, Maze, Lisburn, County Antrim. One of the major events on the horse-racing calendar (www.downroyal.com; © 028/9262-1256). Early May.

Belfast City Marathon. An epic 42km (26-mile) race of 6,000 international runners through the city. It starts and finishes at Maysfield Leisure Centre (www.belfastcitymarathon.com; © 028/9060-5933). Early May.

Dublin Writers Festival. Dublin, County Dublin. One of the biggest events in the Irish literary calendar, this 9-day festival draws high-profile authors from across the world. Events take place at venues across the city, including Dublin Castle. (www.dublinwritersfestival.com; © 01/222-5455). Mid-May.

Wicklow Arts Festival. This is Wicklow's big spring event, held over 5 days in Wicklow Town. Many of the dozens of music, theater, art, and literary events are free (www.wicklowartsfestival.ie). Late May.

Sky Cat Laughs Comedy Festival. Various venues in Kilkenny Town. Past performers at this international festival of stand-up comedy include American comics Bill Murray, George Wendt, and Emo Phillips, and Ireland's Dara O'Briain (www.thecatlaughs.com). Late May/early June.

JUNE

Taste of Dublin. Dublin, County Dublin. Held over 4 days in Iveagh Gardens, this is one of Ireland's biggest and most high-profile food festivals. Visitors can sample dishes prepared by some of the country's top chefs, and over 100 artisan producers. The event is usually a sellout, so booking is advisable. (www.tasteofdublin.ie). Mid-June.

Blooms day Festival. Various Dublin venues. This unique day of festivity celebrates Leopold Bloom, the central character of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Every aspect of the city, including the menus at restaurants and pubs, duplicates the aromas, sights, sounds, and tastes of Joyce's fictitious Dublin on June 16, 1904, the day when all of the action in *Ulysses* takes place. Ceremonies are held at the James Joyce Tower and Museum; guided walks visit Joycean sights. Contact the James Joyce Centre, 35 N. Great George's St., Dublin 1

(www.jamesjoyce.ie; @ 01/878-8547). June 16.

Cork Midsummer Arts Festival. Emmet Place, Cork City. The program includes musical performances and traditional Irish *céilí* bands, and always has a strong literary content. Bonfire nights are particularly popular (www.corkmidsummer.com; © 021/421-5131). Mid-June.

Irish Derby. The Curragh, County Kildare. This is Ireland's version of the Kentucky Derby or Royal Ascot and is a fashionable gathering (*Hint:* jackets for men, posh hats for women) of racing fans from all over the world. It's one of the richest and most definitive middle-distance horse races in Europe. Booking recommended (www.curragh.ie; © 045/441205). Late June. JULY

Battle of the Boyne Commemoration. Belfast and other cities. This annual event, often called Orangeman's Day, recalls the historic battle between two 17th-century kings. It's a national day of parades by Protestants all over Northern Ireland—but the event is contentious, and there's a weary inevitability to how some parades in urban Belfast and Derry always turn nasty. This may be one better viewed from afar. July 12.

Galway Arts Festival & Races. Galway City and Racecourse. This 2-week fest is a shining star on the Irish arts scene, featuring international theater, concerts, literary evenings, street shows, arts, parades, music, and more. (www.giaf.ie; © 091/509700). The famous Galway Races follow, with 5 more days of racing and merriment, music, and song. See p. 383 for more details. Mid- to late July.

Lughnasa Fair. Carrickfergus Castle, County Antrim. A spectacular revival with a 12th-century Norman castle and its grounds, this event features people in period costumes, medieval games, traditional food, entertainment, and crafts (www.carrickfergus.org; © 028/9335-8000). Late July/early August.

AUGUST

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann. This has been Ireland's premier summer festival of traditional music since 1951, with competitions held to select the all-Ireland champions in all categories of instruments and singing. The host city changes every year, so visit www.fleadhcheoil.ie to find out this year's location (© 071/911-1444). Early to mid-August.

Fáilte Ireland Horse Show. RDS Showgrounds, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. This is the most important equestrian and social event on the Irish national calendar. Aside from the daily dressage and jumping competitions, highlights include a fashionable ladies' day, nightly formal hunt balls, and the awarding of the Aga Khan Trophy and the Nation's Cup (www.dublinhorseshow.ie or www.rds.ie; © 01/668-0866). Early August.

Kilkenny Arts Festival. Kilkenny Town. This weeklong event has it all, from classical and traditional music to plays, one-person shows, readings, films, poetry, and art exhibitions (www.kilkennyarts.ie; © 056/776-3663). Mid-August.

Puck Fair. Killorglin, County Kerry. This is one of Ireland's oldest festivals. Each year, the residents of this tiny Ring of Kerry town capture a wild goat and enthrone it as "king" over 3 days of merrymaking that include open-air concerts, horse fairs, parades, and fireworks. (See p. 315.) And yes, the goat does get to wear a crown (www.puckfair.ie; © 066/976-2366). August 10–12.

Rose of Tralee International Festival. Tralee, County Kerry. A gala atmosphere prevails at this 5-day event (see p, 324), with a full program of concerts, street entertainment, horse races, and a beauty-and-talent pageant leading up to the televised selection of the "Rose of Tralee" (www.roseoftralee.ie; © 066/712-1322). Late August.

National Heritage Week. More than 400 events are held throughout the country—walks, lectures, exhibitions, music recitals, and more (www.heritageweek.ie; © 185/020-0878). Late August.

SEPTEMBER

Electric Picnic. Stradbally, County Laois. This midsize music festival, held on the grounds of Stradbally Hall, County Laois, is known for its eclectic lineup. Recent acts to have played here include Sonic Youth, Björk, Fatboy Slim, and Sigur Rós. (www.electricpicnic.ie; **081/871-9300**). Early September.

Lisdoonvarna Matchmaking Festival. Lisdoonvarna, County Clare. Still the biggest and best singles' event after all these years, this traditional "bachelor" festival (see p. 370) carries on in the lovely spa town of Lisdoonvarna, with lots of wonderful music and dance (www.matchmakerireland.com; © 065/707-4005). September/October.

All-Ireland Hurling & Gaelic Football Finals. Croke Park, Dublin 3. The finals of Ireland's most beloved sports, hurling and Gaelic football, are Ireland's equivalent of the Super Bowl. If you can't be at Croke Park, experience this in the full bonhomie of a pub. You can find information at www.gaa.ie, or obtain tickets through Ticketmaster (www.ticketmaster.ie; © 081/871-9300). September.

Irish Antique Dealers' Fair. RDS Showgrounds, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. Ireland's premier annual antiques fair, with hundreds of dealers from all over the island (www.iada.ie; © 01/679-4147). Late September/early October.

Galway International Oyster Festival. A haven for oyster aficionados from across the globe, the highlights of this festival include the World Oyster Opening Championship, a grand opening parade, a yacht race, an art exhibition, a gala banquet, traditional music, and, of

course, lots of oyster eating (www.galwayoysterfest.com; @ 091/394637). Late September.

Dublin Theatre Festival. Theaters throughout Dublin. Showcases for new plays by every major Irish company (including the Abbey and the Gate), plus a range of productions from abroad (www.dublintheatrefestival.com; © 01/677-8439). Late September/mid-October.

OCTOBER

Kinsale International Gourmet Festival. Kinsale, County Cork. The foodie capital of Ireland hosts this well-respected annual fest, featuring special menus in all the restaurants and plenty of star chefs in town from abroad (www.kinsalerestaurants.com; © 021/477-3571). October.

Baboró International Arts Festival for Children. Galway. A fun-filled, educational festival geared to kids 3 to 12 years of age, with theater, music, dance, museum exhibitions, and literary events (www.baboro.ie; © 091/562667). Mid-late October.

Guinness Cork Jazz Festival. Cork City. Ireland's second city stages a first-rate festival of jazz, with an international lineup of live acts playing in hotels, concert halls, and pubs (www.guinnessjazzfestival.com; © 021/427-8979). Late October.

Dublin City Marathon. On the last Monday in October, more than 5,000 runners from both sides of the Atlantic and the Irish Sea participate in this popular run through the streets of the capital (www.dublinmarathon.ie; © 01/623-2250). Late October.

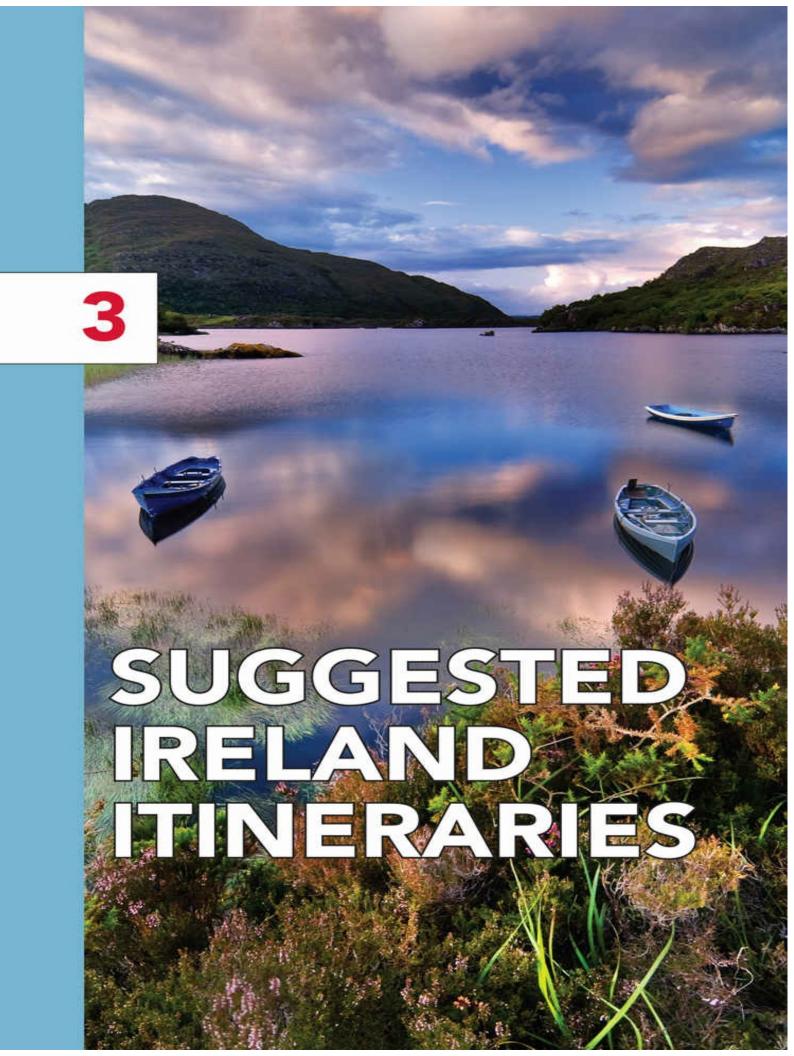
Wexford Festival Opera. Wexford, County Wexford. This is not your average stuffy opera festival. Famous as much for the jubilant, informal atmosphere as for the acclaimed productions of lesser known 18th- and 19th-century operatic masterpieces, the festival also offers classical music concerts, recitals, and more. (www.wexfordopera.com; © 053/912-2400). Late October/early November.

Belfast Festival at Queen's. Queen's University, Belfast. Ireland's largest arts festival attracts enormous crowds each year for its stellar program of drama, opera, music, and film (www.belfastfestival.com; © 028/9097-1197). October/early November.

Murphy's Cork International Film Festival. Cinemas throughout Cork. Ireland's oldest film festival offers a plethora of international features, documentaries, short films, and special programs (www.corkfilmfest.org; © 021/427-1711). Mid-November. DECEMBER

Killarney Christmas Market. Fair Hill, Killarney, County Kerry. Killarney gets very enthusiastic indeed about the festive season, so it's unsurprising that it should host some of the region's best Christmas markets, devoted mainly to quality local crafts and food (www.christmasinkillarney.com; © 064/663-7928). Various dates in December.

Dublin Docklands Christmas Festival. Now part of the traditional run-up to Christmas in Dublin, this huge event all but takes over Docklands. Mostly it's an opportunity to shop (there are over 100 different traders), but there's also a traditional-style fairground, and festive food and drink aplenty (www.docklands.ie; © 01/496-9883). Mid-December until Christmas.



Killarney National Park.

reland is such a small island that you can cover a lot of ground in a week and feel quite at home within two. But even with the best of intentions and all the energy in the world, you'll never see it all on a short visit.

The suggested itineraries over the next few pages will help you get the most out of this extraordinary and varied country—no matter how long you have to see it. If you've only got a week to spend here, the southern regions probably have more to offer. They're generally easier to get around, and the major sights are somewhat closer together. If you're traveling with kids, Dublin and County Kerry have particularly rich troves of kid-friendly attractions. However, those in search of the road less traveled will be drawn northward, especially to places such as Mayo, Sligo, and the wilds of Donegal beyond.

THE REGIONS IN BRIEF

The island of Ireland is divided into two political units: the **Republic of Ireland**, which makes up the vast majority of the country, and **Northern Ireland**, which along with England, Scotland, and Wales is part of the United Kingdom. Of Ireland's 32 counties, all but 6 are in the Republic.

The ancient Gaelic regions that once divided Ireland are still used in conversation and directions: Ulster is north, Munster is south, Leinster is east, and Connaught is west. Each region is divided into counties:

In Ulster (to the north) Cavan, Donegal, and Monaghan in the Republic; Antrim, Armagh, Derry, Down, Fermanagh, and Tyrone in Northern Ireland.

In Munster (to the south) Clare, Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary, and Waterford.

In Leinster (to the east) Dublin, Carlow, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Longford, Louth, Meath, Offaly, Westmeath, Wexford, and Wicklow.

In Connaught (to the west) Sligo, Mayo, Galway, Roscommon, and Leitrim.

DUBLIN & ENVIRONS With 40% of the Republic's population living within 97km (60 miles) of Dublin, the capital is the center of the profound changes that have transformed Ireland into a prosperous and increasingly European country. Within an hour's drive of Dublin are Dalkey, Dún Laoghaire, and many more engaging coastal towns, as well as the rural beauty of the Wicklow Mountains and the prehistoric ruins in County Meath.



Ashford castle and gardens, County Mayo.

THE SOUTHEAST The southeast offers sandy beaches, Wexford's lush and mountainous countryside, Waterford's famous Crystal Factory, Kilkenny and Cahir's ancient castles, and the Irish National Heritage Park at Ferrycarrig.

CORK & ENVIRONS Cork, Ireland's second largest city, is a buzzy university town and a congenial gateway to the south and west of the island. Within arm's reach are Blarney Castle (and its famous stone), the culinary and scenic delights of Kinsale, the Drombeg Stone Circle, Cape Clear Island, and Mizen Head. Also in this region is the dazzling landscape of West Cork.

THE SOUTHWEST The once remote splendor of County Kerry has long ceased to be a secret, at least during the high season. The Ring of Kerry (less glamorously known as hwys. N70 and N71) encircling the Iveragh Peninsula is Ireland's most visited attraction after the Book of Kells. That's both a recommendation and a warning. While Killarney National Park provides a stunning haven from buses, the town of Killarney is filled with souvenir shops and tour groups. Marginally less visited highlights include the rugged Dingle Peninsula and two sets of islands with rich histories: the Skelligs and the Blaskets.

THE WEST The west of Ireland offers a first taste of Ireland's wild beauty and striking diversity for those who fly into Shannon Airport. County Limerick has an array of impressive castles: Knappogue,

Bunratty, and (just over the county line in Galway) Dunguaire. County Clare's natural offerings particularly the unique landscapes of the Burren—are unforgettable. Farther up the coast to the north, past Galway, County Mayo is the home of the sweet town of Westport on Clew Bay. Achill Island (accessible by car) has beaches and stunning cliff views.

GALWAY & ENVIRONS Galway Town is busy, colorful, and funky—a youthful port and university town and the self-proclaimed arts capital of Ireland with lots of theater, music, and dance. County Galway is the gateway to Connemara's moody, magical mountains and boglands. Offshore lie the atmospheric, mysterious Aran Islands, Inishmore, Inishmaan, and Inisheer.

THE MIDLANDS The lush center of Ireland, bisected by the lazy River Shannon, is a land of pastures, rivers, lakes, woods, and gentle mountain slopes, and a retreat, in high season, from the throngs of tourists who crowd the coasts. The Midlands also hold remarkable sites—Birr Castle and its splendid gardens, for example, and Clonmacnois, the evocative ruins of a famous Irish monastic center.

THE NORTHWEST In Ireland it's easy to become convinced that isolated austerity is beautiful. Nowhere is this more evident than in Donegal, with its jagged, desolate coastline. (If you don't mind the cold, it offers some fine surfing.) Inland, Glenveagh National Park has as much wilderness as you could want. County Sligo inspired the poetry of W. B. Yeats, and it offers a dense collection of stone circles, passage tombs, and cairns at such sites as Carrowmore, Knocknarea, and Carrowkeel.

NORTHERN IRELAND Across the border, Northern Ireland's six counties are a decade-and-a-half into a new era. It's still one of the most underrated parts of Ireland, with such attractions as the stunning Antrim Coast, the extraordinary basalt columns of the Giant's Causeway, and the Glens of Antrim. The old city walls of Derry, the past glory of Carrickfergus Castle, and Belfast's elaborate political murals make a trip across the border worthwhile.

HOW TO SEE IRELAND

To Drive or Not to Drive?

Let's get one thing straight: you don't *have* to rent a car to see Ireland. Millions of people don't. But you must first decide what's most important to you. If you want to see some of the major towns and cities, and those parts of the countryside that can easily be reached on tours or public transport, then don't bother renting a car. Ireland has a decent public transportation network, and you're spoiled for choice when it comes to tour bus excursions. And that's a fine way to do it. This is *your* trip, after all.

However, if your ideal Ireland involves wandering through the countryside, visiting small villages, climbing castle walls, hailing history from a ruined abbey, or finding yourself alone on a rocky beach —you effectively cannot do those things independently without a car. Out of the main towns, public transportation exists, but it's slow and limiting. Every major town has car-rental agencies, if you decide to explore by car.

Just remember: they drive on the *left*.

Be Smart Where You Start

The next step is deciding where to start. That decision can be made for you by where your flight terminates. If you're flying into Shannon Airport, then it makes geographic sense to start out on the west coast. If you're flying into Dublin, you might as well explore that city first, then either head up to the North and the ruggedly beautiful Antrim Coast, or south down to the Wicklow Mountains,

Kilkenny, and the rolling green hills of Wexford and Waterford.

Still, if you fly into Dublin but your heart is in Galway, no worries. You can traverse the width of the country in a few hours, once you get out of Dublin's stultifying sprawl. Just bear in mind that rural roads are not well lit or well signposted, so driving at night should be avoided. Being lost in unfamiliar territory (where it can be many miles between villages) is no fun at all. This is more of an issue in the winter, when it can get dark as early as 4pm. During summer time, the driving is a little easier, as it often stays light until after 10pm.

So ... Where to Go?

So taking all of these factors into consideration, the question remains: *Where do you want to go?* We can't answer that question for you, but we can give you some itineraries that we have used ourselves. They might help you focus on ways to orchestrate your journey so that you can get the most out of it with the fewest scheduling worries. The last thing you want to do on vacation is to spend the whole time looking at your watch.

All of these tours (bar one) assume you have a week to see the country. Where there's potential for a longer trip, we've given some alternatives for an extended version. Pick and choose the parts that appeal to you, add in your own favorite shopping or scenic drives, and turn it all into a custom-made holiday for yourself.

THE BEST OF IRELAND IN 1 WEEK

There's something terribly romantic about flying into Dublin. The compact, laid-back city awaits a few miles down the road, packed with old-fashioned pubs, modern restaurants, and absorbing sights all laid out for walking. If you've never been here, a couple of days in Dublin make for a quick primer on Ireland. It's just enough time to do some shopping on **Grafton Street**, head up O'Connell Street to the **General Post Office**, and discover the Georgian beauty of **St. Stephen's Green** and **Merrion Square**. You can give the surface of the city a good brush in a couple of days, and then head south to **Kilkenny** and **Wicklow**, on to **Waterford**, **Cork**, and **Kerry**, and up to **Clare** for a quick glance before the clock runs out. It is only hitting the high points but, as high points go, they're hard to beat.



DAYS 1 & 2: Arrive in Dublin

If it happens that you're arriving from North America, you start with an advantage: Most flights arrive early in the morning, which effectively gives you an extra day's sightseeing. Check into your hotel, say yes to any tea and scones offered, take a minute to relax, and then head out on foot. Get a map from your concierge and then just start walking.

Stay south of the River Liffey and head down Dame Street to **Dublin Castle** (p. 109), home of the magical **Chester Beatty Library** (p. 97) with its vast collection of gorgeous illuminated manuscripts. Later, take in **St. Patrick's Cathedral** (p. 106) and the vibrant green quadrangles of **Trinity College** (p. 107), before heading down to Merrion Square, with its handsome granite architecture and two of the main sites of Ireland's **National Museum** (a third one is on the west side of the city). The **Archaeology** museum has an extraordinary hoard of ancient gold, while the recently refurbished **Natural History** building contains an array of objects from the ancient past. It's a short stroll from here down to **St. Stephen's Green.** Rest your weary toes and soak up the floral view here, before strolling up **Grafton Street** for some shopping before collapsing in your hotel.

On **DAY 2**, have a hearty breakfast in your hotel before striking out for the trendy cultural hub of **Temple Bar.** Stroll north to the river, then take a right and walk along the noisy, vibrant waterfront to the landmark arc of the **Ha'penny Bridge.** Walk across and head east **O'Connell Street**, where you can walk past its many statues to the bullet-ridden columns of the **General Post Office** (p. 111), site of the 1916 Easter Rising. After exploring its displays, head farther up O'Connell Street to the **Dublin Writers Museum** (p. 101), which bookish types love for its extensive display of memorabilia. Let someone else do the work in the evening, either on a walking tour—such as the **Irish Music Pub Crawl**, perhaps (p. 110)—or some good-natured scares aboard the **Dublin Ghost Bus** (p. 127). Those in search of less organized fun may prefer the simple, atmospheric pleasure of **An Evening of Food, Folklore & Fairies** (p. 173).

DAY 3: South to Wicklow & Kilkenny

It takes less than 2 hours to drive from the hustle and traffic of Dublin to the peace and quiet of the **Wicklow Mountains** (p. 178). Drive through the town of Enniskerry to the great estate of **Powerscourt** (p. 183) on the south end of the village. After lunching in its Avoca Café, head on to **Glendalough** (p. 181) and feel your soul relax in the pastoral mountain setting of this ancient monastic retreat. From there drive on to the colorful village of **Kilkenny** where you can spend the rest of the day shopping in its pottery and crafts shops and exploring noble **Kilkenny Castle** (p. 234). This is a good place to spend your first night outside of Dublin.

DAY 4: West to Waterford & Cork

Waterford, Ireland's oldest city, is less than an hour south of Kilkenny, so you'll be able to get there with plenty of time left for sightseeing. Have a quick look around some or all of the Waterford Treasures museums (p. 214), before dropping in for a tour of the House of Waterford Crystal. After lunch, you have a choice—either head to Cork (p. 245), Ireland's busy second city, or Kinsale (p. 263), a quieter harbor town near Cork that has lately become a foodie destination. Each has plenty to keep you busy for the rest of the day and good hotels in which to spend the night.

DAYS 5 & 6: The Ring of Kerry

If you're not allergic to touristy things, you could stop at **Blarney Castle** (p. 248) on your way out of Cork in the morning; otherwise, on to County Kerry at the southwest tip of the island. Here the most popular place to explore—and one of the busiest tourist spots in Ireland—is the **Ring of Kerry** (see p. 290). It is a beautiful drive, filled with historic sites and tiny villages, but you'll have to brave the masses. If you have the stamina, the entire Ring is doable at a reasonable pace over 2 days, although you'd have to skip pretty much everything else around it to make that goal.

Alternatively, you could just explore the short section of the Ring that runs from lovely **Kenmare** (p. 307) to the bucolic peace of **Killarney National Park** (p. 293). Here you can indulge in a buggy ride around the lakes and drink in beautiful landscapes.

DAY 7: County Clare

Time is short now, so as you drive through County Clare, promise yourself to come back someday and do it justice. For now, head for the perilously tall **Cliffs of Moher** (p. 364) where the view seems to stretch all the way to America (although the price to park will make you shiver). Then you've another choice: Spend the rest of the day exploring **Bunratty Castle** (p. 363)—where medieval fortress meets historical theme park—or marveling at the otherworldly limestone landscape of the **Burren** (see "The Burren," in chapter 9). Either would be a perfect, quintessentially Irish end to your all-too-short trip.

THE BEST OF IRELAND IN 2 WEEKS

With 2 weeks, your visit to Ireland will be much more relaxed. You can stretch out a bit more in your travels, heading to less crowded counties with more time to meet the locals. In your second week, head up to Galway, Mayo, and Donegal, taking time to smell the heather along the way.

DAYS 1–7

Follow "The Best of Ireland in 1 Week" itinerary, as outlined above.

DAY 8

After spending **DAY 7** exploring Clare, you'll discover that you need more time to explore this region. If you didn't make it to the **Burren**, spend most of your day here. Otherwise, you could visit another of the county's great medieval buildings such as **Knappogue Castle** (p. 366) or the exquisite ruins of **Corcomroe Abbey** (p. 362). Lovers of live music will want to spend the evening in the pubs of **Doolin** (p. 365), one of the very best places in the country to catch proper, traditional music.

DAYS 9 & 10: County Galway

Start the day with a drive up from Clare to Galway City (it will take around an hour), your base for **DAY 9.** You could spend a relaxing day walking the delightful streets of this artsy, vibrant town, take a cruise out to the misty **Aran Islands** (see "The Aran Islands," in chapter 10), or, if you've got kids to keep amused, take them to the fabulous **Galway Atlantaquaria** (p. 393). On the following day, you can go either east or west. Go west to explore **Connemara National Park** (p. 399), where it's time to get out from behind the wheel, and maybe even see this lovely park by horseback if you're feeling brave. If you head east, you'll be going inland for a whistle-stop tour of what the Irish Midlands have to offer (chapter 11). Either return to your Galway City hotel or pick a B&B in the countryside.



A busker entertains passerby in Galway.

DAY 11: County Mayo

Drive up from Galway through the spectacular scenery, where the rocky shoreline plunges into the cobalt sea in glorious fashion. The south Mayo town of **Westport**, sitting at the edge of a picturesque river, is a delightful place to wander. Probably depending on whether or not you've got a family to entertain, you could either spend a couple of hours at **Westport House and Pirate Adventure Park** (p. 436) or visit the **National Museum of Ireland: Country Life** (p. 436) near Castlebar. Ancient history buffs will probably want to press on to a hotel in County Sligo (see below), but if it's quiet retreat you're after, drive across the strangely empty flatlands to **Achill**

Island (p. 441). The route along the coast and out across the bridge to the island is slow and windy, but the views are fantastic. If you do make it out to Achill, consider an overnight stay at the **Bervie** (p. 445), where the sea is right outside the door.

DAY 12: County Sligo

Depending on where you based yourself for the night, you may be in for a long drive, so start early. **Sligo Town** (p. 448) has a few worthwhile attractions, but mostly it will be useful as a stop for lunch. The real reason to come this far lies in the surrounding countryside. There is an astonishing concentration of ancient burial sites here, including **Carrowkeel** and **Carrowmore** that contain the world's oldest piece of freestanding architecture. Our favorite place to stay the night in these parts is the extraordinary **Temple House** (p. 459).

DAY 13: North to Donegal

You're really entering the wilds of Ireland now. Head up the coast past Donegal Town until you catch the N15 road. Then follow it around the breathtaking coastline to the busy hill town of **Ballyshannon** (p. 469), an excellent spot for crafts shops and glorious views from the top of the hill. The adventurous can explore the **Catsby Cave** (p. 469), a picturesque grotto at the edge of the Abbey River. But here the drive is really the thing, so head on to the darling town of **Glencolumbkille** (p. 470). The excellent folk park here is well worth an hour of your time before you head on to the stone-cut town of **Ardara** at the foot of a steep hill—it's wall-to-wall arts-and-crafts shops and is a pleasure to explore. Art lovers won't want to miss the revelatory gallery at **Glebe House** (p. 480). You've spent a lot of time in the car today, but if you can face another 40 minutes or so to the wonderful **Rathmullan House** (p. 484), you'll find a beautiful, elegant seaside retreat waiting for you on your last night.

DAY 14: Heading Home

If your flight leaves late, you could rise early and spend the morning driving up to **Malin Head** (p. 487), the northernmost tip of Ireland. It's a wild and wooly place just a couple of hours' drive from Rathmullan. From there, expect the journey to the airport to take at least 4 hours, but allow plenty of time in case of traffic backups around Dublin—they're virtually constant.



Fanad lighthouse, County Donegal.

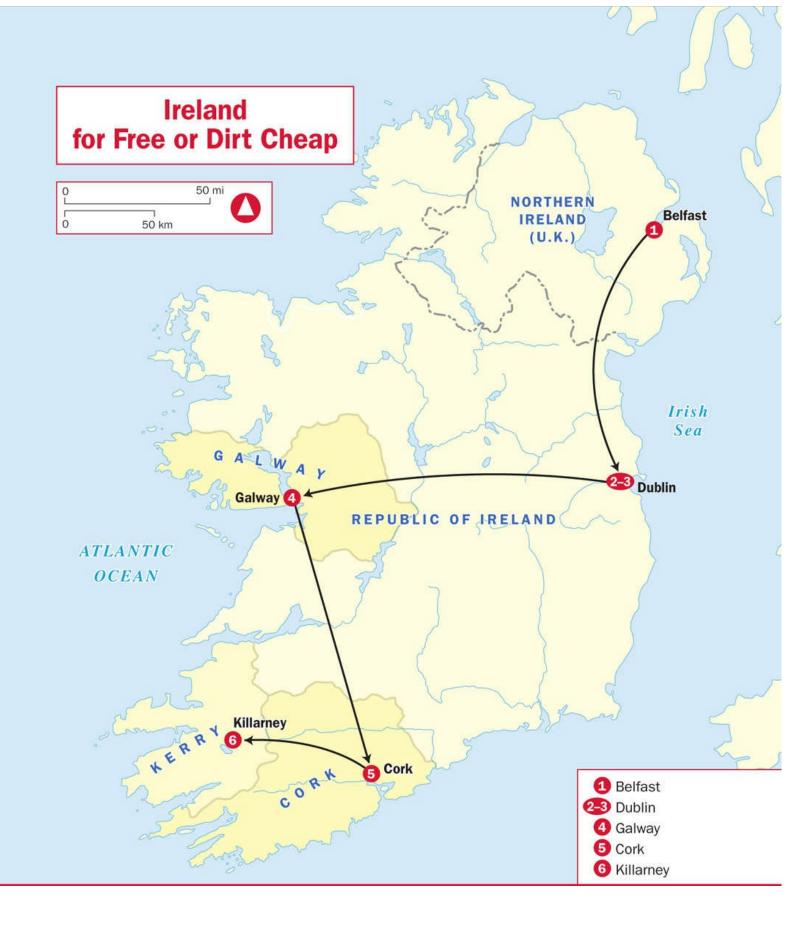
IRELAND FOR FREE OR DIRT CHEAP

Ireland is no longer a cheap country to visit—and hasn't been for some time. The economic crash of late 2000s and early 2010s drove prices down a bit, but hotels and restaurants are still pricey, and in recent years the euro/dollar exchange rate has not favored travelers from the U.S. But here's the good news: You can visit a lot of great sites for free in Ireland, including some of the biggest tourist attractions in the country. You can also save a lot of money by sticking mainly to places that can be reached by public transport, thus eliminating the need to rent a car (every place we list is easily accessible by train or bus). You'd be surprised by how much of Ireland you can see without blowing the budget. We're starting this tour in Northern Ireland (maybe you got a great deal on a flight to Belfast!), because it's one of the more budget-friendly regions. For more information on train and bus timetables, see www.irishrail.ie and www.buseireann.ie.

DAY 1: Belfast

Belfast is rich with free attractions—here are just a few. The excellent **Ulster Museum** (p. 509) displays artifacts from across 9,000 years of Irish history. Right next door is the **Belfast Botanic**

Gardens & Palm House (p. 499), and it's only a short walk from the campus of **Queen's University** (p. 506). **Belfast City Hall** (p. 504) runs free guided tours. Another exceptional Victorian landmark, **Belfast Cathedral** (p. 502), is also free, as is **Cave Hill Country Park** (p. 504), a tranquil place with good walking trails and incredible views of the city. Last but not least, because Belfast is still most famous for the sectarian strife of the mid- to late-20th century, a highlight of your visit may be to view the political murals remaining in the epicenter of the conflict, the **Falls and Shankill roads areas** (p. 505). These neighborhoods are now safe for visitors to explore, and the street art is all free. To get the most out of them, however, you may want to spend some of that cash you've saved so far on a **Black Taxi Tour** (p. 503).





City Hall of Belfast.

Catch a train from Belfast to Dublin (Connolly Station). Time: 2 hr. 10 min. Fares start at about €22 for adults.

DAYS 2 & 3: Dublin

Ireland's capital is also the number one destination in the country for free sites. The **Chester Beatty Library** (p. 97) is, for our money, one of the best museums in Europe. The collection of illuminated gospels and early copies of the Bible, Torah, and Koran would justify a steep entrance fee, but it won't cost you a cent. Three of the four separate museums constituting the **National Museum of Ireland** are in Dublin—Archaeology, Natural History, and Decorative Arts and History—and all are free. Each contains some incredible treasures, and collectively have enough to keep you occupied for a day or more. All of Dublin's best major art galleries are free, including the National Gallery of Ireland (p. 104), the Irish Museum of Modern Art (p. 117), the Temple Bar Gallery (p. 117), and the excellent Hugh Lane Gallery (p. 101). Many of Dublin's most historic public buildings don't charge admission. The Irish President's House (Áras an Uachtaráin, p. 102) is accessible only by tour on a first-come, first-served basis; the queue forms at the visitor center in Phoenix Park. The Bank of Ireland/Parliament House (p. 113) and the Four Courts (p. 111) are also free. The General Post Office on O'Connell Street (p. 111) is still

a working post office but has a small number of exhibits devoted to the Easter Rising, including the original Declaration of Independence. Add to this the great public spaces such as **Phoenix Park** (p. 119), **St. Stephen's Green** (p. 119), and **Trinity College** (p. 142), and you'll see it's possible to spend a full 2 days here without spending a penny on sightseeing.

SAVING MONEY ON trains & buses

The cost of rail travel can quickly mount up, but there are ways to save money. Whenever you can, *book in advance*. The example fares listed in this itinerary are all pre-booked; walk-up fares can be higher. The downside for booking that way is that you have to specify times of travel—but Irish Rail has a handy policy of letting you upgrade a pre-booked ticket into something more flexible for just $\in 10$.

If you're going to be spending a lot of time on public transportation, you should also strongly consider buying a money-saving pass. **Eurail Pass** is good for travel on trains, Expressway coaches, and the Irish Continental Lines ferries between France and Ireland. They cost around $\in 129$ for a 3-day pass and $\in 177$ for a 5-day pass. (Days can be non-consecutive, so long as they're all used within a month.)Youth passes (ages 16–25), family, and first-class passes are also available. The passes are valid throughout Ireland (including Northern Ireland). For further details, or for purchase, visit www.eurail.com.

This can add up to significant savings, but there are a couple bits of small print to be aware of. First, it's still advisable to make seat reservations to guarantee a space—this may cost a few extra euro each time in booking fees. Also, not everybody can buy a pass. E.U. citizens aren't allowed to buy Eurail passes.

Eurail passes can also be purchased from **Railpass** (www.railpass.com), **STA Travel** (www.sta.com; **Ø 800/781-4040** in the U.S.), and other travel agents.

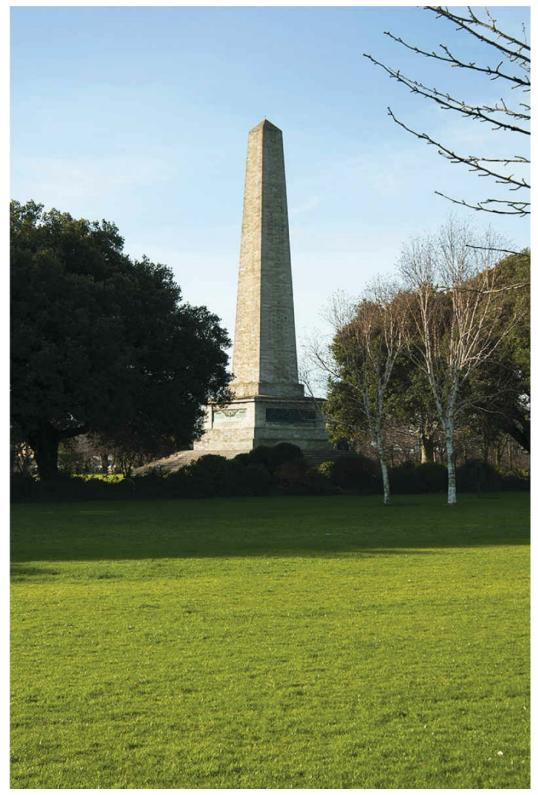
Catch a train from Dublin (Heuston Station) to Galway. Time: 2 hr. 40 min. Fares start at about €33 for adults.

DAY 4: Galway

Ireland's artsy, seductive west-coast city offers plenty of free pursuits. The **Galway Arts Centre** (p. 378) usually has good exhibitions, and you can often score cheap tickets for performances. The **Galway City Museum** (p. 378) makes for a stellar introduction to the region, with its fine collection of artifacts from the medieval period onward. **St. Nicholas' Collegiate Church** (p. 382), the oldest church in the city, contains a 12th-century crusader's tomb and other extraordinary historic pieces. Make sure you also devote some time to just wandering the streets of this eminently walkable town; its central medieval district is a tiny, tangled area featuring plenty of photogenic corners.

Catch a bus from Galway Bus Station to Cork (Parnell Place Bus Station). Time: 3½ hr. with one change or 4 hr. 20 min. direct. Fares start at about €27 for adults.

DAY 5: Galway to Cork



Wellington Monument in Phoenix Park, Dublin.

Busy, youthful Cork City doesn't have a great deal of free historic attractions, but if you're up for a large dose of culture, you'll find plenty to do without paying a cent. Start with a trip to the **Old English Market** (p. 253) for a browse and a cheap lunch. Afterward, head to the **Crawford Art Gallery** (p. 252)—it's one of the very best in Ireland and completely free. More excellent free art is to be found at the **Lewis Glucksman Gallery** (p. 255) on the campus of **University College Cork.** In the evening, check out a few of Cork's exceptional pubs. They have a reputation for being among the best in the country for traditional music (see "A Tuneful Pint" on p. 259).

Catch a train from Cork to Killarney. Most change at Mallow. Time: 1 hr. 20 min. direct, or 2 hr. with change. Fares start at about €29 for adults.

DAY 6: Cork to Killarney

It's not exactly difficult to reach **Killarney National Park** (p. 293) from Killarney Town; you just walk toward the cathedral and turn left. This 65sq. km (25-sq. mile) expanse of forest, lakes, and mountains is crisscrossed with several well-conceived nature trails, plus more challenging routes for serious hikers. Formerly the grounds of a great mansion, the **Knockreer Estate** (p. 294) still has lovely gardens and beautiful views. Free sites in Killarney Town itself include the rather grand neo-Gothic **St. Mary's Cathedral** (p. 298). For dinner, the frugal traveler will be drawn to **The Laurels** (p. 305)—a lively pub in the center of Killarney town serving steaks, seafood, and stone-baked pizzas, with live music on the side.

Catch a train Killarney to Dublin—again, nearly all change at Mallow. Time: 3½ hr. Fares start at about €44 for adults.

DAY 7: Homeward Bound . . .

Assuming your airline will let you fly out of Dublin, an early-ish train back to the capital should allow you some time to pick up any of the free sites you didn't manage to cover earlier in the tour. Otherwise, you'll have to catch a train straight on to Belfast for your flight home (about $7\frac{1}{2}$ hr. with up to three changes; fares from Killarney start at about €38 adults). And that's it! You've done a fair bit of Ireland without breaking the bank. Pick your accommodations early and wisely to save the most. Plenty of inexpensive B&Bs are listed in this book for all of these cities. Your other main expense on this itinerary will be rail fares, but you can save money on those too (see "Saving Money on Trains & Buses" on p. 69).

THE BEST OF IRELAND FOR FAMILIES

Traveling with children is always a bit of an adventure, and you'll want all the help you can get. Luckily Ireland—with its vast open countryside, farm hotels, and castles—is like a fairy-tale playground for kids. You may have trouble finding babysitters outside major towns, so just take the kids with you. Most restaurants, sights, and even pubs (during the day) welcome children. The best part of the country for those traveling with kids is arguably Cork and Kerry, where everything seems to be set up for families. Here's a sample itinerary to give you some ideas.

DAYS 1 & 2: Dublin

The sprawling greens of **Phoenix Park** (p. 119) are a great place for little ones to let off steam (it's the best place in the city for a picnic too, if the weather's good). Within the park, **Dublin Zoo** (p. 118) is designed to cater to the younger ones (you can take a train ride around the zoo, for instance). Inquisitive young minds will be inspired by the cabinets of curiosity at the **National Museum of Ireland: Natural History** (p. 105), and have their interest piqued by **Number Twenty-Nine: Georgian House Museum** (p. 116), a house which has been kept exactly as it would have been at the turn of the 19th century. The guides at another museum, the **Little Museum of Dublin** (p. 115), do a great job of putting the ordinary lives of Dubliners in the last hundred years into context for younger visitors. But if your youngsters' attention spans demand something a little flashier, try a **Viking Splash Tour** (p. 127), a historical whirl around the city in a World War II amphibious vehicle, complete with headlong splash into the River Liffey. Kids with a high threshold for the ghoulish may get a kick out of the creepy crypts at **St. Michan's Church** (p. 122); if that's too scary, even younger kids are all but guaranteed to love an evening aboard the **Dublin**

Ghost Bus (p. 127).

DAY 2: County Cork

Okay, so it's not exactly untouched by the tourism fairy, but kids find plenty to love about **Blarney Castle** (p. 248), just outside Cork City. They can kiss the famous stone if they don't mind an attendant holding them upside down. A few miles away, the **Fota Island & Wildlife Park** (p. 273) is a well-designed zoo where the docile animals (those that don't bite, kick, or stomp) roam among the visitors.

DAYS 3–5: County Kerry

Kerry is probably Ireland's most kid-friendly county, so there's enough to keep you busy here for at least a couple of days. On the Dingle Peninsula, Fungie, star of the **Dingle Dolphin Boat Tours** (p. 326) has been entertaining kids and grown-ups alike for the last 30 years. On the Iveragh Peninsula, Kenmare's **Seafari** cruises and seal-watching trips (p. 307) teach kids about conservation issues by putting them in touch with the underwater residents of Kenmare Bay. **Blueberry Hill Farm** (p. 318), in Sneem, is a working, old-fashioned farmstead where kids can help milk cows, make butter, and take part in a treasure hunt. Meanwhile, an underground tour of the atmospheric **Crag Cave** (p. 322) is a surefire winner—as is a stop for high-energy playtime at the **Crazy Cave** (p. 322) adventure playground. And don't overlook what **Killarney National Park** (p. 293) has to offer little ones—what could be better than a ride around the mountains and lakes in an old-fashioned horse-drawn "jarvey"?

DAY 6: Bunratty Folk Park

You could spend most of the day at **Bunratty Castle & Folk Park** (p. 363), an attraction that combines one of Ireland's best medieval castles with a living history museum. It's a brilliant recreation of a 19th-century village, complete with costumed actors strolling down the street, chatting to passers-by, and even working in the shops. Bunratty is also the setting for a lively (and hugely popular) **Medieval Banquet.** It's raucous, but surprisingly good fun; book an early evening sitting to suit young bedtimes.

DAY 7: Heading Home

If you have time before the drive back to the airport, head into the **Burren** (see "The Burren" in chapter 9). Young imaginations will be fired up by the dolmens and other ancient sites that litter the otherworldly landscape. It's also where you'll find the **Burren Birds of Prey Centre** at Aillwee Cave (p. 360); you can see buzzards, falcons, eagles, and owls in flight at this working aviary.



BEYOND A WEEK...

If your trip extends beyond a week, your family will find plenty of standout attractions for kids farther north.

The Atlantaquaria (p. 393), just outside Galway City, is a state-of-the-art aquarium, while pony trekking across Connemara National Park (p. 399) is a unique way to see this beautiful, windswept landscape.

In Mayo, Westport House and Pirate Adventure Park (p. 436) has all the components necessary for high-activity fun; young girls in particular will enjoy learning all about the region's real-life pirate hero, Grace O'Malley (see p. 435).

If you're going as far as Belfast, the attractions around the new Titanic Quarter hold plenty of youthful appeal. Try the hands-on science center, W5 (p. 510), and the state-of-the-art Titanic Belfast museum (p. 507).

And the Antrim Coast Drive (see p. 541) has two key highlights that children will adore: the perilous (but fun) Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge (p. 539) and the awe-inspiring alien shapes of the Giant's Causeway (p. 540).

EXPLORING ANCIENT IRELAND

Ireland has treasured and protected its ancestral past, with mysterious stone circles, cairns, and huge stone tables called *dolmens* still standing perfectly preserved in pastures and on hillsides all over the island. Some of the oldest tombs predate the Egyptian pyramids by centuries, and in many cases, while the sites are preserved, their meaning and purpose remain intriguing riddles. To delve into this misty past, you'll need to be intrepid and cover a lot of ground in the car, but it'll be worth it—exploring these rocky symbols can be the most memorable part of any trip to Ireland.

DAY 1: Knowth & the Boyne Valley

After an early breakfast, head north to the rich rolling Boyne Valley (about an hour's drive north of Dublin off the N2) to the **Brú na Bóinne Visitor Centre** (p. 191) and this extensive Neolithic burial ground. This huge necropolis holds numerous sites, with three open to visitors—**Newgrange** (p. 195), **Knowth** (p. 192), and **Dowth.** Register at the center to tour Newgrange first. A tour here, early in the day before it gets crowded, is spectacular. Next tour the burial ground at Knowth with its extensive collection of passage-grave art. In the afternoon, head down the N3 to the **Hill of Tara** (p. 191). Here mounds and passage graves date from the Bronze Age.

DAY 2: Céide Fields

It will take a couple of hours to drive from Dublin to the remote location in north County Mayo, but your efforts will be rewarded. This extraordinary ancient site (p. 437) holds the stony remains of an entire prehistoric farming village on top of a cliff, with a bonus of breathtaking views of the sea and surrounding countryside. Spend the day exploring the 5,000-year-old site, and lunch in the excellent visitor center.

DAY 3: County Sligo

In the morning, drive east to County Sligo. On the N4, south of Sligo Town, visit the **Carrowkeel Passage Tomb Cemetery** (p. 452) perched on a hilltop overlooking Lough Arrow. It has wide, sweeping views, and the 14 cairns and dolmens are often very quiet early in the day—with luck you might have them all to yourself. Then head on to Sligo Town and follow signs to **Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery** (p. 452). This extraordinary site has 60 stone circles, passage tombs, and dolmens scattered across acres of green pastures. They are believed to predate Newgrange by nearly a millennium. In the afternoon, if you're feeling energetic, climb to the hilltop cairn of **Knocknarea** (p. 455) located nearby—it's believed to be the grave of folklore fairy Queen Maeve.



DAY 4: Inishmurray Island

After a relaxing morning, travel by boat to the island of **Inishmurray** (see p. 454) off the coast of Sligo. There you can spend the day wandering the impressively complete remains of the early monastic settlement founded in the 6th century. You can still make out its ancient chapels, beehive cells, and altars. If the weather is fine, pack a picnic lunch and eat on the sunny beach. Return to Sligo for the night.

DAY 5: The Burren

Today begins with another long drive, but you'll pass through some of the most beautiful parts of Galway and Mayo along the way. **The Burren**, in County Clare, is one of the richest areas of the country for ancient remains from the Neolithic period through medieval times. There are around 120 dolmens and wedge tombs—including the impressive **Poulnabrone Dolmen** (p. 362)—and as many as 500 ring forts. For more on this extraordinary region see "The Burren" in chapter 9.



One of many ancient tombs at Carrowmore, a Megalithic burial ground in County Sligo.

DAY 6: Skellig Michael

Right after breakfast, head south to County Kerry, where this starkly beautiful island sits 13km (8 miles) off the Iveragh Peninsula, a mute memorial to the hardy souls who once eked out a living amid its formidable cliffs (see "The Ring of Kerry" in chapter 8). Deeply observant early Christian monks punished their bodies by living here in miserable conditions and spent their days carving 600 steps into the hard stone, to enable them to walk up to their beehive huts and icy chapels. Today it is an unforgettable landscape, and the ruins of their homes are profoundly moving. A trip out here by boat and an afternoon's exploration will take up much of the day. Once you return to the mainland, reward yourself with a relaxing evening in Kenmare.

DAY 7: Glendalough

Drive east today to County Wicklow, where the evocative ruins of the monastery at **Glendalough** (p. 181) are sprawled around two peaceful lakes nestled on the side of a mountain. Get a map from the visitor center before beginning your exploration of the round towers, chapels, and huts dotted around the wooded site. Don't miss the ancient chapel known as **St. Kevin's Kitchen.** If the weather is warm, bring your lunch and picnic by the lake. You can easily spend a day here.

IRELAND OFF THE BEATEN PATH

We start this tour in Belfast, a city in the midst of an immense transformation since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement that finally established a detente in Northern Ireland. Tourism has steadily increased in this region over the last decade, but the crowds still have yet to arrive en masse. If the best sites of the Antrim Coast were in County Cork or Kerry, they'd be overrun with tourists; as it is, one can still visit a spectacular setting such as the Giant's Causeway and find oneself alone with nature. This tour then heads west to take a couple of Sligo's prehistoric sites and continues south for a visit to Achill Island, a peaceful retreat off the coast of County Mayo.

DAYS 1 & 2: Belfast

Northern Ireland's capital—and the island of Ireland's second largest city—is a historic, vibrant town. Start with a visit to the **Ulster Museum** (p. 509) and experience some of the city's more recent past firsthand with a **Black Taxi Tour** (p. 503). The new museums in the Titanic Quarter, such as the immense **Titanic Belfast** (p. 507), provide a more high-tech dose of history; alternatively, you could immerse yourself in the city's present by exploring its busy shopping districts. The **Belfast Botanic Gardens & Palm House** (p. 499) and **Queen's University** (p. 506) are also worth a look. Round off the day with a pint at one of Belfast's extraordinarily pretty pubs like the **Crown Liquor Saloon** (p. 524) and a meal at one of the small but growing number of world-class restaurants.

DAY 3: County Antrim

One of the North's loveliest counties, Antrim is home to two gorgeous parks: the **Castlewellan Forest Park** (p. 531) with formal gardens and gorgeous woodland walks, and the **Silent Valley Mountain Park** (p. 532) with beautiful walks and even more incredible views. Alternatively, the Antrim Coast road is one of Ireland's great coastal drives—and one of the least spoiled. Few tourists ever venture this far north; those who do will reap spectacular rewards. Start in **Carrickfergus**, with a brief stop to look around its medieval castle (p. 510), before heading north along the coast road. For the best views take the **Torr Head Scenic Road** (p. 542) located just after the village of **Cushendun** (p. 540). It's an alternative, signposted road running parallel to the main route, ideal for those with a good head for heights. From up here on a clear day, you can see all the way to the Mull of Kintyre in Scotland. The Antrim Coast's most remarkable attraction is the **Giant's Causeway** (p. 540), an uncanny natural rock formation comprised of thousands of tightly packed basalt columns. You could do the drive in about 2 hours, but you'll want to allow considerably longer than that to give yourself time to stop along the way. There are places along the coast to spend the night, or you could go straight on into **Derry** (p. 547). It's about another hour on from the Giant's Causeway.

DAY 4: Derry to Sligo

Straddling the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic, this vibrant town for years was synonymous with political strife. Though it's peaceful these days, it's still a divided place—the residents can't even agree on what to call it. Road signs from the Republic point to Derry; those in the North point to Londonderry. How can a place like that not be full of character and history? Check out the award-winning **Tower Museum** (p. 553) and the Gothic, 17th-century **Cathedral of St. Columb** (p. 532) before recharging for a long drive to County Sligo in the afternoon.

DAY 5: County Sligo

Nestled within the gentle, verdant hills of this underrated county are some dramatic archaeological sites. Within a short drive from Sligo Town are two of the most incredible: **Carrowkeel Passage Tomb Cemetery** (p. 452), packed with 14 cairns, dolmens, and stone circles, and the impossibly ancient **Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery** (p. 452). Here's a thought to ponder while clambering around the latter: The innocuously named tomb 52A is thought to be 7,400 years old, making it the earliest known piece of freestanding stone architecture in the world.

DAY 6: Sligo to Achill Island

Just off the coast of County Mayo, this is a wild and beautiful place of unspoiled beaches and spectacular scenery. But you'll also find a handful of excellent little hotels and B&Bs, mostly in the vicinity of **Keel**, the island's most attractive village. This is also major outdoor sports territory, as the constant wind off the Atlantic Ocean is ideal for windsurfing, hang gliding, and any other sport that depends on a breeze. One of the best (and least known) discoveries on Achill Island is a deserted village on the slopes of **Mount Slievemore** (p. 441). Not too many people venture up there, making it an even more extraordinary and moving place to visit.



DAY 7: Achill Island to Shannon

It's a long drive to whichever airport you're flying home from, but a flight out of Shannon will give you the most spectacular route. If you can extend your trip a little, a ferry ride over to Mayo's **Clare Island** (p. 434) is a lovely way to spend a day. Even more peaceful and isolated than its near neighbor, Achill, Clare's permanent population amounts to just 150 people, and you can go a long way without bumping into any of them.

THE BEST OF IRELAND FOR GOLFERS

Golf is the single biggest sporting attraction in Ireland, with nearly a quarter of a million visitors traveling here specifically to play. The Irish landscape and climate, like those of Scotland, seem almost custom-designed for scenic links, fair fairways, green greens, and dramatic traps—and there is never a shortage of 19th holes. In short, Ireland is a place of golfing pilgrimage.

Every region of the country boasts a few fine 18-hole courses, so no matter where you go, you can easily slip in a rewarding game. (See listings in each chapter.) Greens fees vary widely, but are often surprisingly modest for non-members, especially on weekdays and at off-peak hours.

But if golf is the focus of your vacation, there are a few world-class courses that really shouldn't be missed. The following itinerary is in a way a dream list—you may need to swap out one of these days to do other kinds of sight-seeing in these regions. And if you do decide to try to cram in all these elite courses, expect to shell out some hefty greens fees.

Because so many of Ireland's top courses are on the west coast, we begin this itinerary with a flight into Shannon Airport (see chapter 9).

DAYS 1 & 2: County Clare

Depending upon how early your flight gets in—and how well you can play while jet-lagged—you may even be able to get in a round on **DAY 1**, if you've booked your tee times in advance at either **Lahinch Golf Club** (p. 368) on the coast in Lahinch, just south of the Cliffs of Moher, or what is now called the **Trump International Golf Links** (p. 367) in Doonbeg, also on the coast but further south. Both are links courses—or rather, all three are, since Lahinch has two courses, the Old Course and the Castle Course. (The Old Course is the longer and more famous.) The Trump course in Doonbeg, which was designed by Greg Norman, also has a luxury hotel, which is as pricey as you'd expect; you may want to choose a less glitzy hotel as your base, especially if you're playing Lahinch as well (or instead). Whichever course you don't play on **DAY 1**, you can play on **DAY 2**.

DAY 3: County Kerry

Heading south to County Kerry (*Tip:* Take the coastal route N67, which incorporates a ferry ride from Killimer to Tarbert), you have three choices just northwest of the town of Tralee. The **Ballybunion Golf Club** (p. 324) in Ballybunion offers two equally esteemed 18-hole clifftop links courses above the Shannon estuary: the Old Course, and the Cashen Course, which was designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr. If you can't get a tee time at Ballybunion, you can still have a memorable round at the **Tralee Golf Club** (p. 324) in Ardfert, which was designed by Arnold Palmer on a dramatic site overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. You may even have time left for a scenic drive around the Dingle Peninsula.

DAY 4: County Cork

It's about a 2-hour drive from Tralee down to County Cork and the spectacular **Old Head Golf Links** (p. 266), set on a peninsula just south of the charming town of Kinsale. Named one of *Golf Magazine*'s "Top 100 Courses in the World," it charges stiff greens fees—but then, how often do you get to play on a pristine course surrounded by ocean on three sides? Treat yourself to a good dinner that night in Kinsale, one of Ireland's most foodie-friendly towns.



DAYS 5 & 6: Dublin

Spend the morning driving cross-country to the Irish capital (if possible, stopping along the way to see the stunning medieval ruins of the Rock of Cashel, p. 352, in County Tipperary). One of the world's great golfing cities, Dublin is home to a quarter of Ireland's courses, all within an hour's drive of the city center. Hopefully you've already booked afternoon tee times at either the **Portmarnock Golf Club** (p. 130), set on a spit of land in Portmarnock, or the **Royal Dublin Golf Club** (p. 131) on Bull Island in Dublin Bay, near Dollymount. Both are over a century old and have

hosted the Irish Open multiple times. Whichever course you play today, you can play the other tomorrow. Both are in the northern suburbs, so do yourself a favor and book a hotel up there, thus avoiding the hassle of getting into and out of the city, taking public transport into the downtown area for sightseeing, dining, or nightlife.

DAY 7: Heading home

It'll take less than 3 hours to cross the island back to Shannon Airport. So, if you still haven't had your fill of golf, that will leave you time for whichever County Clare course you still want to try out. (See DAYS 1 & 2.) Book a hotel near the airport so you can get a good night's sleep before flying home.

BEYOND A WEEK...

If you can stretch your vacation by another day or two, you'll be well rewarded if you head up into the less-travelled regions of Northwest Ireland. Fewer golfers make it up here, and the greens fees are therefore much less stratospheric. More importantly, on the drive up you'll see some incredibly beautiful countryside that's never mobbed with tourists. **County Sligo Golf Club** (p. 458), just under 3 hours' drive from Dublin, is a wind-whipped links course edged with wild natural terrain —and it has sweeping views of Sligo Bay and of Ben Bulben mountain, immortalized in the poetry of W. B. Yeats. There are two outstanding seaside courses at the **Rosapenna Golf Club** (p. 482), way up in the Atlantic Highlands of Donegal, a 4-hour drive from Dublin. Its newer Sandy Hill course was named the British Isles's top course in 2008 by *Golf Magazine*. Rosapenna has its own hotel, which may simplify your stay. Sligo is about 3 hours north of Shannon Airport, while the Donegal course is a good 5-hour drive back to Shannon—but the route leads through some stunning countryside in County Mayo (chapter 12) and County Galway (chapter 10).



An Lár City Centre

Via Airport

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Dublin.

F or such an ancient town, Dublin is doing a pretty good job of not showing its age. Despite its stony gray appearance, the Irish capital is actually one of Europe's most youthful cities. Around half of its residents are under the age of 28—and almost a full third of Ireland's entire population lives in the greater Dublin area. Dublin's oldest landmarks are still among its most interesting, but they're enlivened now by a wealth of modern attractions: Edgy bars and cafes buzz alongside pubs that have stood for centuries, while chic boutiques are snuggled into the medieval precincts of Old City. It's yours to discover afresh—and even if you think you know what to expect, you're almost certain to be surprised by what you find.

ESSENTIALS

Arriving

BY PLANE Aer Lingus (www.aerlingus.com; © 081/836-5000), Ireland's national airline, operates regular, direct scheduled flights between Dublin International Airport and numerous cities worldwide. From the U.S., direct routes are from Boston, Chicago (O'Hare), New York (JFK), Orlando, and San Francisco. American Airlines (www.aa.com; © 1800/433-7300), Delta (www.delta.com; © 800/241-4141) and United (www.united.com; © 1800/864-8331) all fly direct to Dublin from at least one of those same cities. From Canada, direct flights are operated by Air Canada (www.aircanada.com; © 1888/247-2262). From Australia, Quantas (www.qantas.com; © 13-13-13 from within Australia) flies to Dublin with a change in London or Dubai. Air New

Zealand (www.airnewzealand.co.nz; © 080/0737-000) flies to Dublin, changing in San Francisco or Los Angeles and then London. Most of the major European airlines have direct flights to Dublin.

Dublin International Airport (www.dublinairport.com; © 01/814-1111) is 11km (6³/₄ miles) north of the city center. A travel information desk in the arrivals concourse provides information on public bus and rail services throughout the country.

An excellent airport-to-city shuttle bus service called **AirCoach** operates 24 hours a day, making runs at 15-minute intervals. Its buses go direct from the airport to Dublin's city center and south side. Not all the major stops are covered on every service, so do check that you've got the right one before you board. City center fares are $\notin 6-\notin 7$ one-way, depending on where you are going; and to Ballsbridge, Dún Laoghaire or Dalkey, around $\notin 10$. Children aged 5 to 12 are $\notin 2-\notin 5.50$; children 13 and over are counted as adults. You buy your ticket from the driver. Although AirCoach is slightly more expensive than the Dublin Bus (see below), it makes fewer stops, so it is faster (the journey to the city center takes about 45 min.), and it brings you into the hotel districts. To confirm AirCoach departures and arrivals, check online at www.aircoach.ie or call @ 01/844-7118.

If you need to connect with the Irish bus or rail service, Dublin Bus's route 747, otherwise known as the Airlink (www.dublinbus.ie; © 01/844-4265), provides express coach services from the airport into central Dublin and beyond. Buses go to the city's central bus station, **Busáras**, on Store Street and on to **Connolly** and **Heuston** railway stations. Service runs daily from 5am until 11:30pm (Sun 7am–11:20pm), with departures every 15 to 20 minutes. One-way fare is €7 for adults and €3.50 for

children 11 and under.

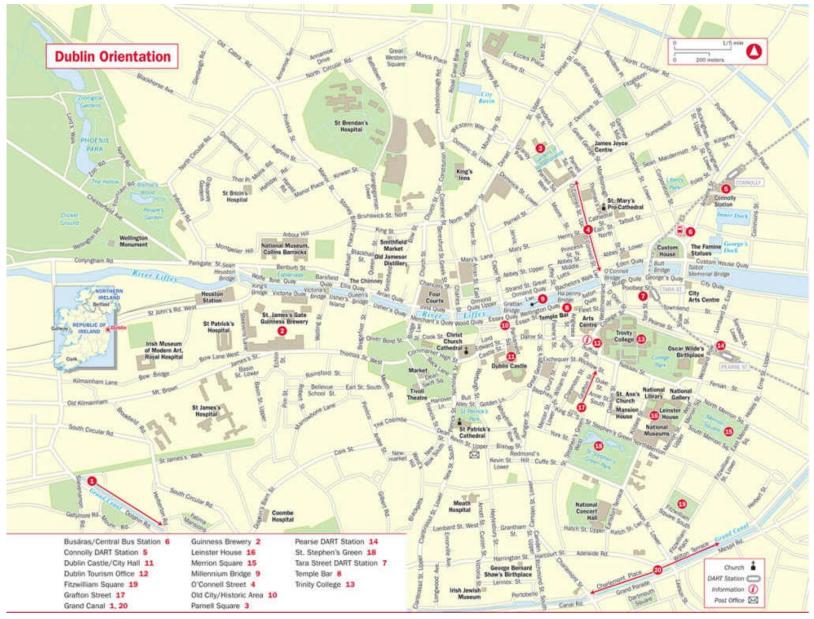
Finally, **Dublin Bus** (www.dublinbus.ie; \bigcirc 01/873-4222) has regular daily connections between the airport and the city center from 6am to 11:30pm. The one-way trip takes about 30 minutes, with fares starting at around €3.30 adults, €3.30 children. Consult the travel information desk in the arrivals concourse to figure out which bus takes you closest to your hotel.

For speed and ease—especially if you have a lot of luggage—a **taxi** is the best way to get directly to your hotel or guesthouse. Depending on your destination, fares average between $\in 20$ and $\in 35$, plus $\in 1$ for each additional passenger (but they shouldn't charge you extra for luggage). A tip of a couple of euro is standard. Taxis are lined up at a first-come, first-served taxi stand outside the arrivals terminal.

Major international and local car-rental companies operate desks at Dublin Airport.

BY FERRY Passenger and car ferries from Britain arrive at the Dublin Ferryport, on the eastern end of the North Docks. (In 2015 the regular ferry service between Dún Laoghaire and Holyhead in the U.K. ended after 204 years, so this is now the only option). Contact Irish Ferries (www.irishferries.ie; © 0818/300-400); P&O Irish Sea (www.poirishsea.com; © 0871/66-6464 from the U.K.) for bookings and information; or Stena Line (www.stenaline.com; © 01/204-7777). Buses and taxis service both ports.

BY TRAIN Called Iarnród Éireann in Gaelic, Irish Rail (www.irishrail.ie; © 1890/77-88-99 for timetables, © 1850/366-222 to prebook tickets) operates daily train service to Dublin from Belfast, Northern Ireland, and all major cities in the Irish Republic, including Cork, Galway, Limerick, Killarney, Sligo, Wexford, and Waterford. Trains from the south, west, and southwest arrive at Heuston Station, Kingsbridge, off St. John's Road; from the north and northwest at Connolly Station, Amiens Street; and from the southeast at Pearse Station, Westland Row, Tara Street.



BY BUS Bus Éireann (www.buseireann.ie; © 01/836-6111) operates daily express coach and local bus service from all major cities and towns in Ireland into Dublin's central bus station, Busáras, Store Street.

BY CAR If you are arriving by car from other parts of Ireland or on a car ferry from Britain, all main roads lead into the heart of Dublin and are well signposted to **An Lar** (City Centre). To bypass the city center, the East Link toll bridge (\in 2) and West Link are signposted, and M50 circuits the city on three sides. From Wexford Town, Galway, or Belfast the drive takes around 2 hours; from Cork, $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

Visitor Information

Dublin Tourism operates several walk-in visitor centers in greater Dublin that are open every day except Christmas. The principal center is on Suffolk Street, Dublin 2, open from Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5:30pm, Sunday and Bank Holidays 10:30am to 3pm. The Suffolk Street office has a currency exchange counter, a car-rental counter, an accommodation reservations service, bus and rail information desks, a gift shop, and a cafe. For accommodation reservations throughout Ireland by credit card (including some good last-minute deals on Dublin hotels), contact Dublin Tourism at www.visitdublin.com or © 1890/324-583. A tourism center is also in the arrivals concourse of both terminals at Dublin Airport and the ferry terminal at Dún Laoghaire Harbor.

At any of these centers you can pick up the free *Totally Dublin*, a monthly entertainment guide. Alternatively, the website **In Dublin** (www.indublin.ie) has a comprehensive what's-on section.

City Layout

Dublin is divided down the middle by the curves of the River Liffey, which empties into the sea at the city's farthest edge. To the north and south, canals encircle the city center: The Royal Canal arcs across the north and the Grand Canal through the south. Traditionally, the area south of the river has been Dublin's buzzing, prosperous hub. It still holds most of the best hotels, restaurants, shops, and sights, but the Northside is on the upswing, and hip new bars and hotels give it a trendy edge. Dublin is compact and easily walked in an hour. In fact, a 45-minute walk from peaceful St. Stephen's Green, up bustling Grafton Street, and across the Liffey to the top of O'Connell Street offers a good overview of the city's prosperous present and troubled past.

MAIN STREETS & SQUARES In the town center just south of the river, the main east-west artery is **Dame Street**, which changes its name to College Green, Westmoreland Street, and Lord Edward Street at various points as it connects **Trinity College** with **Dublin Castle** and **Christ Church Cathedral.** On one side of Dame Street are the winding medieval lanes of **Temple Bar**, Dublin's party central thanks to plenty of pubs. On the other side of Dame Street are tributary streets lined with shops and cafes. Where Dame Street becomes College Green, the sturdy gray stone walls of Trinity College make an excellent landmark to get your bearings. At the southwest corner of the campus, you'll find the top of **Grafton Street**, a lively pedestrianized shopping lane crowded with tourists, musicians, and artists, which leads to the bucolic park of **St. Stephen's Green**. From there, heading back up via **Kildare Street** will take you past **Leinster House**, where the Irish Parliament meets, and a turn to the right brings you to **Merrion Square**, another of Dublin's extraordinarily well-preserved Georgian squares.



Grafton Street is bustling with shoppers, buskers, and curious passersby.

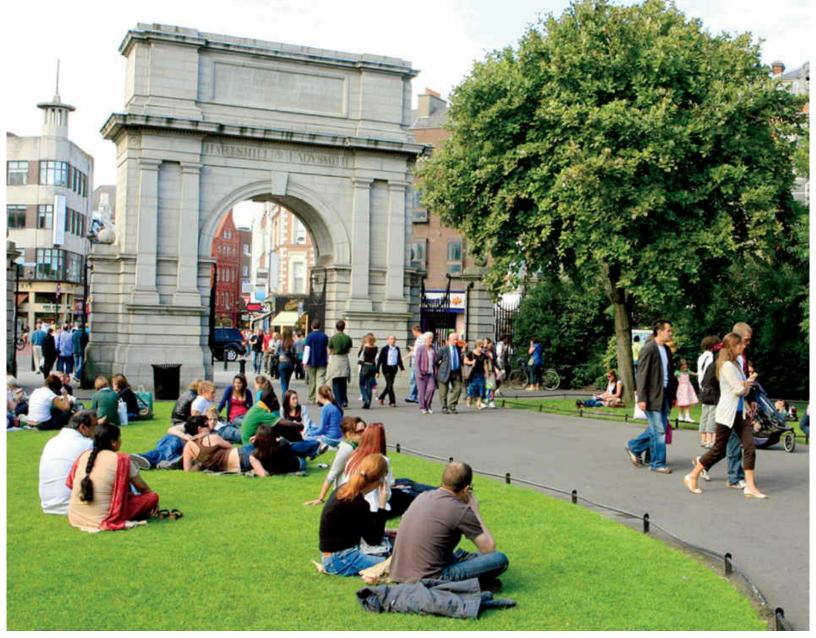
To get to the Northside, most visitors choose to walk across the photogenic arch of the **Ha'penny Bridge** (see p. 112), while locals take the less attractive **O'Connell Bridge** nearby. You can be different and cross via the Ha'penny's sleekly modern neighbor, the **Millennium Bridge**, which is beautifully illuminated after dark. The O'Connell Bridge leads directly onto **O'Connell Street**, a wide, statue-lined boulevard that is the north's main thoroughfare. O'Connell Street runs north to **Parnell Square**, which holds a couple of marvelous museums and marks the top edge of central Dublin. From the bottom to the top, O'Connell Street is lined with statues, starting with an absurdly ornate representation of its namesake politician Daniel O'Connell surrounded by angels (still pocked with bullet holes left from the Easter Rising). The street running along the Liffey's embankment is called the **North Quays** by everyone, though its name changes on virtually every block, reflecting the long-gone docks that once lined it.

In the older section of the city, **High Street** is the gateway to medieval and Viking Dublin, from the city's two medieval cathedrals to the old city walls and nearby Dublin Castle.

Dublin Neighborhoods in Brief

TRINITY COLLEGE AREA On the south side of the River Liffey, Trinity College stands at virtually the dead center of the city. Its shady quadrangles and atmospheric stone buildings are surrounded by bookstores, shops, and noisy traffic.

TEMPLE BAR There are really two Temple Bars, depending on when you visit. During the day, Temple Bar is an artsy, cultured district full of trendy shops and modern art galleries. But such refinement gives way to an altogether more raucous atmosphere at night. With its myriad selection of pubs, bars, and hip clubs, this is definitely where it's at in Dublin after dark.



St. Stephen's Green Park is serene despite the crowds passing through en route to shops and restaurants.

Murky Origins

For most visitors, the very word "Dublin" may bring to mind a heady, romantic mix of history and good times to come, but it actually has a more prosaic origin. The name comes from the ancient Celtic words *dubh linn*, meaning "the black pool." Specifically, it refers to a natural inlet where the River Liffey met the River Poddle, and the waters were dark and murky. Long since buried, the inlet is thought to be somewhere around Dublin Castle.

An allusion to these watery origins still survives in the city's Gaelic name, *Baile Átha Cliath*, which means "the town of the hurdled ford"—a ford being a point where a stream or river crosses a road. When fords were "hurdled" in medieval times, it meant that they were covered at low tide with woven sheets of willow, making them easier to cross.

OLD CITY Dating from Viking and medieval times, the cobblestone enclave of the historic Old City includes Dublin Castle, the remnants of the city's original walls, and Christ Church and St. Patrick's cathedrals.

LIBERTIES Adjacent to Old City, the Liberties district takes its name from the fact that it was once just outside the city walls, and, therefore, exempt from Dublin's jurisdiction. Although it prospered in its early days, Liberties fell on hard times in the 17th and 18th centuries and has only felt the touch of urban renewal in the last decade or so. Its main claim to fame is the Guinness Brewery.

ST. STEPHEN'S GREEN/GRAFTON STREET AREA The biggest tourist draw in town, this district is home to Dublin's finest hotels, restaurants, and shops. The neighborhood is filled with impressive Georgian architecture and is primarily a business and shopping zone.



Monument of Jim Larkin, in Dublin's O'Connell Street.

FITZWILLIAM & MERRION SQUARES Near Trinity College and St. Stephen's Green, these two leafy squares are surrounded by grand Georgian town houses. Some of Dublin's most famous citizens once lived here; today many of the houses are offices for doctors, lawyers, and government agencies.



St. Stephen's Green is a city park in Dublin which opened to the public in 1880.

O'CONNELL STREET (NORTH OF THE LIFFEY) The epicenter of Dublin's stormy political struggles, the north was once a fashionable area, but it lost much of its charm as it declined in the 20th century. It has experienced something of a resurgence in recent years, and now is home to some high-profile hotels, shops, and restaurants. But it still feels a little more down-at-heel than the Southside. With four theaters in walking distance of O'Connell Street, this is also Dublin's theater district.

NORTH QUAYS (THE LIFFEY RIVERBANK) Once the center of Dublin's shipping industry, this Northside area is now a trendy address for hotels, bars, and clubs. The quays are actually a series of streets named after the wharves that once stood at water's edge. The quays start near the mouth of the Liffey and end at green Phoenix Park.

BALLSBRIDGE/EMBASSY ROW Immediately south of the Grand Canal, this upscale suburb is just barely within walking distance of the city center. Primarily a prestigious residential area, it is also home to hotels, restaurants, and embassies.

Getting Around

If your stay in Dublin is short, geography is on your side. The vast majority of the capital's best sites are concentrated in the city center, an area of no more than a few square kilometers. This leads to your first, most important (and quite frankly, easiest) decision: If you have a car, leave it behind at your hotel (or as close as you can get—parking is notoriously difficult). Dublin's streets are crowded and confusing, with baffling one-way streets, bad signage, and terrible traffic.

However, cars aside, Dublin is a very easy and convenient city to get around. Public transportation is good and getting better, taxis are plentiful and reasonably priced, and your own two feet can easily carry you from one end of town to the other. In fact, with its perennial traffic and parking problems, it's a city where the foot is mightier than the wheel.

BY BUS After walking, buses are the most convenient and practical way to get between the city center sights. Dublin Bus operates a fleet of double-deckers, single-deckers, and minibuses (the latter charmingly called "imps"). Most originate on or near O'Connell Street, Abbey Street, and Eden Quay on the Northside, and at Aston Quay, College Street, and Fleet Street on the south side. Look for bus stop markers resembling big blue or green lollipops—they're every few blocks on main thoroughfares. To tell where the bus is going, look at the destination street and bus number above its front window; those heading for the city center indicate that with an odd mix of Latin and Gaelic: via an lar.

Bus service runs daily throughout the city, starting at 6am (10am on Sun), with the last bus at about 11:30pm. On Friday and Saturday nights, **Nitelink** service runs from the city center to the suburbs from midnight to 4am. Buses operate every 30 minutes for most runs; schedules are posted on revolving notice boards at bus stops.

Inner-city fares are based on distances traveled. Daytime journeys that take place entirely within the designated "City Centre Zone" cost $\notin 0.70$. This stretches from Parnell Square in the north, to Connolly Station and Merrion Square in the east, St. Stephen's Green in the south, and Ormond Quay in the west. Longer journeys cost anything from $\notin 1.65$ all the way up to around $\notin 4.50$ if you're going as far as the outer suburbs.

You pay on board the bus, using an automatic fare machine located in front of the driver. **No Dublin bus accepts notes or gives change.** If you don't have the exact money in coins, the driver will issue you with a "change receipt." You must then take this to the Dublin Bus headquarters on O'Connell Street to collect your change (a process not designed to encourage refunds). The sole exception to this rule is route 747 ("Airlink"), which runs between the airport and the city center. It accepts notes and gives change normally.

leap CARDS

If you're likely to use public transport a lot while in Dublin (which we highly recommend), do as the locals do: Get a Leap Card, a pre-paid card for reduced-cost travel on all Dublin buses (including Airlink and Nightlink), DART, Luas, and commuter trains. You can buy them at around 400 shops in and around the city—look for the distinctive green logo depicting a somewhat over-excited frog in mid-leap. (In Dublin Airport, you can pick one up at the small **Easons, Kiosk,** and **Spa** shops.) Ticket machines in some city center DART and railway stations also dispense Leap Cards, or you can order them online at www.leapcard.ie. They're free, but you have to pay a refundable deposit of \in 5 adults, \in 3 children, and buy at least \in 5 worth of credit up-front.

learning the lingo: "BANK HOLIDAYS"

No, they don't give banks extra vacation time in Ireland. North Americans may be baffled by this phrase, which you'll see a lot on lists of opening times. It simply means a public holiday, often on a Monday—something like a "three-day weekend." Many shops are either closed or run on reduced hours on Bank Holidays.

There are currently nine regular Bank Holidays in Ireland: New Year's Day (January 1st); St. Patrick's Day (March 17th); Easter Monday; the first Mondays in every month from May to August, except July; the final Monday in October; Christmas Day (December 25th) and St. Stephen's Day (December 26th).

BY DART An acronym for Dublin Area Rapid Transit, the electric DART trains travel above ground, linking the city center stations at **Connolly Station**, **Tara Street**, and **Pearse Street** with suburbs and seaside communities as far as Malahide to the north and Greystones to the south. Service operates

roughly every 10 to 20 minutes Monday to Saturday from around 6am to midnight and Sunday from 9:30am to 11pm. For further information, contact DART, Dublin Pearse Station (www.dart.ie; © 1850/366-222).

BYTRAM The sleek, modern (and wheelchair accessible) light rail tram system known as **Luas** runs from around 5:30am to 12:30am Monday to Friday, 6:30am to 12:30am Saturday, and 7am to 11:30pm on Sunday. (The last trams to certain stations are earlier—be sure to check the timetable.) There are two lines, Red and Green: The Green Line links St. Stephen's Green with Sandyford in the south; the Red Line runs between the Point, near the 3Arena in Dublin Docklands, and Connolly Railway Station, down to the southwestern suburbs of Saggart and Tallaght. For further information, contact Luas (www.luas.ie; © 1850/300-604).

ON FOOT Marvelously compact, Dublin is ideal for walking. Just remember to look right and then left (and in the direction opposite your instincts if you're from North America) before crossing the street. Pedestrians have the right of way at specially marked, zebra-striped crossings (these intersections usually have two flashing lights).

BY TAXI It's very difficult to hail a taxi on the street; instead, they line up at taxi stands (called "ranks") outside major hotels, at bus and train stations, and on prime thoroughfares such as Upper O'Connell Street, College Green, and the north side of St. Stephen's Green. You can also phone for a taxi; see the numbers listed in the "Fast Facts" section below.

[FastFACTS] DUBLIN

ATMs/Banks Nearly all banks are open Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm (to 5pm Thurs). Convenient locations include the **Bank of Ireland,** at 2 College Green, Dublin 2, 88 Camden St. Lower, Dublin 1, and at Trinity College; and the **Allied Irish Bank (AIB),** at 100 Grafton St., Dublin 2, and 37 O'Connell St., Dublin 1.

Currency Exchange Currency-exchange services, signposted as **Bureau de Change**, are in most Dublin banks and at many branches of the Irish post office system, known as **An Post**. A bureau de change operates daily during flight arrival and departure times at Dublin Airport. Some hotels and travel agencies offer bureau de change services. *Tip*: The best rate of exchange is almost always when you use your bank card at an ATM.

Dentists For dental emergencies, your hotel will usually contact a dentist for you; otherwise, try Smiles Dental, 28 O'Connell St. (© 1850/323-323) or Molesworth Dental Surgery, 2 Molesworth Place (© 01/661-5544).

Doctors & Hospitals For emergencies, dial © 999. If you need a doctor, your hotel should be able to contact one for you. Otherwise you could contact Dame Street Medical Center, 16 Dame St. (© 01/679-0754), or the Suffolk Street Surgery, 107 Grafton St. (© 01/679-8181).

Emergencies For police, fire, or other emergencies, dial @ 999.

Luggage Storage If you arrive at your hotel too early to check in, or if check-out is in the morning and your flight isn't until the evening, many hotels will look after your baggage. Alternatively, the **tourism office** (\bigcirc 01/410-0700) at 37 College Green, opposite Trinity College, can store bags securely for \in 5 per 24 hours. There's also a "Left Luggage" facility at the Terminal 1 parking lot at Dublin Airport.

Mail & Postage General Post Office, O'Connell St. (\bigcirc 01/705-8833) is open Monday through Saturday, 8:30am–6pm. Postage for a letter or postcard costs $\in 0.68$ within Ireland and Northern Ireland, $\in 1$ to the rest of the world.

Newspapers & Magazines Look for *Totally Dublin* (www.totallydublin.ie), a free monthly entertainment guide, at tourism offices. One of the best online magazines is *In Dublin* (www.indublin.ie), which has comprehensive event listings. The main Irish daily broadsheet newspapers are the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent*. Tabloid papers include the *Irish Sun*, the *Irish Daily Mirror* and the *Herald*.

Pharmacies Dublin does not have 24-hr. pharmacies. City Pharmacy, 14 Dame St. (© 01/670-4523) stays open until 9pm weekdays, 7pm Sat; Boots the Chemist, 20 Henry St. (© 01/873-0209) stays open until 7pm Monday to Wednesday and Saturday,

9pm Thursday, 8pm Friday, and 6pm Sunday. There are also branches of Boots at 12 Grafton St. (© 01/677-3000) and in the St Stephen's Green Centre (© 01/478-4368), but not all branches keep the same hours.

Taxis Taxi ranks are outside major hotels, at bus and train stations, and on Upper O'Connell Street, College Green, and the north side of St. Stephen's Green. To call a cab try NRC Cabs (© 01/677-2222), Trinity (© 01/708-2222), or VIP/ACE Taxis (© 01/478-3333).

EXPLORING DUBLIN

Wandering Dublin—just walking down its Georgian streets with a map only in case you get *really* lost—is one of the great pleasures of a visit here. The city center, where the vast majority of the sights are located, is small enough that there's almost no way you can go wrong. One minute, you're walking along a quiet leafy street and suddenly the Irish Parliament appears before you. A few minutes later, it's gorgeous Merrion Square. Then, you're facing the granite buildings of Trinity College—and on and on. So pack a sturdy pair of shoes, have your umbrella at the ready, and head out to discover how rewarding this wonderful old town can be.

Top Attractions

Book of Kells and Old Library ** LIBRARY It's definitely one of Ireland's national treasures, this magnificent hand-drawn manuscript of the four gospels, dating to the year 800, with elaborate calligraphy and colorful illumination drawn by Irish monks. Unfortunately, you'll find it hard to see past the hordes of onlookers into the dim glass box where it is kept, and you're handsomely charged for the privilege. (Another way to secure a more comfortable viewing experience is by taking a Trinity Tour—see p. 106.) However, the Library's handsome **Long Room** is arguably the greater attraction here. The grand, chained library holds many rare works on Irish history and presents frequently changing displays of classic works. The Book of Kells is located in the Old Library building, on the south side of Library Square, inside the main campus.

The Library Building, Trinity College, College Green, Dublin 2. www.tcd.ie/Library/bookofkells. \bigcirc 01/896-2320. Admission \in 10; \in 12 including campus tour. May–Sept Mon–Sat 9:30am–5pm; Sun 9:30am–4:30pm; Oct–Apr Mon–Sat 9:30am–5pm; Sun noon–4:30pm. Open with reduced hours on most Bank Holidays. DART: Pearse St., Connolly St. Luas: Lower Abbey St., St. Stephen's Green. Bus: College Green entrance: 7N, 15N, 15X, 44N, 46N, 48N, 49N, 51D, 51X, 54N, 56A, 70B, 70X, 77A, 77N, 92. Nassau St. entrance (for Old Library/Book of Kells): 25X, 32X, 33X, 41X, 51D, 51X, 58X, 67X, 84X, 92.



Trinity College in Dublin, home of the Book of Kells.

LOCAL hero: SIR ALFRED CHESTER BEATTY

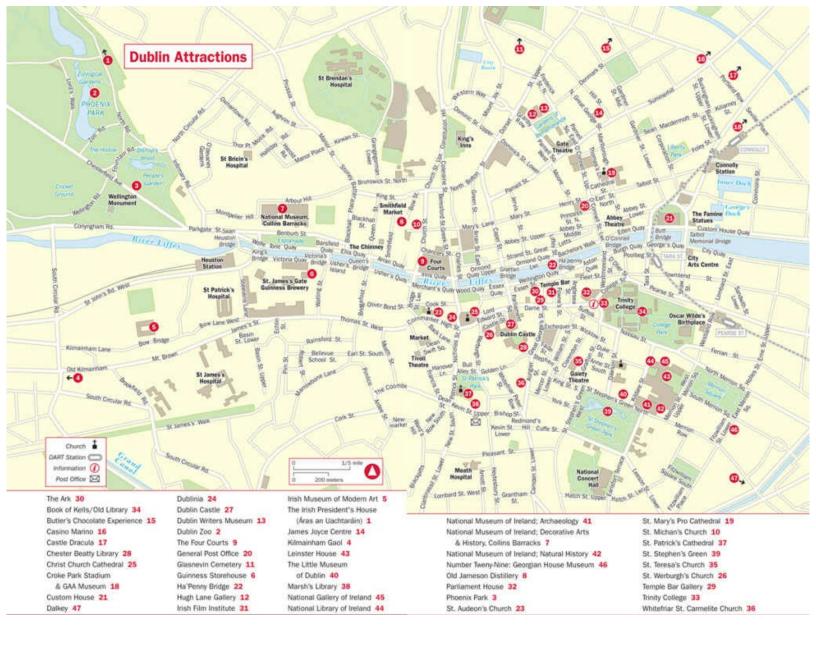
Few people embody the term "citizen of the world" as much as Sir Alfred Chester Beatty. Born in New York in 1875, Beatty launched an American mining business that earned him the nickname "the King of Copper"—and a multimillion-dollar fortune to boot. This fabulous wealth gave him the means to pursue his passion for ancient manuscripts and works of art, and by the time he was an old man, his collection rivaled some of the world's greatest museums. Beatty became a British citizen in the 1930s and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1954, after he made a generous bequest to the British Museum. However, he left the vast majority of his collection to Ireland—his ancestral home and a place he always loved. In return Beatty was made an honorary Irish citizen in 1957. He died 11 years later in Monaco, but was brought back to Dublin for a state funeral—to date the only civilian to be given this honor. Despite all this, Beatty is a surprisingly little-known figure in his adoptive home today. Many Dublin tourist guides don't list the Chester Beatty Museum among the city's top attractions, and we've even spoken to locals who had never heard of the museum—or the man himself—at all. What an injustice!

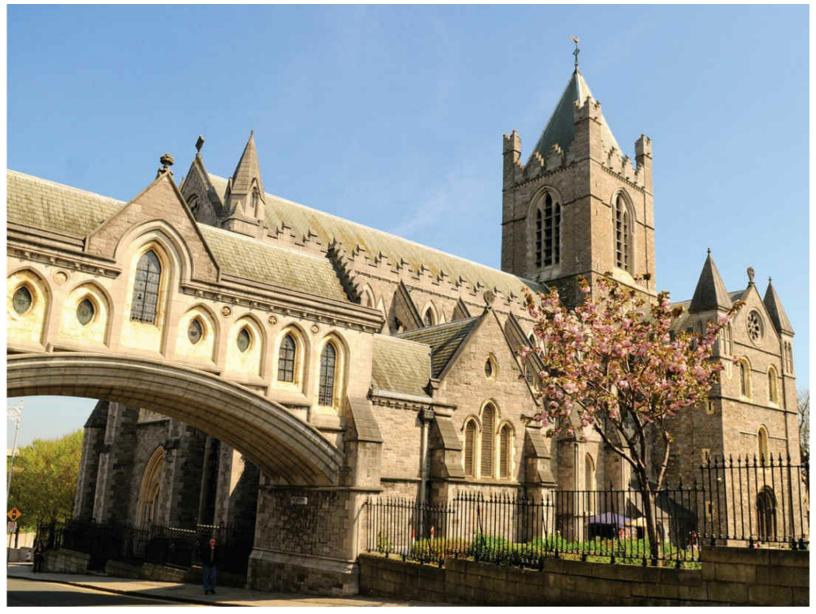
Chester Beatty Library *** LIBRARY This dazzling collection of early religious texts and other priceless artifacts is named in honor of Sir Alfred Chester Beatty, an Anglo-American industrialist who bequeathed his unique private collection to the Irish nation when he died in 1968. And what a collection it is! Beatty was one of the great 20th-century adventurer-collectors, of the kind that simply could not exist today. Highlights of the bequest include breathtaking illuminated gospels; 8th- and 9th-century Qurans; sacred Buddhist texts from Burma and Tibet; nearly 1,000 Japanese prints from the Edo era; jade and snuff bottles from China; and cuneiform writing tablets dating back nearly 5,000 years. If there's a better museum of this size in Ireland, we have yet to find it. Why queue and pay a tenner to see two pages from the Book of Kells when you can lose yourself in this wonderful place for free?

On the grounds of Dublin Castle, Dame St., Dublin 2. www.cbl.ie. **© 01/407-0750.** Free admission. Mar–Oct Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat 11am–5:30pm; Sun 1pm–5pm; Nov–Feb Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat 11am–5:30pm; Sun 1pm–5pm. Luas: Jervis. Bus: 37, 39, 39A, 39B, 39C, 49, 49A, 49X, 50, 50X, 56A, 65X, 70, 70A, 70X, 77, 77A, 77X, 123.

Christ Church Cathedral ****** CATHEDRAL This magnificent cathedral was designed to be seen from the river, so walk to it from the riverside in order to truly appreciate its size. It dates from 1038, when Sitric, Danish king of Dublin, built the first wooden Christ Church here. In 1171, the original foundation was extended into a cruciform layout and rebuilt in stone by the Norman warrior Strongbow. The present structure dates mainly from 1871 to 1878, when a huge restoration took place —the work done then remains controversial to this day, as much of the building's old detail was destroyed in the process. Still, magnificent stonework and graceful pointed arches survive. (There's also a statue of Strongbow inside, and some believe his tomb is here as well, although historians are not convinced). The best way to get a glimpse of what the original building must have been like is to visit the 12th-century crypt, which has been kept untouched. An intriguing side note: Christ Church once displayed what was believed to be the preserved heart of St. Laurence O'Toole (1128–80). However, in 2012, the holy relic was stolen in an audacious nighttime raid. Nothing else was taken, including items of much higher value, leading police to surmise that it was stolen to order for a collector. The heart is still missing.

Christchurch Place, Dublin 8. www.christchurchdublin.ie. \bigcirc 01/677-8099. Admission €6 adults; €4.50 seniors and students; €2 children € (15 and under); €15 families. Mar–May Mon–Sat 9am–6pm; Sun 12:30–2:30pm, 4:30–6pm. June–Sept Mon–Sat 9am–7pm; Sun 12:30–2:30pm, 4:30–6pm. Oct Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; Sun 12:30–2:30pm, 4:30–6pm. Nov–Feb Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; Sun 12:30–2:30pm. Mar–Apr Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; Sun 12:30–6pm. Last entry 45 min. before closing (Mon–Sat). Bus: 37, 39, 39A, 39B, 39C, 39X, 49, 49A, 49X, 50X, 54A, 56A, 70, 70A, 70X, 78A.





Christ Church Cathedral.

Monumental Wit

Few cities have such a love-hate relationship with their statues as Dublin. Locals have an acerbic rhyming nickname for each one, many of them unprintable. The very buxom statue of Molly Malone (heroine of the titular Irish folk song, who sold "cockles and mussels, alive alive, oh . . .") now standing in front of the tourism office on Suffolk Street, is variously known as, "the Tart with the Cart," "the Trollope with the Scallop," or "the Flirt in the Skirt." In the same vein, the James Joyce statue on O'Connell Street is "the Prick with a Stick"; the statue of Anna Livia (a character in Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* who symbolized the Liffey), rising from an ornamental pond in Croppies Park, is "the Floozie in the Jacuzzi"; and, depending on whom you talk to, the Spire of Dublin on O'Connell Street is either "the Stiletto in the Ghetto," "the Skewer in the Sewer," "the Stiffy by the Liffey," or "the Nail in the Pale."

Dublin Writers Museum ** MUSEUM Manuscripts, early editions, personal possessions, and other pieces of ephemera relating to Ireland's most famous writers are on display at this great museum in Parnell Square. The exhibits are laid out across two rooms, tracing the development of Irish literature up to the present day. Lovers of Behan, Joyce, Shaw, Stoker, Wilde, Yeats, and the other greats of the canon will find plenty to love here—from the trivial (Brendan Behan's postcard from Los Angeles extolling its virtues as a place to get drunk) to the profound (a first edition of

Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger*, complete with a handwritten extra section that his publisher refused to publish, fearing it too controversial). You can take a self-guided audio tour, and there's an excellent bookshop—of course. Talks, readings, and other special events are occasionally held here; call or check the website for details.

18 Parnell Sq., Dublin 1. www.writersmuseum.com. \bigcirc 01/872-2077. Admission €7.50 adults; €6.50 seniors and students; €5 children; €20 families. Mon–Sat 10am–4:45pm; Sun and public holidays 11am–4:45pm. Last admission 45 min. before closing. Bus: 1, 2, 8, 14, 14A, 16, 16A, 19, 19A, 33X, 39X, 40, 40A, 40B, 40C, 41X, 48A, 58X, 70B, 70X, 116, 120, 123, 145.



The personal correspondence and effects of Ireland's greatest writers are on public display at the Dublin Writers Museum.

Hugh Lane Gallery $\star\star$ ART MUSEUM This small art gallery punches above its weight with a strong collection of Impressionist works. Highlights of the collection include Degas's *Sur la Plage* and Manet's *La Musique aux Tuileries*. There are also sculptures by Rodin, a stunning collection of

Arts and Crafts stained glass by Dublin-born artist Harry Clarke (don't miss his masterpiece, *The Eve* of St. Agnes); and numerous works by modern Irish artists. One room holds the maddeningly cluttered studio of the Irish painter Francis Bacon that the gallery purchased from London and moved to Dublin, where it has been reconstructed behind glass. They moved everything—right down to the dust. It's an excellent, compact art museum, and a great place to spend an afternoon.

Parnell Sq. North, Dublin 1. www.hughlane.ie. **© 01/222-5550.** Free admission. Tues–Thurs 10am–6pm; Fri–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 11am–5pm. Closed Mon. Bus: 1, 2, 8, 10A, 14, 14A, 16, 16A, 19, 19A, 33X, 39X, 40, 41X, 46A, 46B, 46X, 48A, 58C, 58X, 70B, 70X, 116, 145.

THE tortured TALE OF THE HUGH LANE GALLERY

Millionaire art dealer and collector Sir Hugh Percy Lane made quite a splash when he opened his own public art gallery in Dublin on Harcourt Street in 1907. He soon tired of running it, however, and in 1912 he offered to donate the whole thing—millions of pounds worth of Impressionist paintings—to the city. His only condition was that the city should build an appropriate structure to hold it all.

Dublin agreed, and all seemed well. However, months later, the city had failed to find a suitable structure and was caught up in haggling over the cost. When the city withdrew from the deal, Lane was (understandably) furious. In a temper, he made an agreement with the National Gallery in London to give that vast art museum his collection instead.

To the rescue came the great Irish poet W. B. Yeats. (Lane also happened to be the nephew of Yeats' friend and patron Lady Augusta Gregory). Infuriated by the government's ineptitude, Yeats wrote a series of angry poems lambasting the government for its failure to find a place to house such magnificent works. Inspired in part by Yeats's fervor, Lane changed his mind and decided to leave his collection to Dublin after all. He ordered his will changed—but he hadn't yet had it signed and witnessed when he was killed in 1915 aboard the ocean liner *Lusitania*, when it was torpedoed by a German U-boat.

So began a legal stalemate in which the National Gallery and the city of Dublin wrangled over the very same Monets, Courbets, and Manets that Dublin hadn't even been sure it wanted a few months earlier.

To an extent, the issue is still unresolved 90 years later. Luckily, an agreement is in place by which the main works in the collection are displayed at different times by both galleries.

And the Hugh Lane Gallery now has a gorgeous home in the classical Charlemont House on Parnell Square. Sir Hugh would surely approve.

The Irish President's House (Áras an Uachtaráin) ** HISTORIC HOUSE Set in Phoenix Park, Áras an Uachtaráin was once the Viceregal Lodge, the summer retreat of the British viceroy, whose main digs were in Dublin Castle. From what were never humble beginnings, the original 1751 country house was expanded several times, gradually becoming the splendid neoclassical white mansion you see today, which now serves as the official residence of Ireland's President. Guided tours leave from the Phoenix Park Visitors Centre every Saturday. After an introductory historical film, a bus brings visitors to and from the house for a 1-hour tour of the state reception rooms (tours run a little longer in summer, when the gardens are included on the itinerary, weather permitting). As the building is still the official home of the Irish president, a strictly limited number of tickets are given out, on a firstcome, first-served basis. The house may occasionally be closed for state events, so it's wise to call ahead. *Note:* For security reasons, no backpacks, travel bags, strollers, cameras, or mobile phones are allowed on the tour.

Tour departs from Phoenix Park Visitor Centre, Dublin 8. www.president.ie. © 01/677-0095 (Phoenix Park visitor center). Free admission. Sat tours hourly, 10:30am-3:30pm. Bus: 37.

Kilmainham Gaol *** HISTORIC SITE Anyone interested in Ireland's struggle for independence from British rule should not miss visiting this former prison. Within these walls, political prisoners were incarcerated, tortured, and killed from 1796 until 1924. The leaders of the 1916 Easter Uprising were executed here, along with many others. Future president Eamon de Valera was its final prisoner.

An exhibition illuminates the brutal history of the Irish penal system; there's also a well-presented historical film. To walk along these corridors through the grim exercise yard, or to venture into the walled compound, is a moving (at times even overwhelming) experience that will linger in your memory.

Inchicore Rd., Kilmainham, Dublin 8. www.heritageireland.ie/en/Dublin/KilmainhamGaol. **Ø** 01/453-5984. Admission €6 adults; €4 seniors; €2 students and children; €14 families. Apr–Sept daily 9:30am–6pm; Oct–Mar Mon–Sat 9:30am–5:30pm; Sun 10am–6pm. Last admission 1 hr. before closing. Luas: Suir Road. Bus: 13, 40, 51B, 51C, 63, 69, 78A, 79, 123, 206.



For more than a century, Irish revolutionaries were imprisoned and punished in Kilmainham Gaol.

National Gallery of Ireland ** ART MUSEUM George Bernard Shaw loved this place so much that he left it one-third of his royalties in perpetuity after he died. He saw it as paying a debt, so important was the gallery to his education. It is still a place to wander, wonder, and just be in thrall to so much beautiful art. Highlights of the permanent collection include paintings by Caravaggio, Gainsborough, Rubens, Goya, Rembrandt, Monet, and Picasso. The Irish national portrait collection is housed in one wing, while another area is devoted to the career of Jack B. Yeats (brother of W. B. Yeats), an Irish painter of some note. Major exhibitions change regularly, and the subjects are often more imaginative than just the usual run of retrospectives and national landscapes (although those appear too); recent shows have included an exhibition devoted to painting without color. In keeping

with the "art for all" ethos that so enamored Bernard Shaw, entry to the permanent collection and many of the temporary shows is free.

Merrion Sq. West, Dublin 2. www.nationalgallery.ie. **© 01/661-5133.** Free admission. Mon–Wed, Fri–Sat 9:30am–5:30pm; Thurs 9:30am–8:30pm; Sun 11am–5:30pm; public holidays 10am–5:30pm. DART: Pearse. Luas: St. Stephen's Green, Grafton St. Bus: 4, 5, 7, 7A, 8, 13, 13A, 39, 39A, 44, 45, 46A, 48A.

National Museum of Ireland: Archaeology *** MUSEUM The most impressive of the four sites that collectively make up the National Museum of Ireland, this excellent museum is devoted to the ancient history of Ireland and beyond—from the Stone Age up to the Early Modern period. Highlights include a stunning collection of Viking artifacts from the archaeological digs that took place in Dublin from the 1960s to the early 1980s—a haul so important that in one fell swoop they rewrote the history of Viking settlement in Ireland. There is also an enormous range of Bronze Age gold and metalwork, as well as iconic Christian treasures from the Dark Ages, including the Ardagh Chalice, the Moylough Belt Shrine and the Tara Brooch. Other notable artifacts include "Ralaghan Man," a carved wooden Bronze Age statue from County Cavan; a collection of 2nd-century Roman figurines and homewares; and an extraordinary granite table made in Egypt circa 1870 _{B.C.} The other sites of the NMI are the Natural History Museum on nearby Kildare Street; the Decorative Arts and History branch at Collins Barracks in Benburb, just west of the city center; and the Country Life branch in Castlebar, County Mayo (see p. 436).

Kildare St., Dublin 2. www.museum.ie. 🖉 01/677-7444. Free admission. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 2–5pm. Bus: 7B, 7D, 10, 10A, 11, 11A, 11B, 14, 14A, 15, 15A, 15B, 15C, 20B, 25X, 32X.

National Museum of Ireland: Decorative Arts & History, Collins Barracks ** MUSEUM As the name of this branch of the National Museum of Ireland suggests, the collection tells the story of Irish (and world) history through fashion, jewelry, furniture, and other decorative arts, with the bulk of the collection spanning the 1760s to the 1960s. One gallery is devoted to the work of Eileen Gray (1878–1976), an Irish architect and furniture designer who became one of the most important figures of the Modernist movement; another showcases the extraordinary collection of Asian art bequeathed to the Irish nation in the 1930s by Irish-American philanthropist Albert Bender. Set in a converted 18th-century army building, this branch of the National Museum isn't entirely devoted to the arts; eight galleries cover Irish military history from the 16th century to the present day, including a fascinating section about the Easter Rising of 1916.

Collins Barracks, Benburb St., Dublin 7. www.museum.ie. © 01/677-7444. Free admission. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 2–5pm. Luas: Museum. Rail: Heuston. Bus: 39B, 70N.

National Museum of Ireland: Natural History ★★ MUSEUM Before a huge renovation completed in 2010, this vast museum was a venerable but rather moth-eaten institution. Today the building has never looked better—right down to the grand Victorian staircase, closed for years, that takes visitors to the upper floors. The core collection itself has changed little since the museum was founded in the mid–19th century, ranging from small stuffed native Irish animals and primates to the skeletons of enormous sea creatures. Although there are recent additions—including the Discovery Zone, in which visitors can open a series of drawers, to discover the unusual specimens within—it still feels quaintly old-fashioned. Sadly, as of this writing, safety problems have required closing the balcony levels, which display some of the most unique parts of the collection, such as the avian galleries and the "crystal jellies" collection—beautiful oversize glass models of microscopic sea creatures, made in the 19th century by the eccentric and brilliant Blaschka brothers of Dresden. Here's hoping that those galleries will have re-opened by the time of your visit.

Merrion St., Dublin 2. www.museum.ie. **© 01/677-7444.** Free admission. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 2–5pm. Bus: 4, 5, 7A, 8, 15X, 44, 44B, 44C, 48A, 49X, 50X, 51X, 63, 65X, 77X, 84.

A TOUR OF trinity college

A beautiful, grand, romantic place to wander around, the Trinity campus is open free of charge to the public year-round, although there might be some access restrictions during exam periods.

Trinity's most striking and famous monument, the white **Campanile**, or bell tower, grabs your attention as soon as you enter through the main archway. Dating from the mid-19th century, it stands on the site of the college's original foundations, from 300 years earlier.

Built in the 18th century to a design by Thomas Burgh, the neoclassical **Old Library Building** is the only section of the campus that you have to pay to see. It's where you'll find the **Book of Kells**, although the library's magnificent **Long Room** is worth seeing in its own right (see p. 96).

Home to the geography and geology departments, the **Museum Building** is one of Trinity's hidden gems. It was built in the mid-19th century with a combination of Byzantine and Moorish influences. Walk through and look up to the domed ceiling and the green marbled banisters.

Set between these two architectural masterpieces, the stark 1967 **Berkeley Library Building** sharply divides opinion with its austere modernism. Designer Paul Koralek's library honors Bishop George Berkeley, famed for his philosophical theory of "immaterialism" (things that can't be proved cannot exist), which went against the theories of both Isaac Newton and the Catholic Church. The gleaming sculpture outside the library is *Sphere with Sphere* by Arnaldo Pomodoro (1983).

Also facing the Old Library across Fellows Square, the 1970s **Arts Building** includes the **Douglas Hyde Gallery**, which displays a regularly changing program of modern art. Exhibitions switch out about every three months and admission is always free.

Tucked away in the far northeastern corner of the campus, the excellent **Science Gallery** is a combination art space, science museum, and debating forum, with fun and thought-provoking exhibitions, workshops, public lectures, and even shows. Entry is free, except to certain special events. See **www.sciencegallery.com** for more details.

One of the more benign remnants of English rule, the **College Park Cricket Pitch** is a small park where you'll often find a cricket match in progress on summer weekends. If you don't know the rules of cricket, it may be hard to follow—the sport is notoriously arcane for the uninitiated—but you can still enjoy the picturesque sight of the players in their white uniforms.

St. Patrick's Cathedral $\star\star$ CATHEDRAL The largest church in Ireland, and one of the most beloved places of worship in the world, St. Patrick's is one of two Anglican Cathedrals in Dublin. Most of what you can see dates from the 14th century, but religious buildings stood here nearly a thousand years before that. It is mainly early English in style, with a square medieval tower that houses the largest ringing peal bells in Ireland, as well as an 18th-century spire. A moving collection of war memorials is tucked away at the very back of the cavernous nave, including a very low-key tribute to the Irish dead of World War II. (Ireland was neutral in that war, but around 300,000 men volunteered to fight with the Allies.) Admission includes an irregular program of lunchtime classical music recitals at the Cathedral—call or check the website for details. *Tip:* You can download a free MP3 audio tour from the Cathedral's website.

St. Patrick's Close, Dublin 8. www.stpatrickscathedral.ie. \bigcirc 01/453-9472. Admission \in 6 adults; \in 5 seniors and students; \in 3 children; \in 15 families. Mar–Oct Mon–Fri 9:30am–5pm; Sat 9am–6pm; Sun 9–10:30am, 12:30–2:30pm, 4:30–6pm. Nov–Feb Mon–Fri 9:30am–5pm; Sat 9am–5pm; Sun 9am–10:30am, 12:30–2:30pm. Guided tours Mon–Sat 10:30am and 2:30pm. Last admission 30 min. before closing. Bus: 49, 49A, 49X, 50X, 54A, 56A, 77, 77A, 77X, 150, 151.

Trinity College $\star\star$ UNIVERSITY The oldest university in Ireland, Trinity was founded in 1592 by Queen Elizabeth I to offer an education to the children of the upper classes and protect them from the "malign" Catholic influences elsewhere in Europe. Now it is simply the most well-respected university in Ireland. Among its alumni are Bram Stoker, Jonathan Swift, Oscar Wilde, and Samuel Beckett, as well as an array of rebels and revolutionaries who helped create the Republic of Ireland.

The campus spreads across central Dublin just south of the River Liffey, with cobbled squares, gardens, a picturesque quadrangle, and buildings dating from the 17th to the 20th centuries. You can wander the campus for free; alternatively, between May and September, **Trinity Tours** take in all of the main sights, including a ticket for the Old Library and the Book of Kells (see box p. 96).

College Green, Dublin 2. www.tcd.ie. \bigcirc 01/896-1000. Campus tours \notin 5; including Old Library \notin 12 (half-price for students, Oct–Mar) Library and Book of Kells only \notin 9. Campus tours: May–Sept 10:15, 10:35, 10:55, 11:20, 11:45am, 12:10, 12:40, 1:05, 1:30, 2, 2:25, 2:50, 3:15, 3:40pm (no 3:40pm tour Sun and public holidays). DART: Pearse St., Connolly St. Luas: Lower Abbey St., St. Stephen's Green. Bus: College Green entrance (for tours): 7N, 15N, 15X, 44N, 46N, 48N, 49N, 51D, 51X, 54N, 56A, 70B, 70X, 77A, 77N, 92. Nassau St. entrance (for Old Library/Book of Kells): 25X, 32X, 33X, 41X, 51D, 51X, 58X, 67X, 84X, 92.



The Old Library Long Room at Trinity College.



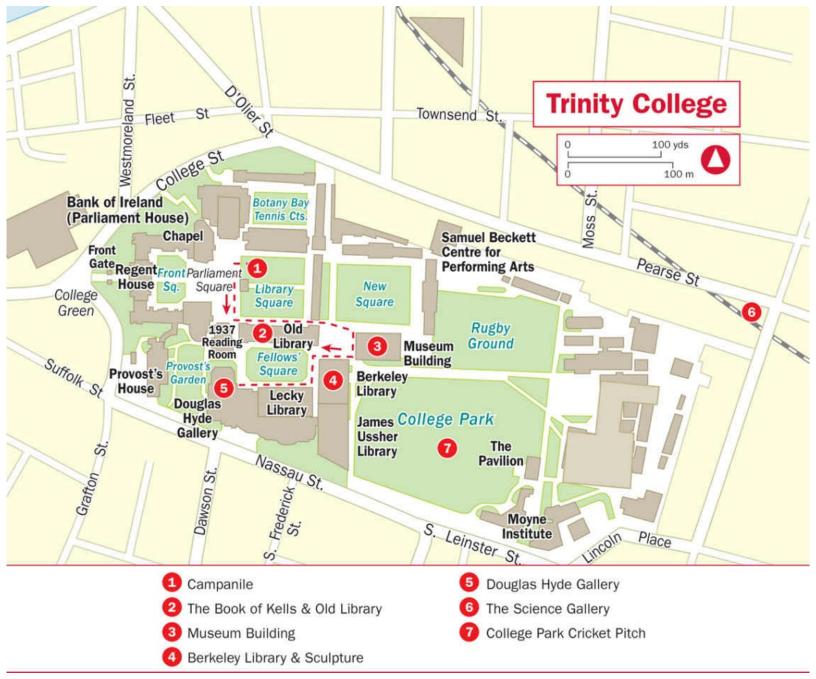
Abstract spherical metal world sculpture at the Berkeley Library at Trinity College in Dublin.

More Attractions

HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE & BUILDINGS

Custom House \star ARCHITECTURAL SITE Completed in 1791, this beautifully proportioned Georgian building has a long classical facade of graceful pavilions, arcades, and a central dome topped by a statue of Commerce. The 14 keystones over the doors and windows are known as the Riverine Heads, because they represent the Atlantic Ocean and the 13 principal rivers of Ireland. Although it burned to a shell in 1921, the building has been masterfully restored. The exterior is the main attraction here, and most of the interior is closed to the public; but there is a visitor center with exhibitions and an audiovisual presentation telling the story of its reconstruction.

Custom House Quay, Dublin 1. \bigcirc 01/888-2000. Admission \in 1.50 adults; \in 4 families; students free. Visitor center: mid-Mar–Nov Mon–Fri 10am–12:30pm, 2–5pm; Sat–Sun and public holidays 2–5pm. Dec–mid-Mar Wed–Fri 10am–12:30pm, 2–5pm; Sun 2–5pm. Luas: Busáras. Bus: 27C, 41X, 53A, 90, 90A, 92, 151, 747, 748.



Dublin Castle \star CASTLE The center of British power in Ireland for more than 700 years, this 13th-century castle was finally taken over by the new Irish government in 1922. You can wander the grounds for free, but they're disappointingly plain; the official tour takes in the much more impressive State Apartments, the early18th-century Treasury, and the Gothic-style Chapel Royal chapel building that boasts fine plaster decoration and a carved-oak gallery. The castle's only extant tower—a 13th-century structure once used to imprison suspected traitors—now holds a small museum dedicated to the Garda (Irish police). The castle's Upper Yard was, in 1583, the scene of Ireland's last trial by mortal combat; today it is dominated by an impressive Georgian structure called the Bedford Tower. The Irish crown jewels used to be kept in the Bedford Tower—until they were stolen in 1907 (they have still never been found). If it's open, check out the Medieval Undercroft, an excavated site on the grounds where an early Viking fortress once stood. *Note:* This is a government building, so areas are may be closed for state events.

Dame St., Dublin 2. www.dublincastle.ie. \bigcirc 01/645-8813. Admission \in 6.50 adults; \in 5.50 seniors; \in 3 students and children (11 and under). Guided tour \in 8.50 adults; \in 7.50 seniors; \in 4 students and children. Mon–Sat 9:45am–4:45pm; Sun and public holidays noon–4:45pm. Luas: Jervis. Bus: 13, 37, 37, 39, 39A, 39B, 39C, 49, 49A, 49X, 50, 50X, 54A, 56A, 65X, 70, 70A, 70X, 77, 77A, 77X, 123, 150, 747.

DUBLIN walking tours

Small and compact, Dublin was made for walking, and some of the best experiences the city has to offer involve taking it at your own pace, map in hand. If you'd like more guidance, however, consider one of the following tour services.

You could hardly be in better or more learned hands for the **Historical Walking Tours of Dublin** (www.historicaltours.ie; **\bigcirc 087/688-9412**), whose guides are all post-grad students at Trinity College, Dublin. Established for nearly 30 years, these engaging tours offer peerless historical insight. Tours leave from the front gates of Trinity College on College Green, daily at 11am and 3pm from May to Stepmber; daily at 11am in April and October; and Friday to Sunday at 11am from November to March. Tickets cost \in 12 adults, \in 10 students and seniors, and you can just pay the guide on the day. An intriguing variety of private tours are also available—subjects include Medieval Dublin; Irish Food; Sex and Religion; and even a Running Tour for those who could take their history with a workout. These need to be booked in advance and cost \in 160.

If you prefer to take in the sights at a more leisurely pace, with a bit of liquid refreshment to keep things lively, try the Literary **Pub Crawl** (www.dublinpubcrawl.com; **O** 01/670-5602). Walking in the footsteps of Joyce, Behan, Beckett, Shaw, and other Irish literary greats, this tour visits Dublin's most famous pubs and explores their deep literary connections. Actors provide humorous performances and commentary between stops. Tours start at the **Duke Pub**, 8 Duke St. (**O** 01/679-9553), daily at 7:30pm from April to October; and Thursday to Sunday at 7:30pm from November to March. Tickets cost \in 12 adults, \in 10 students. A limited number of tickets are sold at the Duke on the night, but it's best to book online. No children are allowed, for obvious reasons.

More excellent sightseeing for the thirsty can be enjoyed on the **Traditional Irish Music Pub Crawl** (www.discoverdublin.ie/musical-pub-crawl; \bigcirc 01/475-3313). Tours are led by two professional musicians, who sing as you make your way from one famous musical pub to another in Temple Bar. The evening is touristy, but the music is good. Tours meet upstairs at **Oliver St. John Gogarty's** pub, Fleet Street and Anglesea St. (\bigcirc 01/671-1822). Tours run daily at 7:30pm from April to October; and Thursday to Saturday at 7:30pm from November to March. The cost is \in 12 adults, \in 10 students. You can book in advance or buy on the night. Again, no children.

In 2016, Ireland celebrates the 100th anniversary of a rebellion that would profoundly change Irish history—the failed Easter Rising. The **1916 Rebellion Walking Tour** (www.1916rising.com; **© 086/858-3847**) takes you into the heat of the action at the General Post Office, explaining how the anger rose until the rebellion exploded on Easter Sunday in 1916. The 2-hour tour is well thought out and run by local historians who wrote a book on the events of that year. Tours run March to October, 11:30am from Monday to Saturday, and 1pm on Sunday. Tickets cost $\in 12$. Booking is advisable. Meet at the International Bar, 23 Wicklow St. (**© 01/677-9250**).



The Custom House at night.

The Four Courts \star ARCHITECTURAL SITE Home to the Irish legal courts since 1796, this fine 18th-century building was designed by James Gandon (who also designed the Custom House; see p. 109). It is distinguished by its graceful Corinthian columns, massive dome, and exterior statues of Justice, Mercy, Wisdom, and Moses. Badly damaged by the fighting during the civil war of 1922, this building was later artfully restored, although some details, such as the statues of famous Irish lawyers that used to adorn the niches of the Round Hall, were lost. Tours are available, but frustratingly only for law students (who must book as part of a group). The only way to see the interior is usually to watch a trial in progress.

Inns Quay, Dublin 8. www.courts.ie. 🖉 01/888-6000. Luas: Four Courts. Bus: 25, 25A, 51D, 51X, 68, 69, 78, 79, 79A, 83, 151, 172.

General Post Office ★ HISTORIC SITE Don't be fooled by the nondescript name: With a facade of Ionic columns and Greco-Roman pilasters 60m long (197 ft.) and 17m high (56 ft.), this is more than a post office—it is the symbol of Irish freedom. Built between 1815 and 1818, it was the main stronghold of the Irish Volunteers during the Easter Rising. On Easter Sunday, 1916, Patrick Pearse stood on its steps and read a proclamation declaring a free Irish Republic. It began, "In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty." Then he and an army of supporters barricaded themselves inside. A siege ensued that ultimately involved much of the north of the city, and before it was over, the building was all but destroyed. It had barely been restored before the civil war broke out in 1922, and it was heavily damaged again. It's still a working post office today, although the small Letters, Lives and Liberty Museum does house a few diverting exhibits, including the original Declaration of Independence. That's all very much a

secondary attraction, though; touching the bullet holes in the walls out front is a far more powerful way to experience a sense of this building's history.

O'Connell St., Dublin 1. www.anpost.ie. \bigcirc 01/705-8833. Free admission (museum \in 2). Post Office building: Mon–Sat 8:30am–6pm. Closed public holidays. Museum: Mon–Sat 10am–5pm. Luas: Abbey St. Bus: 10, 10A, 32X, 33X, 39X, 40A, 40C, 41X, 46A, 46B, 46C, 46D, 46E, 116, 123, 145, 747.

Ha'penny Bridge \star LOCAL LANDMARK Built in 1816, and one of the earliest cast-iron bridges in Europe, the graceful, pedestrian-only Ha'penny Bridge (pronounced *Hay*-penny) is the still the most attractive of Dublin's bridges. Officially named the Liffey Bridge, it's universally known by the toll it once charged to cross it: half a penny. The turnstiles were removed in 1919 when passage was made free. The bridge is at its prettiest after sundown, when the old lamps atop its three filigreed arches are lit, and the underside at each end is illuminated in green. In recent years it became traditional for couples to leave padlocks latched onto the bridge, with their names inscribed, before throwing the keys into the water. Dublin's city government now forbids the practice, seeing them more as an eyesore than a symbol of eternal love.

Connects Wellington Quay and Lower Ormond Quay, Dublin 2. Luas: Jervis. Bus: 39B, 51, 51B, 51C, 51D, 51X, 68, 69, 69X, 78, 78A, 79, 79A, 90, 92, 206.

dublin PASS

If you're planning a lot of sightseeing in Dublin, the tourism board would like you to consider purchasing its **Dublin Pass**, which offers free admission to most of the city's major sights, as well as free travel from the airport on the AirCoach shuttle, and discounts at a number of shops, bars, and restaurants.

Unfortunately, the pass is a bit pricey, given that so many of Dublin's sights are free, and the Dublin Pass website muddles the water by including free museums (such as the Chester Beatty Library and the national museums) among fee-charging sights. Our advice is this: Buy the pass, but plan carefully how best to use it. For example, consider buying a pass good for 1 or 2 days, and then see all of the city's most expensive sights (the Guinness Storehouse, Kilmainham Gaol, and so forth) on those days. On the other days of your trip, you can devote your time to the museums, parks, and galleries that charge no entrance fee.

An adult pass costs \in 39 for 1 day, \in 61 for 2 days, \in 71 for 3 days, and \in 105 for 6 days. A child's pass costs \in 21 for 1 day, \in 35 for 2 days, \in 42 for 3 days, and \in 54 for 6 days.

You can purchase a pass at any Dublin Tourism office, or online at **www.dublinpass.ie**. There are sometimes discounts available if you buy one in advance.

Leinster House \star ARCHITECTURAL SITE The home of the Dáil (Irish House of Representatives) and Seanad (Irish Senate), this is the modern center of Irish government. Dating from 1745, it was originally known as Kildare House and was the seat of the Dukes of Leinster. Like the Parliament House building (see below), it is said to have been a major influence on the architects of Washington, D.C.; the resemblance to Irish-born James Hoban's design for the White House, built 78 years later, is certainly clear enough. When the Dáil is not in session, tickets are available for guided tours on Monday and Friday at 10:30am and 2:30pm. You don't have to book, but numbers are strictly limited. To reserve tickets, the events desk prefers an email (event.desk@oireachtas.ie; include your full name, address and telephone number), or you can call © 1890/252-4551. *Note:* You need to bring photo I.D. (such as a driver's license or passport) to gain admission, and you shouldn't bring large or bulky bags.

Kildare St. and Merrion Sq., Dublin 2. www.oireachtas.ie. © 01/618-3186 or 3781. Free admission. Entry by tour only, Mon and Fri 10:30am, 2:30, 3:30pm. (Additional tours when Dáil and Seanad in session, Tues and Wed 7, 8pm). Bus: 4, 5, 7A, 8, 7B, 7D, 10, 10A, 11, 11A, 11B, 14, 14A, 15, 15A, 15B, 15C, 15X, 20B, 25X, 32X, 44, 44B, 44C, 48A, 49X, 50X, 51X, 63, 65X, 77X, 84.

Parliament House \star ARCHITECTURAL SITE The grand colonnaded facade of this building was allegedly the model for the Capitol building in Washington, D.C., with one key difference: It's completely devoid of windows. When Parliament House was built in the 1730s, a vicious window tax was in force, so not having any was a neat way to save money. The Irish Parliament met here until 1801, when, by an extraordinary quirk of history, it voted for its own abolition. William Pitt the Younger, then Prime Minister of Britain, had promised sweeping reform of the anti-Catholic laws if Ireland agreed to a formal union with Britain. They did so, but Pitt was deposed by King George III, the reforms never happened, and the Irish lost what little self-government they had. Today the building is owned by the Bank of Ireland, but you can see parts of the magnificent interior featuring oak woodwork, 18th-century tapestries, and a sparkling crystal chandelier. Friendly porters are on hand to fill you in on the history. In our experience they may also give informal tours of rooms you can't normally see, if you ask nicely.

2 College Green, Dublin 2. © 01/671-1488. Free admission. Mon–Wed, Fri 10am–4pm; Thurs 10am–5pm. Bus: 7N, 15N, 15X, 44N, 46N, 48N, 49N, 51D, 51X, 54N, 56A, 70B, 70X, 77A, 77N, 92.

MUSEUMS & LIBRARIES

Croke Park Stadium & GAA Museum * SPORTS MUSEUM Croke Park is the headquarters, and main sports ground, of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), which oversees most of the traditional Irish sports—including hurling, rounders (similar to baseball), and Gaelic football. Their museum does a good job of setting out the history of these games and putting them into the wider historical context of the importance of sport to the Irish way of life. The interactive exhibits include a large video archive, and you can take a tour of the stadium too. But the most excitement is, of course, to be had on match days—check the website if you want to come and hear the roar of the crowd for real.

Jones Rd., Dublin 3. www.crokepark.ie. \bigcirc 01/819-2300. Tour and museum: \notin 13 adults; \notin 9.50 seniors and students; \notin 8.50 children 11 and under; \notin 34- \notin 38 families. Museum only: \notin 6 adults; \notin 5 seniors and students; \notin 4 children 11 and under; \notin 16 families. Sept-May Mon-Sat 9:30am-5pm; Sun and public holidays 10:30am-5pm. June-Aug Mon-Sat 9:30am-6pm; Sun and public holidays 10:30am-5pm. Sometimes closed on match days; call to confirm. Tours: Jan-May, Sept-Dec Mon-Fri 11am, 1, 3pm; Sat 10, 11am, noon, 1, 2, 3pm; Sun and public holidays 10:11am, noon, 1, 2, 3pm. June Mon-Fri 11am, 1, 3, 4pm; Sat—Sun 10, 11am, noon, 1, 2 and 3pm. July-Aug Mon-Sat 10, 11am, noon, 1, 2, 3 and 4pm; Sun and public holidays 10, 11am, noon, 1, 2, 3pm. Tours on match days depend on start times and may not run; call to confirm. Bus: 1, 11, 13, 16, 33, 41, 41B, 41C, 44.



The harp-like Samuel Beckett Bridge, named after the famed Irish playwright.

James Joyce Centre \star This idiosyncratic museum is set in a handsome Georgian house that once belonged to the Earl of Kenmare. Joyce himself never lived here; however, he was rather taken with a former owner of the house named Denis Maginni. An eccentric man, who was Irish but added the "i" to give himself an air of Italian sophistication, Maginni appears as a character in *Ulysses*. Today the center functions as both a small museum and a cultural center devoted to Joyce and his work. Actual exhibits are a little thin on the ground, but they hold interesting (at least for Joyce fans) lectures and special events, and also organize a Joyce-themed walking tour of Dublin. Unsurprisingly, this place becomes an explosion of activity around Bloomsday (June 16th), the date upon which *Ulysses*' fictional events take place. Unlike the rest of Dublin, which makes do with a single day of celebrating its most famous 20th-century literary hero, the James Joyce Centre turns it into a week-long festival. 35 North Great George's St., Dublin 1. www.jamesjoyce.ie. **© 01/878-8547.** Admission €5 adults; €4 seniors, students and children. Mon-Sat 10am-5pm; Sun noon-5pm. Last admission 30 min. before closing. Bus: 1, 2, 8, 14, 14A, 16, 16A, 19, 19A, 33X, 39X, 41X, 48A, 58X, 70B, 70X, 116, 145.

The Little Museum of Dublin ** MUSEUM Stuffed full of ephemera relating to the lives of ordinary Dubliners—art, toys, photographs, newspapers, prints, and other artifacts of the everyday—this delightful little museum chronicles what it was like to live in the city throughout the 20th century. Thoughtfully laid out inside a beautifully preserved Georgian townhouse, the vast majority of the items on display were donated by the people of Dublin, and the collection is being added to all the

time. In among the curios are genuine documents of social history, including items relating to the First World War, the struggle for independence, and the suffrage movement. Several objects have charming anecdotes connected—such as the music stand that, in June 1963, was hurriedly borrowed from the home of a local antique dealer by visiting U.S. President John F. Kennedy, when he realized he had nowhere to put his papers during a speech. While it probably packs more of an emotional punch for native Dubliners, the exhibits tell an engaging story for outsiders as well. Tours (on the hour, every hour) are lively and informative, and the guides are great with children.

15 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2. www.littlemuseum.ie. \bigcirc 01/661-1000. Admission €7 adults; €5 seniors; €4.50 students and children; €14 families. Deluxe ticket (includes private guided tour) €12. Fri–Wed 9:30am–5pm; Thurs 9:30am–8pm. Luas: St. Stephen's Green. Bus: 15X, 32X, 39X, 41X, 46X, 51X,



The Little Museum of Dublin.

Marsh's Library ****** LIBRARY Unlike Trinity College's Long Room, which is largely for show these days, Marsh's Library is still a functioning library. Founded by Narcissus Marsh, the

Archbishop of Dublin, in 1701, its interior is a magnificent example of a 17th-century scholar's library that has remained much the same for three centuries. Its walls are lined with scholarly volumes, chiefly focused on theology, medicine, ancient history, and maps, along with Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and French literature. You can still see the wire cages in which readers would be locked in with the more valuable tomes. There's a particularly excellent collection of books by and about Jonathan Swift (see "Hard to Love," p, 124) which includes volumes with his editing comments in the margins—ironically, perhaps, given that Swift himself said of Archbishop Marsh, "He is the first of human race, that with great advantages of learning, piety, and station ever escaped being a great man."

St Patrick's Close, Dublin 8. www.marshlibrary.ie. **Ø 01/454-3511.** Admission €3 adults; €2 seniors and students; children 15 and under free. Mon, Wed–Sat 9:30am–1pm, 2–5pm; Sat 10am–1pm. Closed public holidays and last week in Dec. Bus: 49, 49A, 50X, 54A, 56A, 77A, 77X, 150, 151.

National Library of Ireland ★ LIBRARY If you're coming to Ireland to research your roots, this library should be one of your first stops, with thousands of volumes and records that yield ancestral information. Open at this location since 1890, this is the principal library of Irish studies. It's particularly noted for its collection of first editions and the papers of Irish writers and political figures, such as W. B. Yeats, Daniel O'Connell, and Patrick Pearse. Parts of their collection are always on display to the general public (their exhibition devoted to Yeats is particularly good). The library also has an unrivaled collection of maps of Ireland. A specialist Genealogy Advisory Service is open Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4:45pm. It's free of charge; no appointment necessary. Kildare St., Dublin 2. www.nli.ie. © 01/603-0200. Free admission. Mon-Wed 9:30am-7:45pm; Thurs-Fri 9:30am-4:45pm; Sat 9:30am-

Kildare St., Dublin 2. www.nli.ie. 001/603-0200. Free admission. Mon–Wed 9:30am–7:45pm; Thurs–Fri 9:30am–4:45pm; Sat 9:30am–4:45pm; Var 9:30am–7:45pm; Thurs–Fri 9:30am–4:45pm; Sat 9:30am–7:45pm; Thurs–Fri 9:30am–4:45pm; Sat 9:30am–7:45pm; Thurs–Fri 9:30am–7:45pm; Sat 9:30am–7:45pm; Sat 9:30am–7:45pm; Thurs–Fri 9:30am–7:45pm; Sat 9:30am–7:45pm; Sat 9:30am–7:45pm; Thurs–Fri 9:30am–7:45pm; Sat 9:30am, Sat 9:30am, Sat 9:30am, Sa

Number Twenty-Nine: Georgian House Museum ** MUSEUM A little time capsule of family life in Georgian Dublin, Number 29 is a fascinating curiosity. Rooms are kept as close as possible to how they would have looked in the period from 1790 to about 1820. The differences between family living spaces and the basement servants' quarters are, unsurprisingly, stark. Two elegant drawing rooms, with rich carpets and expensive blue wallpaper and crystal chandeliers, stand in sharp relief to the sparse housekeeper's bedroom or the simple, homely kitchen. At the same time, however, the industriousness of the kitchen is quite a revelation—medicines and cosmetics were made here from scratch by the servants, in addition to all the family's meals. The self-guided audio tour is informative, or if you can't bear to be in a place like this without being able to ask questions, there's a full tour daily at 3pm.

Corner of Fitzwilliam St. Lower and Mount St. Upper, Dublin 2. www.esb.ie/no29. **© 01/702-6165.** Admission €6 adults; €3 seniors and students; children 15 and under free. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm. Last admission 30 min. before closing. Tours: 3pm. DART: Pearse. Bus: 15X, 49X, 50X, 65X, 77X.

ART MUSEUMS

Irish Film Institute \star ARTS CENTER This art-house film institute is a hip hangout for cinephiles in Dublin's artsy Temple Bar district. It houses three cinemas, the Irish Film Archive, a library, a small but comprehensive bookshop, and a cafe that makes a good place for a cup of coffee on a cold afternoon. There's also a busy bar. While there's naturally an emphasis on Irish cinema, groundbreaking films from all over the world get shown here, with a good mixture of new titles and classics. There are also special film-related events, many of which are free.

6 Eustace St., Dublin 2. www.ifi.ie. **Ø 01/679-3477.** Free admission. Cinema tickets €8–€10. Mon–Thurs 11am–10:30pm; Fri 11am–11pm; Sat–Sun noon–11pm. Bus: 27, 40, 49, 54A, 56A, 65, 65B, 68, 68A, 69, 69X, 77A, 77X, 79, 79A.

Irish Museum of Modern Art \star ART MUSEUM This small but handsome museum, located in a beautiful 17th-century former hospital building, has a strong collection of modern art dating from the 1940s to the present day. Highlights include a striking series of mid-1970s photographs by Serbian conceptual artist Marina Abramovic; etchings and lithographs by Alice Maher, Louis le Brocquy, and Marcel Duchamp; and the Madden Arnholz Collection, made up of around 2,000 old master prints, including works by Hogarth and Rembrandt. The beautifully restored grounds are also used as an exhibition space, with a number of changing pieces set among the formal lawns and clipped box hedges.

Royal Hospital, Military Rd., Kilmainham, Dublin 8. www.imma.ie. © 01/612-9900. Free admission. Tues–Fri 11:30am–5:30pm; Sat 10am–5pm; Sun and public holidays noon–5:30pm. Last admission 45 min. before closing. Closed Mon. Luas: Heuston. Bus: 26, 51, 51B, 78A, 79, 90, 123.

Temple Bar Gallery ** ART GALLERY/STUDIOS This big, rambling art gallery sums up all that is good about Temple Bar. Founded in 1983 in the heart of Dublin's "Left Bank," this is one of the largest studio and gallery complexes of its kind in Europe. It's filled with innovative work by contemporary Irish artists—more than 30 of them, in a variety of disciplines, including sculpture, painting, printing, and photography. The colors and creativity are dazzling, and it's run by helpful, friendly people. Only the gallery section is open to the public, but you can make an appointment in advance to view individual artists at work. The Studios host free talks and discussion panels, featuring the great and the good of the Irish arts scene. Call or go online for details.

5–9 Temple Bar, Dublin 2. www.templebargallery.com. **© 01/671-0073.** Free admission. Tues–Sat 11am–6pm. Bus: 26, 37, 39, 39A, 39B, 39C, 49X, 50X, 65X, 66, 66A, 66B, 66D, 67, 67A, 69X, 70, 70A, 77X.



Grattan Bridge over the River Liffey.

PARKS & GARDENS

Dublin Zoo ** If you've got kids and they're in need of a change from castles, churches and history, here's the antidote. This modern, humane zoo in Phoenix Park provides a home for more than 235 species of wild animals and tropical birds. The animals live inside a series of realistically created habitats such as "African Savanna," home to giraffes, rhinos, and ostriches; "Gorilla Rainforest," a 12,000 square meter (7½ sq. mile) enclosure that houses five lowland gorillas; "Asian Forest," home to Sumatran tigers and lions; "the South American House" with an eclectic range of almost unbearably cute species, including tiny pygmy marmosets, and two-toed sloths; and the new "Pacific Coast," opened in 2015, home to sea lions (you can watch them swim underwater), and a flamingo aviary big enough for the gracious birds to take flight. There are playgrounds and gift shops scattered throughout. Feeding times and scheduled talks are posted on the zoo's website (several times daily from March to September, weekends only from October to February). A restaurant is on site, as well as plenty of smaller cafes, picnic areas for those who prefer to bring their own meals.

Phoenix Park, Dublin 8. www.dublinzoo.ie. \bigcirc 01/474-8900. Admission \in 17 adults; \in 13 seniors and students; \in 12 children 3–15; \in 5.80 special needs child; \in 9.20 special needs adult; \in 47– \in 56 families. Mar–Sept daily 9:30am–6pm; Oct daily 9:30am–5:30pm; Nov–Dec daily 9:30am–4pm; Jan daily 9:30am–4:30pm; Feb 9:30am–5pm. Last admission to zoo 1 hr. before closing; last admission to African Savanna 30 min. before closing. Luas: Heuston (15-min. walk). Bus: 25, 26, 46A, 66, 66A, 66B, 67, 69.

Phoenix Park ★ PARK The vast green expanses of Phoenix Park are Dublin's playground, and it's

easy to see why. This is a well-designed, user-friendly park crisscrossed by a network of roads and quiet pedestrian walkways that make its 704 hectares (1,739 acres) easily accessible. Avenues of oaks, beech trees, pines, and chestnut trees are shady hideaways, or you can sun yourself in broad expanses of grassland. It's a relaxing place to spend a restful afternoon, but there's plenty to do here should you feel active. The home of the Irish president (see p. 102) is in the park, as is the Dublin Zoo (see above). Livestock graze peacefully on pasturelands, deer roam the forested areas, and horses romp on polo fields. The visitor center is partly located inside **Ashtown Castle**, a 15th-century towerhouse. Astonishingly, the castle was only discovered in 1978—it had been completely incorporated into a later building, and only revealed when that structure was demolished. Free parking is adjacent to the center. Also next to the center is the **Victorian Tea Kiosk**, which serves snacks and light lunches, and has toilets. It's open from 10am to 4:30pm daily. The park is 3km (2 miles) west of the city center on the north bank of the River Liffey.

Phoenix Park, Dublin 8. www.phoenixpark.ie. © 01/677-0095. Free admission. Park: 24 hr. Visitor center: Apr–Dec daily 10am–6pm; Jan–Mar Wed–Sun 9:30am–5:30pm. Last admission 45 min. before closing. Bus: Castleknock Road entrance: 37. Navan Road entrance: 37, 38, 39, 70. North Circular Road entrance: 46A.

St. Stephen's Green \star PARK This lovely city center park is filled with public art, and there always seems to be something new and imaginative hidden amid its leafy walkways. Among them is a beautiful statue commemorating the Irish rebel Wolfe Tone (beside an affecting monument to the Great Famine) and a garden of scented plants for blind visitors. This is a great place for a summer picnic. If the weather's fine, you can take a buggy ride through the park; rides leave from the Grafton Street side and cost around €30 to €50 for one to four passengers.

Dublin 2. Luas: St. Stephen's Green. Bus: 20B, 32X, 33X, 39X, 40A, 40C, 41X, 46B, 46N, 46X, 51X, 58X, 70B, 70X, 84X, 92.

HORSE-DRAWN carriage tours

Touristy it may be, but there's something hard to resist about the idea of clattering over Dublin's cobblestoned streets in a horsedrawn carriage, with a driver who will comment on the sights as you clop past. Drivers and their carriages congregate at the Grafton Street side of St. Stephen's Green. Simply walk up to one and arrange your tour—anything from a short swing around the green to a half-hour Georgian tour or an hour-long Old City tour.

Rides are available on a first-come, first-served basis from April to October (weather permitting) and will run you about \notin 30 to \notin 60 for one to four passengers.

Alternatively, to book a tour in advance, **Bernard Fagan Horse Drawn Carriages** (www.bernardfagancarriages.com; \bigcirc **086/874-8691**) is one recommended company. They build their tours around what you're interested in seeing; prices vary accordingly, but expect to pay upwards of \in 25 per person for an hour-long tour.



The Wellington Monument is an obelisk located in Phoenix Park; at 203 feet tall, it is the largest obelisk in Europe.

FOR KIDS

The Ark: A Cultural Centre for Children \star ARTS CENTER This is a great option for children who are makers, thinkers, doers, listeners, and watchers. Age-specific programs are geared to small groups of kids from 2 to 12 years old. Mini-courses (1–2 hr. long) are designed around themes in music, visual arts, and theater; there are also workshops in photography, instrument making, and the art of architecture. The custom-designed arts center has three modern floors that house a theater, a gallery, and a workshop for hands-on learning sessions. Tickets include one child and one adult; prices vary, but expect to pay around $\epsilon 6$ to $\epsilon 12$ for most events. Check the current themes and schedule on the Ark's very helpful website and book well ahead.

11a Eustace St., Dublin 2. www.ark.ie. **© 01/670-7788.** Ticket prices vary. Event times vary; call ahead. DART: Tara St. Luas: Jervis. Bus: 27, 40, 49, 54A, 56A, 65, 65B, 68, 68A, 69, 69X, 77A, 77X, 79, 79A.

Dublinia \star HERITAGE SITE Covering the history of Dublin from the Viking age through medieval times, this child-friendly history "experience" is presented as a series of interactive tableaux—complete with sound effects, smells, and audio "reconstructions" of *olde worlde* Dublin. (They're such effective earworms, in fact, that even adults may find themselves thinking about them months later.) Kids can try on clothes like the ones their ancestors may have worn, or even find themselves

placed in the Dublin stocks as "felons." Check the website for details of special tours, with costumed guides, and other family-friendly activities. Dublinia is right across from Christ Church Cathedral, making this an excellent payoff for any little ones who patiently trudged around that historic but austere building; combined tickets for the two offer big savings.

St. Michael's Hill, Christ Church, Dublin 8. www.dublinia.ie. **© 01/679-4611.** Admission €8.50 adults; €7.50 seniors and students; €5.50 children; €24 families. Mar–Sept daily 10am–6:30pm; Oct–Feb daily 10am–5:30pm. Last admission 1 hr. before closing. Luas: Four Courts. Bus: 49, 49A, 54A, 123.

CHURCHES & CATHEDRALS

St. Audeon's Church \star CHURCH Near the only remaining gate of the Old City walls (dating from 1214), this is said to be the only surviving medieval parish church in Dublin. Although it is partly in ruins, significant parts have survived, including the west doorway, which dates from 1190, and the 13th-century nave. (*Note:* While this St. Audeon's is Church of Ireland, nearby is another St. Audeon's Church, this one Catholic and dating from 1846. It was in the latter church that Father "Flash" Kavanagh used to say the world's fastest Mass so that his congregation was out in time for the football matches.) Entrance to the ancient church is through a visitor center. The center's exhibition, relating the history of St. Audeon's, is self-guided; visits to the church itself are by guided tour, and it is only open in high season.

14 High St., Dublin 8. www.heritageireland.ie. © 01/677-0088. Free admission. Apr-Oct daily 9:30am-5:30pm. Bus: 49X, 50X, 51B, 51C, 51N, 54A, 78A, 206.

St. Mary's Pro Cathedral \star CATHEDRAL No, there isn't a pro and amateur league for Cathedrals in Ireland—"pro" simply means "temporary." And therein lies a fascinating piece of historical trivia. Contrary to popular belief, Dublin has no Roman Catholic Cathedral (St. Patrick's and Christ Church have been part of the Anglican Church of Ireland since the 16th century.) But the Vatican views Christ Church as Dublin's "true" Catholic Cathedral. Therefore, St. Mary's has been designated the "temporary" official Catholic cathedral in Dublin . . . since 1820. Tucked away on a rather unimpressive back street, it's nonetheless the heart of the city's Northside. It was built between 1815 and 1825 in Greek Revival Doric style, with an exterior portico modeled on the Temple of Theseus in Athens, with six Doric columns. The Renaissance-style interior is patterned after the Church of Saint-Philippe du Roule of Paris. The church is noted for its awe-inspiring Palestrina Choir, which sings a Latin Mass every Sunday at 11am (during term times).

83 Marlborough St., Dublin 1. www.procathedral.ie. **© 01/874-5441.** Free admission. Mon–Fri 7:30am–6:45pm; Sat 7:30am–7:15pm; Sun 9am–1:45pm, 5:30–7:45pm; public holidays 10am–1:30pm. DART: Connolly, Tara St. Luas: Abbey St. Bus: 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 7A, 7B, 7D, 8, 10, 10A, 11, 11A, 11B, 13, 20B, 27, 32X, 33X, 39X, 40A, 40C, 41, 41A, 41B, 41C, 41X, 42, 42A, 42B, 43, 51A, 116, 123, 130, 142, 747.

FAMILY favorites

Sure, Dublin is rich in history and culture, but if you've got restless kids in tow, museums and historic buildings can get old fast. Luckily, the Irish capital also has a good complement of attractions that are tailor-made for families.

For a lively tour of Dublin's Viking history, the **Viking Splash Tour**, in a reconditioned World War II amphibious "duck" vehicle (see "Dublin Bus Tours," p. 127), is more about fun than history. The same holds true of nearby **Dublinia** (see p 121), which offers a kid-focused history of Dublin with plenty of hands-on activities. If the youngsters need a little artistic stimulation, the **Ark** (see p. 120) offers arts classes and cultural experiences ranging from painting and drawing to theater.

If the weather's fine, Dublin's many parks give families a respite from the city's ruckus. Right in the center, **Merrion Square** and **St. Stephen's Green** have lawns for picnicking, ducks for feeding, playgrounds for swinging, and gardens for spotting flowers. The whole family can take a horse-drawn carriage ride around the parks (see box on p. 119). West of Dublin's city center, vast **Phoenix Park** is paradise for children on a sunny day (see p. 119). It holds the **Dublin Zoo** (p. 118), as well as sports fields, playgrounds, herds of free-roaming deer, and (last but not least) ice cream vendors.

Got a pack of eye-rolling teenagers to amuse? **Castle Dracula** (p. 128) and the **Dublin Ghost Bus** (p. 127) deliver some laughs and spooky moments that teens will appreciate, the more so because younger kids aren't allowed.

For a seaside adventure, go a few stops out on the DART light rail to the heritage village of **Dalkey**. At Coliemore Harbour, just a 10-minute walk from the train, you can take a ferry out to explore **Dalkey Island**. A few stops farther down on the DART line, the oceanfront resort town of **Bray** is home to the **National Sea Life Centre** (Strand Rd.; www.visitsealife.com/bray; **© 01/286-6939**). Along with the aquarium, Bray has arcades, games, and other family amusements along its charming boardwalk.

St. Michan's Church ** CHURCH Built on the site of an early Danish chapel (1095), this 17thcentury edifice has fine interior woodwork and an organ (dated 1724) on which Handel is said to have played his *Messiah*. But the church is more famous for its two underground crypts—one of which is filled with mummified bodies that have lain for centuries in an extraordinary state of preservation. A few still have their hair and fingernails; on others you can see desiccated internal organs under the skin. The tallest mummy is known as "the Crusader"; his legs were broken in order to fit him into the coffin. Others in residence include "the Nun" and "the Thief"—although their true identities were lost when the church records were destroyed during the civil war in 1922. It's a macabre place, but a fascinating one. Word is that Bram Stoker was inspired to write *Dracula* in part by having visited as a child. *Note:* The church is wheelchair accessible, but the vaults are not.

Church St., Dublin 7. www.stmichans.com. **© 01/872-4154.** Admission €5 adults; €4 seniors and students; €3.50 children; €15 families. Crypt: Mid-Mar–Oct Mon–Fri 10am–12:45pm, 2–4:45pm; Sat 10am–12:45pm. Nov–mid-Mar Mon–Fri 12:30–3:30pm; Sat 10am–12:45pm. No crypt tours Sun. Luas: Four Courts, Smithfield. Bus: 51D, 51X.

St. Teresa's Church \star CHURCH After years of anti-Catholic legislation, this was the first Catholic church to be legally and openly erected in Dublin, following the Catholic Relief Act of 1793. While the foundation stone was laid in 1793, many enlargements followed, until it reached its present neo-Gothic form in 1876. Among the artistic highlights are John Hogan's *Dead Christ*, a sculpture displayed beneath the altar, and Phyllis Burke's seven beautiful stained glass windows.

Clarendon St., Dublin 2. www.clarendonstreet.com. **© 01/671-8466.** Free admission; donations welcome. Daily 8am–8pm or longer. Bus: 15A, 15B, 44, 61, 100X, 101X, 109, 111, 133, 140.

St. Werburgh's Church \star CHURCH Although the neoclassical 18th-century exterior is hardly insignificant, you'd be forgiven for missing St. Werburgh's, as it doesn't look particularly church-like. There's a reason for this—the spire was demolished in 1803, ostensibly because it was in bad repair, although the true reason was that the British were worried that it could be used by snipers to target nearby Dublin Castle. The building itself dates from the late 12th century, although it was rebuilt several times—the present interior was modelled in 1877. Jonathan Swift (see p. 124) was baptized

here in 1677. The ornately carved wooden pulpit dates from the 1700s. Note the enormous cast-iron bell in the middle of the nave (you can hardly miss it). It doesn't, in fact, come from the old tower; it was placed here in honor of Napper Tandy, a leader of the 1798 rebellion, whose name is carved into the metal. To see inside the church you usually have to call first, or you could drop by no. 8 Castle Street (just around the corner) to ask the caretaker to let you in.

Werburgh St., Dublin 2. www.dublincastle.ie. © 01/478-3710. Free admission. Open by appointment May–Sept. Bus: 49X, 50X, 54A, 50X, 56A, 77, 77A, 77X, 78A, 150, 151.

Whitefriar Street Carmelite Church \star CHURCH This 19th-century Byzantine-style church is unexpectedly (perhaps dubiously) one of the city's most romantic spots, as it holds the relics of St. Valentine. The pieces of bone are believed to be authentic; they were given to the church by Pope Gregory XVI in 1836. They're kept in a casket on an altar to the right of the main altar, but once a year (on St. Valentine's Day, of course), they are carried out in procession for a special Mass. The church also holds an icon known as **Our Lady of Dublin**, a 15th-century woodcarving that, in 1824, was rescued from a nearby farm where it had been used as a pig trough.

56 Aungier St., Dublin 2. www.whitefriarstreetchurch.ie. **© 01/475-8821.** Free admission. Mon and Wed–Fri 7:30am–6pm; Tues 7:30am–9pm; Sat 7:30am–7pm; Sun 7:30am–8pm. Bus: 16, 16A, 19, 19A, 83, 122, or 155.

A CEMETERY

Glasnevin Cemetery & Museum * CEMETERY North of the city center, the Irish national cemetery was founded in 1832 and covers more than 50 hectares (124 acres). Most people buried here were ordinary citizens, but there are also many famous names on the headstones, ranging from former Irish Taoiseach (prime minister) Eamon de Valera to other political heroes and rebels including Michael Collins, Daniel O'Connell, Countess Constance Markievicz, and Charles Stewart Parnell. Literary figures also have their place here—you can find writers Christy Brown (immortalized in the film *My Left Foot*) and Brendan Behan. There's a small museum devoted to the cemetery and its famous occupants. Guided tours run daily, or you can download a self-guided tour app for your smartphone for \notin 10 via the cemetery's website. Maps showing who is buried where are also for sale in the flower shop at the entrance.

Finglas Rd., Glasnevin, Dublin 11. www.glasnevintrust.ie. \bigcirc 01/882-6550. Museum and tour €12 seniors and adults, €8 students and children, €25 families; museum only €6 adults, €4 seniors, students and children, €15 families; self-guided audio tour €10. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun and public holidays 11am–5pm. Tours: Daily 11:30am and 2:30pm. Bus: 4, 9, 40, 83, 140, 58X, 66X, 67X, 70X, 84X, 92.

HARD TO love: JONATHAN SWIFT

The acerbic 18th-century wit Jonathan Swift, author of *Gulliver's Travels*, was born in Dublin, and except for a decade or so in England, he lived in Ireland most of his life. After failing to win a position at the English court, he became a Church of Ireland clergyman, while continuing to write and publish essays and poetry. In fact, he wrote his most controversial works while acting as dean of St Patrick's Cathedral.

Many nations might have banned Swift for his scandalous writing. He certainly could not live in England—his works were considered too shocking. But the Irish always forgave him, and the church protected him, even after he published his most infamous essay, "A Modest Proposal," in 1729. In that essay, still read in English classes around the world today, he advocated (ironically) that the Irish should sell their children to be eaten as food, in order to solve the problem of Irish poverty. He assured the reader that Irish babies would be delicious "whether stewed, roasted, baked or boiled . . .".

Satire was relatively unknown at the time, and many readers at first believed he was seriously advocating cannibalism. The essay caused public outrage, and calls for him to be punished. But the church stood by him, as did the town, allowing him to continue to push the limits of 18th-century patience.

Swift believed passionately in humane treatment for the mentally ill, which in his time was unheard of. When he died, he bequeathed much of his estate to found St. Patrick's Hospital for the mentally ill. Typically, though, he couldn't just leave it at that. He wrote one last caustic verse about himself, and the country he loved:

"He left the little wealth he had To build a house for fools and mad; Showing in one satiric touch No nation needed it so much."



The Guinness Storehouse in Dublin.

DISTILLERIES

Guinness Storehouse \star FACTORY TOUR Opened in 1759, the Guinness Storehouse is one of the world's most famous breweries, producing the distinctive dark stout, known and loved the world over. You can explore the Guinness Hopstore, tour a converted 19th-century building housing the World of Guinness Exhibition, and view a film showing how the stout is made; then move on to the Gilroy Gallery that's dedicated to the graphic design work of John Gilroy (whose work you will have seen if you've ever been in an Irish pub); and last but not least, stop in at the breathtaking Gravity Bar. Here you can sample a glass of the famous brew in the glass-enclosed bar 61m (200 ft.) above the ground, complete with 360-degree views of the city.

St. James's Gate, off Robert St., Dublin 8. www.guinness-storehouse.com. \bigcirc 01/408-4800. Admission \in 18 adults; \in 15 seniors and students over 18; \in 12 student under 18; \in 6.50 children 6–12; children 5 and under free; \in 43 families. Sept–May daily 9:30am–5pm (last admission); July–Aug daily 9:30am–7pm (last admission). Luas: St. James's Hospital. Bus: 123.

The Old Jameson Distillery \star FACTORY TOUR Learn as much as you can bear about one of Ireland's most famous whiskies from the right-in-front-of-your-eyes demonstrations at this working distillery, near St. Michan's Church (see p. 122) on the north side of the city. At the conclusion of the tour, you can sip a little firewater and see what you think. A couple of lucky people on each tour are

selected to be "tasters" and sample different Irish, Scotch, and American whiskeys. Tours run throughout the day, about every 30 minutes, and last an hour.

Bow St., Smithfield Village, Dublin 7. www.jamesonwhiskey.com. \bigcirc 01/807-2348. Admission \in 15 adults; \in 12 seniors and students; \in 8 children; \in 40 families. Mon–Sat 9am–6pm; Sun 10am–6pm; last tours 5:15pm. Bus: 67, 67A, 68, 69, 79, 90.

Outlying Attractions

Butler's Chocolate Experience \star FACTORY TOUR Ireland is awash with brewery tours, but rare is the chance to look around a real-life chocolate factory. The world-famous chocolatiers have been based in Dublin since the 1930s. The delectable confections are now produced at a completely unlovable-looking industrial park on the road to Malahide, but like all the best soft-centered chocolates, the sweet part is on the inside. The tour takes you around the factory to see the luxury chocolate makers in action. (Don't worry, there are plenty of tastings.) The factory is completely accessible to wheelchair users. You have to book tours in advance and space is quite limited. No chocolates are made on Saturday, so the weekday tours are definitely the most fun.

Clonshagh Business and Technology Park, Oscar Traynor Rd., Dublin 17. www.butlerschocolates.com/chocolateexperience. \bigcirc 01/851-2151. Admission \in 13 adults; \in 48 families. Mon—Sat 10am, noon, and 3:30pm. Booking essential. Bus: 130. From Dublin take R105 then join R107 toward Malahide. Continue for about 3.5km (2¹/₂ miles) then turn left onto Oscar Traynor Td. The business park is second on the right, then the factory is the 4th left turn once you're inside the park.



Painting chocolate bears at Butler's Chocolate Experience.

DUBLIN bus tours

Convenient, comfortable, and—remember this when the heavens open in June—relatively immune to inclement weather, bus tours are a great way to pack a lot of sightseeing into a little time. And while Dublin has more than its fair share of standard tourist buses, some are more original.

For a lively tour of Dublin's Viking history, the Viking Splash Tour (www.vikingsplash.ie; $\bigcirc 01/707-6000$) in a reconditioned World War II amphibious "duck" vehicle starts on land and eventually splashes into the Grand Canal. Viking helmets, though supplied, are optional. Tickets are $\notin 22$ adults, $\notin 20$ seniors and students, $\notin 16$ teenagers and $\notin 12$ children.

Of the many "hop on, hop off" style bus tours of the city, one of the best is the **Dublin Sightseeing** tour, run by **Dublin Bus** (www.dublinsightseeing.ie; \bigcirc 01/703-3028). The 24-stop tour takes you all around the city center and out as far as Kilmainham Gaol (see p. 103). You can leave and rejoin the tour as many times as you like in a day. Buses run all day, every 10 minutes from 9am to 3:30pm, every 15 minutes until 5:30pm, and every 30 minutes until the last bus at around 6:30pm. Tickets cost €19 adults, €17 seniors and students, €8 children. Large discounts are sometimes offered for families if you book online.

The North Coast and Castle Tour and the South Coast and Gardens Tour, also run by Dublin Bus, take you on all-day excursions to the picturesque coastal regions on the far fringes of Dublin. Tickets for both tours include entry to a separate attraction; the medieval Malahide Castle and its landscaped park to the north, and Powerscourt House and Gardens (see p. 183) to the south. The cost is $\notin 24$ adults, $\notin 12$ children.

A spooky evening tour in a bus decked out in, um . . . spooky wallpaper, **Dublin Ghost Bus** (www.dublinsightseeing.ie/ghostbus; O 01/703-3028) addresses Dublin's history of felons, fiends, and phantoms. You'll see haunted houses, learn of Dracula's Dublin origins, and even get a crash course in body snatching. It's all ghoulish fun but actually quite scary in places, so it's not recommended for anyone younger than teenagers. Tickets cost €28.

Likewise, the entertaining Gravediggers Tour (www.thegravedigger.ie; \bigcirc 085/102-3646) takes you in pursuit of a few ghoulish and well-intentioned scares. Just when it all seems like too much for the faint-hearted, the bus stops at the Gravediggers Pub by Glasnevin Cemetery (see p. 124) for a fortifying drink—included in the ticket price of €26. Live actors and 4D technology help bring the whole experience to life. Or should that be . . .



The Casino Marino house.

Casino Marino $\star\star$ ARCHITECTURAL SITE This unique and unexpected little architectural gem in the middle of a suburban park has nothing at all to do with gambling; "casino" simply means "little house." Built in around 1770, the tiny neoclassical exterior is exquisitely proportioned, with Corinthian columns and elaborate detail around the white stone cornices. Inside, unlikely though it seems from the compactness of the exterior, a full 16 rooms are decorated with rich 18th-century architectural details, such as beautiful plasterwork ceilings and subtly curved windows. Entry is by tour only, but the cheerful guides help put it all into context.

Casino Park (signposted from R107, Malahide Road), Dublin. www.heritageireland.ie. **© 01/833-1618.** Admission €3 adults; €2 seniors; €1 families €8 children and students. Mid-Mar–Oct daily 10am–5pm. Last admission 45 min. before closing. Closed Nov–mid-Mar except to pre-booked groups. Bus: 14, 20B, 27, 27A, 27B, 27C, 42, 43, 127, 128, 129.

Castle Dracula \star INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT Well, this is certainly a novel way to spend a Friday night. Part live theater, part museum, this homage to Dublin-born author Bram Stoker is set up as a tour of "Castle Dracula," through a series of elaborately constructed sets and tunnels. Costumed actors try to scare you and make you laugh in almost equal measure, while you learn more about Bram Stoker and the Dracula phenomenon along the way. (They even have a real lock of Stoker's hair, allegedly taken from his corpse by his wife). The tour ends in an underground auditorium made to look like a spooky graveyard, where you watch a live show that includes comedy and two magicians. The emphasis overall is on laughs rather than scares (although, as there are a few of those, no kids under 14 are allowed). You meet at the reception lobby of the Westwood Club, a modern gym, which somehow adds to the bizarreness of the whole experience. Tickets must be booked in advance. Clontarf DART station is literally next door, or it's about a 15-minute cab ride from the center of Dublin.

Meet at Westwood Gym, Clontarf Rd. (next to Clontarf DART), Dublin. www.castledracula.ie. **© 01/851-2151.** Admission €25 adults; €20 seniors, students and children 15–18. Mar–Aug Fri only 7:30pm. (May not run every Fri—check website for schedule.) DART: Clontarf. Bus: 130.

Dalkey Castle & Heritage Centre ★ HERITAGE SITE Housed in a 15th-century tower house, this center tells the history of venerable Dalkey town in a few sweet, if unsophisticated, displays. Tours run by costumed guides tell the tale of the building (complete with live performance), or you can duck out of the tour and take in the view from the battlements instead. Adjoining the center is a medieval graveyard and the Church of St. Begnet (Dalkey's patron saint), whose foundations date back to Ireland's early Christian period. Dalkey itself is worth a wander; a heritage town with plenty of historic buildings, it also has lots of charming pubs, restaurants, and pricey little boutiques.

Castle St., Dalkey (16km/10 miles southeast of Dublin on R119). www.dalkeycastle.com. \bigcirc 01/285-8366. Admission €8.50 adults; €7 seniors and students; €6.50 children 5–12; €25 families. Mon, Wed–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun 11am–5pm. DART: Dalkey. Bus: 7D, 59.

SPORTS & OUTDOOR PURSUITS

BEACHES Plenty of fine beaches are accessible by city bus or DART, which follows the coast from Howth, north of the city, to Bray, south of the city in County Wicklow. Some popular beaches include **Dollymount**, 5km (3 miles) away; **Sutton**, 11km ($6\frac{3}{4}$ miles) away; **Howth**, 15km ($9\frac{1}{3}$ miles) away; and **Portmarnock** and **Malahide**, each 11km ($6\frac{3}{4}$ miles) away. The southern commuter town of **Dún Laoghaire** (pronounced Dun *Lear*-y), 11km ($6\frac{3}{4}$ miles) away, makes a particularly good day trip. Not only does it offer a beach (at Sandycove) and a long bayfront promenade, there are plenty of interesting shops and a bucolic park to wander around in. For more details, inquire at the Dublin Tourism office.

BIRD-WATCHING The many estuaries, salt marshes, sand flats, and islands near Dublin Bay provide a varied habitat for a number of species. **Rockabill Island,** off the coast at Skerries, is home to an important colony of roseate terns; there is no public access to the island, but the birds can be seen from the shore. **Rogerstown and Malahide estuaries,** on the Northside of Dublin, are wintering grounds for large numbers of brent geese, ducks, and waders. **Sandymount Strand,** on Dublin's south side, has a vast intertidal zone; around dusk in July and August, you can often see large numbers of terns, including visiting roseate terns from Rockabill Island.

Your all-around best bet is a bird sanctuary called Bull Island, also known as the **North Bull**, just north of Dublin city harbor at the suburb of Clontarf. It's not an island at all, but a 3km (2-mile) spit of marshland connected to the mainland by a bridge. It was inadvertently created early in the 19th century by Captain William Bligh, of *Mutiny on the Bounty* fame, when he was head of the Port and Docks Board. Bligh ordered the construction of a harbor wall at the mouth of the River Liffey, in an effort to stop the bay from silting up, and in fairly short order the shifting sands created this small landmass. Its dunes, salt marsh, and extensive intertidal flats provide a unique environment that attracts thousands of seabirds. Hundreds of species have been recorded and 40,000 birds shelter and nest here. In winter, these figures are boosted by tens of thousands of migrants from the Arctic Circle,

and North American spoonbills, little egrets, and sandpipers. Together, they all make a deafening racket. A visitor center is open daily 10am to 4:30pm; admission is free.

FISHING Local rivers, reservoirs, and fisheries offer plenty of opportunities for freshwater angling. A day's catch might include perch, rudd, pike, salmon, sea trout, brown trout, or freshwater eel. **Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI)**, a governmental agency, runs a great website dedicated to fishing in Ireland—the prosaically-named **Fishing in Ireland** (www.fishinginireland.info). In addition to handy run-downs of rules, regulations, and license details for pike, salmon, trout and other forms of fishing, they also have a contact list for local angling clubs. The Dublin regional office is **IFI HQ** at the Citywest Business Campus, Dublin 24 (email dublin@fisheriesireland.ie; © 01/884-2600).

GOLF Dublin is one of the world's great golfing capitals, with a quarter of Ireland's courses including 5 of the top 10—within an hour's drive of the city. Visitors are welcome, but phone ahead and make a reservation. The following four courses—two parkland and two links—are among the best 18-hole courses in the Dublin area.

Elm Park Golf & Sports Club \star , Nutley Lane, Donnybrook, Dublin 4 (www.elmparkgolfclub.ie; \circ 01/269-2650), is in the residential, privileged south side of Dublin. The beautifully manicured par-69 course is especially popular with visitors because it is within 6km (3³/₄ miles) of the city center. Greens fees are €50 Monday to Thursday, €60 Friday, €45 Saturday and Sunday (or €35 before 10am; non-members are not allowed after midday on weekends.)

Portmarnock Golf Club \star , in Portmarnock (www.portmarnockgolfclub.ie; © 01/846-2968), is a respected links course. About 16km (10 miles) from the city center on Dublin's Northside, on a spit of land between the Irish Sea and a tidal inlet, this course opened in 1894. Over the years, the par-72 championship course has been the scene of leading tournaments, including the Dunlop Masters (1959, 1965), Canada Cup (1960), Alcan (1970), St. Andrews Trophy (1968), and many an Irish Open. You won't be surprised, then, to find out that fees are a bit pricey. Greens fees are around €185 weekdays (€125 from November to March), €195 weekends. The price includes lunch.

Royal Dublin Golf Club \star , Bull Island, Dollymount, Dublin 3 (www.theroyaldublingolfclub.com; **01/833-6346**), is often compared to St. Andrews. The century-old, par-73 championship seaside links is on an island in Dublin Bay, 4.8km (3 miles) northeast of the city center. Like Portmarnock, it has been rated among the world's top courses and has played host to several Irish Opens. The home base of Ireland's legendary champion Christy O'Connor, Sr., the Royal Dublin is well known for its fine bunkers, close lies, and subtle trappings. Visitors can play on weekdays except Wednesday, and they hold a few slots for guests on Saturday 4am to 5:30pm and Sunday 10am to noon. Greens fees are \in 150 (\in 75 from Nov to Mar); a second round may be played at half price if there's space available.

St. Margaret's Golf & Country Club \star in Skephubble, St. Margaret's (www.stmargaretsgolf.com; © 01/864-0400), is a stunning, par-72 parkland course 4.8km (3 miles) west of Dublin Airport. Greens fees are around €30 Monday to Friday, €40 Saturday and Sunday, or slightly less in winter.

HORSEBACK RIDING Plenty of riding stables are within easy reach of central Dublin, and prices average about $\in 25$ to $\in 50$ an hour, with or without instruction. Many stables offer guided trail riding, as well as courses in show jumping, dressage, prehunting, eventing, and cross-country riding. For trail riding through Phoenix Park, Ashtown Riding Stables (www.ashtownstables.com; © 01/838-3807) is ideal. They're in the village of Ashtown, adjoining the park and only 10 minutes by car or

bus (no. 37, 38, 39, 70, or 120) from the city center. You can also get there by train from Dublin Connolly station in less than 15 minutes; Ashtown station is directly opposite the stables. Among the other riding centers within easy reach of downtown Dublin are **Carrickmines Equestrian Centre**, Glenamuck Road, Foxrock, Dublin 18 (www.carrickminesequestrian.ie; © 01/295-5990), and **Brennanstown Riding School** in Hollybrook, Kilmacanogue (www.brennanstownrs.ie; © 01/286-3778).

WALKING For casual walking, there are marked trails along the Royal Canal and Grand Canal, which skirt the north and south city centers, respectively. Because they stick to the towpaths of the canals, the paths are flat and easy. Both routes pass a range of small towns and villages that can be used as starting or stopping points.

The walk from Bray (the southern terminus of the DART) to Greystones along the rocky promontory of **Bray Head** is a more vigorous excursion, with beautiful views back toward Killiney Bay, Dalkey Island, and Bray. Follow the beachside promenade south through Bray; at the outskirts of town, the promenade turns left and up, beginning the ascent of Bray Head. Shortly after the ascent begins, a trail branches to the left—this is the cliffside walk, which continues another 5km (3 miles) along the coast to Greystones. From the center of Greystones, a train will take you back to Bray. This is an easy walk, about 2 hours each way, but don't attempt it in bad weather or strong winds, as the cliffside path becomes treacherous.

For great views of Killiney Bay, Bray Head, and Sugarloaf Mountain, climb the steep seaside heights of **Dalkey Hill** and **Killiney Hill**. To get there, leave the Dalkey DART station, head into the center of Dalkey and then south on Dalkey Avenue (at the post office). About 1km (½ mile) from the post office, you'll pass a road ascending through fields on your left—this is the entrance to the Dalkey Hill Park. From the parking lot, climb a series of steps to the top of Dalkey Hill. From here you can see the expanse of the bay, the Wicklow Hills in the distance, and the obelisk topping nearby Killiney Hill. If you continue on to the obelisk, there is a trail leading from there down the seaward side to Vico Road, another lovely place for a seaside walk. It's about 1km (½ mile) from the parking lot to Killiney Hill.

WATERSPORTS Certified level-one and level-two instruction and equipment rental for three watersports—kayaking, sailing, and windsurfing—are available at the **Surfdock Centre**, Grand Canal Dock Yard, Ringsend, Dublin 4 (www.surfdock.ie; © 01/668-3945). The center has 17 hectares (42 acres) of enclosed fresh water for its courses.

SPECTATOR SPORTS

GAELIC SPORTS If your schedule permits, try to get to a Gaelic football or hurling match—the only indigenously Irish games and two of the fastest-moving sports around. Gaelic football is vaguely a cross between soccer and American football; you can move the ball with either your hands or feet. Hurling is a lightning-speed game in which 30 men use heavy sticks to fling a hard leather ball called a *sliotar*—think field hockey meets lacrosse. Both amateur sports are played every weekend throughout the summer at local fields, culminating in September with the All-Ireland Finals, the Irish version of the Super Bowl. For schedules and admission fees, phone the Gaelic Athletic Association, Croke Park, Jones Road, Dublin 3 (www.gaa.ie; © 01/836-3222).

RUGBY & SOCCER The Aviva Stadium, 62 Lansdowne Rd., Dublin 4 (www.avivastadium.ie; © 01/238-2300), is, depending on your perspective, either a gleaming, modern monument to Irish

sports, or one of Dublin's biggest eyesores. Either way you really can't miss it. This is the official home of both the national rugby and football (soccer) teams.

GREYHOUND RACING Races are held throughout the year at **Shelbourne Park Greyhound Stadium**, South Lotts Road, Dublin 4, and **Harold's Cross Stadium**, 151 Harold's Cross Rd. Both can be contacted via the **Irish Greyhound Board** (www.igb.ie) or call © 1890/269-269.

HORSE RACING The closest racecourse to the city center is the **Leopardstown Race Course**, off the Stillorgan road (N11), Foxrock, Dublin 18 (www.leopardstown.com; © 01/289-0500). This modern facility with all-weather, glass-enclosed spectator stands is 9.7km (6 miles) south of the city center. Racing meets—mainly steeplechases, but also a few flats—are scheduled throughout the year, two or three times a month.

WHERE TO STAY IN DUBLIN

With a healthy mix of plush hotels and grand old guesthouses, Dublin excels in providing a place to rest your head at the end of a day. Unfortunately, finding a really great, *affordable* place to stay is a tougher prospect. In this book we have tried to list as many of these "finds" as we can. If you're prepared to stay slightly outside of the city center, your options open up quite a bit (remember that public transportation, including taxis, is relatively cheap). This is particularly true in the leafy suburb of Ballsbridge (just south of the city center) that is fast becoming a center for affordable accommodations.

Wherever you're staying, try to book as far in advance as possible. The most sought-after places fill up fast. Always try to book online in the first instance—many hotels offer web-only special deals that can amount to massive savings on the rack rate. Remember, the fact that times are tough in the global economy right now cuts both ways: Hotels are eager to secure your business. There are some truly amazing deals out there, if you know where to look. Don't be shy about asking about any available discounts or special offers.

If you arrive in Ireland without a reservation, don't despair. One of the best sources of last-minute rooms (often at a discount) is **www.visitdublin.com**. The website lets you view hotels and guesthouses with immediate availability. However, you will have problems at immigration if you arrive in Ireland without a place to stay at least for your first night.

Historic Old City & Temple Bar/Trinity College Area

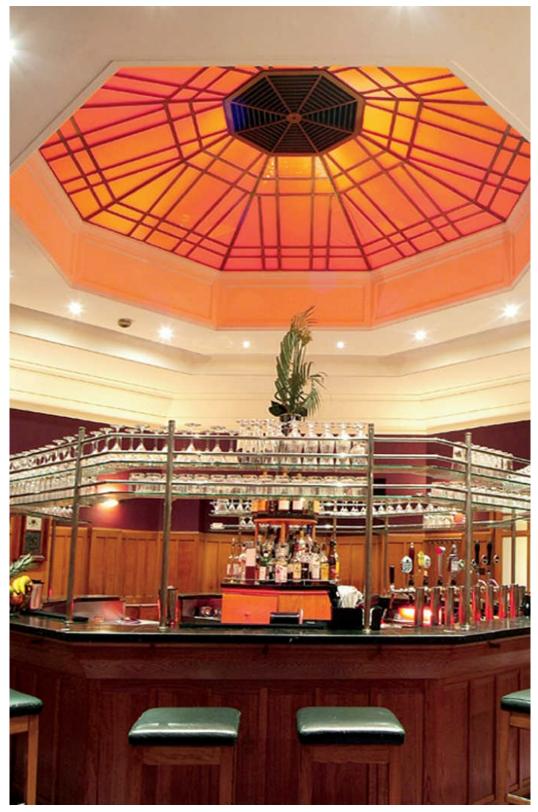
Temple Bar is the youngest, most vibrant niche in a young, vibrant town. Stay here and you'll be on the doorstep of practically anywhere you'd want to go. That said, it can get *very* noisy at night, so request a room on a top floor or at the rear of the establishment if you want some shut-eye.

EXPENSIVE

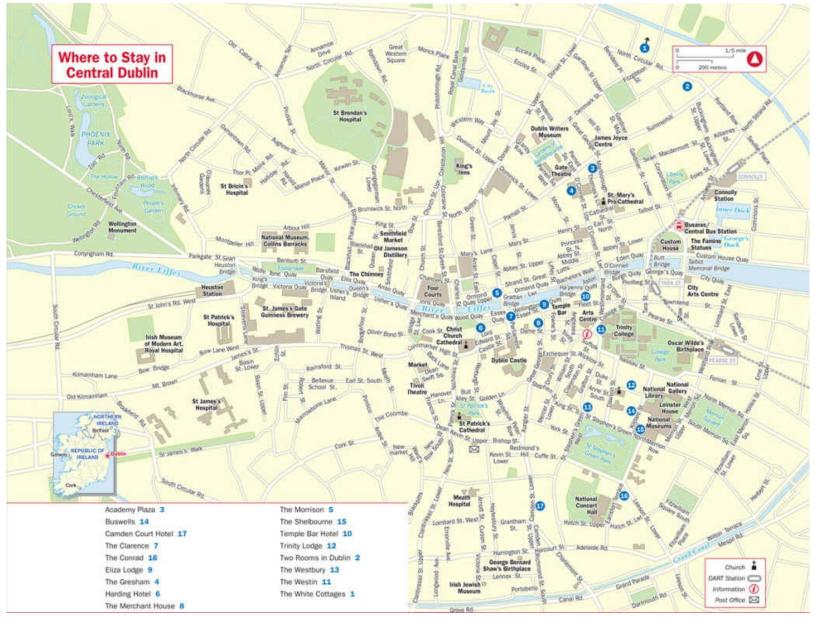
The Clarence $\star\star$ Back in the 1990s, when the Celtic Tiger was starting to roar, the Clarence became something of a symbol of the "new" Dublin. Chic, fashionable, and with megastar owners to boot (Bono and the Edge from U2, who can still occasionally be spotted here), it spoke of Dublin's revival as a modern and cultured capital city. These days, with the economy skulking along at more of a purr, the Clarence has lost some of its original luster (a refurbishment is overdue in places); and the surrounding profusion of ever-trendy bars and restaurants can mean street noise is a problem. (Despite what they all tell you, no hotel smack-dab in the middle of the capital's party district can ever *really* guarantee a quiet night's sleep.) However, the friendly and professional staff go a long

way toward making up for the disappointing edges. Pleasant, well-sized guest rooms are done in contemporary tones (chocolate and cream or white with accents of scarlet and black). Most of the furniture is the work of Irish designers, and beds are luxuriously comfortable. And a definite plus is the price tag—rooms here are relative bargains, considering that this still qualifies as a big-name hotel in the city. The trendy (and pricey) new **Cleaver East** restaurant serves ultra-contemporary Irish cuisine, and stopping by the **Octagon Bar** for a pint of Guinness is an absolute must, even if you're not staying.

6-8 Wellington Quay, Dublin 2. www.theclarence.ie. \bigcirc 01/407-0800. 49 units. €143€219 double; €332–€549 suite. Breakfast €18–€25. Dinner, bed and breakfast packages available. Valet parking €5 per hour. Amenities: Bar; restaurant; gym; room service; spa; Wi-Fi (free). Bus: 26, 66, 66A, 66B, 66D, 67, 67A.



The Octagon Bar in the Clarence hotel draws celebrities, not to the exclusion of regular folk.



The Westin ** With its grand, imposing facade (due to its former incarnation as a bank), this hotel boasts some handsome original 19th-century features in its interior, and even those parts that feel more modern have an impeccably well-maintained elegance to them. Guest rooms are large and with an appropriately traditional air to the modern decor, with subtly distressed wood furniture and wide leather headboards on the outrageously comfortable beds. The Mint Bar remains a fashionable hangout for the Dublin glitterati, and the basement **Exchange** restaurant serves excellent, modern European food. The only thing missing is a spa, but you can book pampering treatments in your room. Westmoreland St., Dublin 2. www.thewestindublin.com. **© 01/645-1000.** 163 units. €230-€439 double; €389-€729 suite. Rates include breakfast. Dinner, bed and breakfast packages available. Valet parking €25 per day. Amenities: Bar; restaurant; gym; room service; Wi-Fi (€15). Bus: 1, 7B, 7D, 9, 11, 13, 16, 16C, 25N, 26, 33N, 39N, 40, 41N, 44, 100, 133.

MODERATE

Buswells $\star\star$ The traditional air of a gentleman's club prevails at this midprice hotel in central Dublin. Original features of the Georgian building are maintained, from the intricate cornices of the 19th-century plasterwork to the polished marble fireplaces and heavy curtains. Therefore it can come as a surprise to find the small but decently furnished guest rooms are modern in style (rather bland, even, after the lovely, traditional spaces one walks through to get to them). Visitors with mobility problems should be certain to ask for a room on a lower floor, as the old building (actually three townhouses merged together), is full of stairs to climb. Pleasant though it is, Buswell's real selling

point is the location—just a few minutes' walk to Trinity College in one direction and St. Stephen's Green in the other. You're in the very heart of the action here.

23–25 Molesworth St., Dublin 2. www.buswells.ie. \bigcirc 01/614-6500. 69 units. €141–€184 double. Hotel covers cost of parking at nearby lot (overnight only). Cheaper rates do not include breakfast. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; Wi-Fi (free). DART: Pearse. Bus: 7B, 7D, 10, 10A, 11, 11A, 11B, 13, 14, 14A, 15, 15A, 15B, 15C, 15X, 20B, 25X, 32X, 27C, 33X, 39B, 40A, 40C, 41X, 46A, 46B, 46C, 51D, 51X, 58X, 67X, 84X, 92.

Eliza Lodge \star Right in the middle of Temple Bar, above a popular Italian restaurant, and overlooking the River Liffey, this smart hotel could hardly feel more in the thick of the action. Guest rooms are simple and compact, with large windows letting in plenty of natural light, although the modern bathrooms can verge on shoebox size. Like so many other hotels in this neighborhood, however, its biggest drawback is the flipside of its greatest asset: the location. Temple Bar is the liveliest part of a busy capital city, and the fact that Eliza Lodge is also on a major traffic intersection hardly acts as an aid to restful sleep. Even without the enticement of a better view of the river, that's good enough reason to fork over extra for an upper floor room. One useful tip for travelers arriving on the overnight flights: You can check in (very) early for just $\in 20$ extra, although this must be requested in advance.

23–24 Wellington Quay (on the corner of Eustace St.), Dublin 2. www.elizalodge.com. \bigcirc 01/671-8044. 18 units. €99–€169 double. Discount parking at nearby lot (€7 overnight, €14 for 24 hr.). Rates include breakfast. Dinner, bed and breakfast packages available. Amenities: Restaurant; Wi-Fi (free). Bus: 26, 39B, 51, 51B, 51C, 51D, 51X, 66, 66A, 66B, 66D, 67, 67A, 68, 69, 69X, 78, 78A, 79, 79A, 90, 92, 206, 748.

Harding Hotel ** Just central enough not to feel like a trek to the main tourist sites, but far enough to escape the inevitable nighttime crowds that descend on nearby Temple Bar, this is an excellent option on the western edge of the city center. The polished wood and bright, floor-to-ceiling windows of the cheerful lobby give off a pleasantly old-fashioned vibe, even though most of the hotel is quite modern. The comfortable guest rooms are a terrific value. Even in high season, you can usually find a double room for well under $\in 100$, and triple rooms typically cost just a little bit more than standard doubles. This makes the Harding a particularly standout option for families. It's not overly fancy, but it's pleasant, clean, and has everything you need.

Copper Alley, Fishamble St., Dublin 2. www.hardinghotel.ie. \bigcirc 01/679-6500. 52 units. \bigcirc 95– \bigcirc 176 double. No parking. Breakfast not included in lower rates. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; accessible rooms; Wi-Fi (free). Bus: 37, 39, 39A, 39B, 39C, 39X, 49, 49A, 49X, 50, 50X, 56A, 70, 70A, 70X.

The Merchant House \star Mainly geared toward business travelers and couples, the accommodations here are different from a conventional guesthouse. The Merchant House is a series of swanky guest suites, with various services attached but no dedicated reception area. The upside to this is a greater degree of privacy and freedom. The downside is that, while the entrance is secure and private, the building isn't staffed all the time. (Travelers who prefer their local color not too, well, colorful, should also be warned that it's next door to a fetish store—albeit a fairly discreet one.) The suites themselves are extremely well designed; features of the original 18th-century building were beautifully retained when the place was renovated in 2006. Nicely modern touches include flatscreen TVs and elegant contemporary furnishings, and fancy optional extras include a dedicated chauffeur. The bed-and-breakfast rate includes daily housekeeping service and breakfast at a nearby cafe.

8 Eustace St., Dublin 2. www.themerchanthouse.eu. \bigcirc 01/633-4447. 4 units. \in 115– \in 145 double. No children. No parking. Breakfast not included in lower rates. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free). Bus: 39B, 49X, 50X, 65X, 77X.

Temple Bar Hotel ★ This cheerful, well-run hotel certainly wins in the location stakes, sitting right

in the middle of trendy Temple Bar. Guest rooms are surprisingly large, and decorated in a clean, modern style, albeit with rather cheap furnishings. Executive rooms offer plenty of extra space for a small premium. The bar downstairs has live music, although if it's not to your fancy, there are a dozen other lively pubs within a stone's throw. The amenities are somewhat lacking for the price, but then again this *is* Temple Bar—hardly bargain central around here.

10 Fleet St., Dublin 2. www.templebarhotel.com. **Ø 01/612-9200.** 129 units. €123–€220 double. Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Bar; room service; Wi-Fi (free). DART: Pearse. Bus: 100X, 133.

O'Connell Street Area/North of the Liffey

The Northside has some good offerings in the way of hotels. Though in some respects a less soughtafter area, it's still very central and within walking distance of all the major sights and shops. Hotel rates tend to be lower than they are just across the bridge.

EXPENSIVE

The Morrison ** Rooms at this chic hotel on the north bank of the Liffey verge on futuristic, with ultra-modern furniture, moody uplighting, and a host of flashy extras, such 40-inch HDTVs. It's all very straight lines and fancy gizmos (they even have in-house tech support), although song lyrics painted onto the walls here and there add an edge of Irish literary romance. There's a good restaurant, the **Morrison Grill**, and a funky cocktail lounge. Sometimes it can feel a little like form over function, but the helpful staff makes everything run smoothly.

Lower Ormond Quay, Dublin 1. www.morrisonhotel.ie. \bigcirc 01/887-2400. 138 units. \notin 161– \notin 233 double; \notin 224– \notin 379 suite. No children under 3. Discount parking at nearby lot (\notin 12 per day). Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; gym; Wi-Fi (free). Bus: 25, 25A, 25B, 25N, 25X, 26, 66, 66A, 66B, 66N, 66X, 67, 67N, 67X, 69N.

MODERATE

The Gresham ** One of Dublin's most historic hotels, the Gresham is also one of the oldest—it opened in 1817, though it was almost destroyed during the Easter Rising of 1916. Most of the current building dates from the 1920s; the public areas retain a wonderfully glamorous art deco feel, preserved during a big modernization of the hotel in the mid-2000s. Although the suites are nothing short of opulent, the cheaper guest rooms can be a little bland, but they're comfortable, well equipped, and most importantly, surprisingly affordable for a hotel with this kind of pedigree. The **Writer's Lounge**, a beautiful remnant of its Jazz Age heyday, is a popular spot for afternoon tea. Overlooking both the hotel lobby and busy O'Connell Street, it's also one of the best perches in the city for some unashamed people watching.

23 Upper O'Connell St., Dublin 1. www.gresham-hotels.com. \bigcirc 01/874-6881. 298 units. €90–€265 double. No children under 3. Discount parking at nearby lot (€15 overnight). Breakfast not included in lower rates. Dinner, bed and breakfast packages available. Amenities: 2 restaurants; 2 bars; room service; discounted use of nearby gym and pool (€10); Wi-Fi (free). Luas: Abbey St. Bus: 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 7A, 7B, 7D, 8, 10, 10A, 11, 11A, 11B, 13.

INEXPENSIVE

Academy Plaza Hotel ★ Owned by the Best Western chain, this is a large, modern, low-frills option popular with business travelers but well located for travelers exploring central Dublin. The lobby is small but pleasant, with wood paneling and leather furniture; rooms are compact and simple, with cream walls, rust-and-brown-colored carpet, and well insulated windows to shield you from street noise. Some rooms are bigger than others, so if size matters, request a deluxe room. Bathrooms are decent and modern, with showers above the baths. Breakfasts are sizeable, if not terribly varied, and can be ordered in your room (for a charge). Staff are pleasant and the location, for the money, is

very good.

10-14 Findlater Place, off O'Connell Street, Dublin 1. www.academyplazahotel.ie. \bigcirc 01/878-0666. 304 units. €60-€90 double. Parking €12 per day. Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free). Luas: Abbey St. Bus: 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 7A, 7B, 7D, 8, 10, 10A, 11, 11A, 11B, 13.

Two Rooms in Dublin *** This exceptionally sweet and welcoming little B&B on the Northside of Dublin is run by two of the most cultured and well-travelled hoteliers you're likely to meet. Kevin, a filmmaker, and Garvan, a photographer, seem always to be campaigning to preserve some part of historic Dublin or other. That love for heritage shines through in the chic and beautiful restoration of their 1834 townhouse. The eponymous two guest rooms are spacious and filled with light, featuring antique brass beds and sunken baths. The Garden Room opens out onto a private patio, where breakfast can be taken if the sun's out; or, in gloomier weather, you can light a fire in the original Victorian grate. TVs are banished to preserve the peaceful atmosphere, but each bedroom does have its own antique radio set. Delicious, home-cooked breakfasts make excellent use of seasonal produce and ethically sourced ingredients. This is simply one of the most charming and intimate B&Bs in Dublin.

18 Summer St. North, Dublin 1. www.tworoomsindublin.com. **© 01/856-0013** or 086/822-5572. 2 units. €100 double. Two-night minimum. No children. On-street parking nearby. Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free). Bus: 7, 8, 14, 15 51A, 123. Rail: Connolly (10-min. walk).

St. Stephen's Green/Grafton Street Area

St. Stephen's Green may be only a 10-minute walk from the hustle and bustle of Temple Bar and Trinity College, but it's infinitely calmer and less harried. This is a good area if you're looking for a little peace and quiet.

EXPENSIVE

The Conrad ** The Dublin outpost of Hilton's high-end brand is all about the luxury. Beds in the spacious, modern guest rooms are sumptuously comfortable (and refreshingly large for a European hotel, even in the cheapest rooms). Color schemes of chocolate and cream, or oatmeal and royal blue, help convey an air of elegance without feeling too fussy. Thoughtful touches, such as Nespresso machines in every room, are welcome—although charging for something as basic as Wi-Fi, when almost every good B&B in the city now provides it for free, is parsimonious. Despite all the luxury, this place certainly feels geared more toward business travelers than anyone else. The excellent **Alex** restaurant, specializing in seafood, is well worth a splurge.

Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2. http://conradhotels3.hilton.com. \bigcirc 01/602-8900. 191 units. $\in 126 - \in 350$ double; $\in 289 - \in 439$ suite. Valet parking $\in 19$ per day. Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Bar; restaurant; room service; gym; Wi-Fi ($\in 5$). Bus: 126.

The Shelbourne $\star\star\star$ Dublin hotels simply don't come with a better historic pedigree than this the Irish constitution was written in this very building (room 112, to be precise). The Shelbourne was acquired by the Marriott group a few years ago, but traditionalists need not fear, because the hotel is still its grand old self. Most of the old wrinkles were ironed out courtesy of a major refurbishment in 2007. A feeling of *fin de siècle* elegance pervades throughout the public areas, with high plaster ceilings, crystal chandeliers, and a winding iron staircase. Guest rooms have a much more discreet, contemporary elegance, with extremely luxurious beds and a host of modern extras. There's also an excellent spa, and you can even book a session with a Genealogy Butler if you need a little expert help in tracing your Irish roots. Afternoon tea at the Shelbourne is a true Dublin institution; consider splurging on a booking, even if you can't spring for a night here.

27 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2. www.marriott.co.uk. Ø 01/663-4500. 190 units. €205-€520 double; €650-€900 suite. Valet parking

€25 per day. Breakfast €21–€29. Dinner, bed and breakfast packages available. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 3 bars; afternoon tea; gym; spa; accessible rooms; Wi-Fi (free). Luas: St. Stephen's Green. Bus: 7B, 7D, 10, 10A, 11, 11A, 11B, 14, 14A, 15, 15A, 15B, 15C, 15X, 20B, 25X, 32X, 39X, 40A, 40C, 41X, 51X, 70B, 84X.

The Westbury $\star\star\star$ Virtually made for well-heeled shopaholics, this top-end hotel on Grafton Street is a luxurious and stylish retreat. Bedrooms are huge and modern, with subtle floral wallpaper, handmade furniture, and soothing beige and cream tones. Beds are comfortable (although with so much space to spare, they could be bigger) and a few are modern-style four posters. Wilde, the excellent Modern Irish restaurant, is a beautiful space overlooking Grafton Street; it also serves one of the city's finest afternoon teas. There's also a more relaxed bar and bistro. Check the website for some enticing package deals, including dinner-bed-and-breakfast and theater options.

Grafton St., Dublin 2. www.doylecollection.com. \bigcirc 01/602-8900. 205 units. \bigcirc 230– \bigcirc 380 double; \bigcirc 350– \bigcirc 910 suite. Parking \bigcirc 20 per day. Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Bar; 2 restaurants; room service; gym; Wi-Fi (free). Bus: 11, 11a, 11b, 14, 14a, 15a, 15c, 15x, 20b, 27c, 33x, 39b, 41x, 46b, 46c.

MODERATE

Camden Court Hotel ** Although not exactly budget, this large hotel just south of St. Stephen's Green is great value for what you get. A "practical base" kind of hotel, rather than one overflowing with character and charm, the Camden Court is nonetheless well equipped, with good-size and modern guest rooms (especially the family rooms), a pool, and a massage salon to sooth away a few of those sightseeing aches and pains. You'd pay significantly more if this place was just a few blocks farther to the north; as it is, the only real drawback is that you're a 10- to 20-minute walk away from the center.

Camden St. Lower (near junction. with Charlotte Way), Dublin 2. www.camdencourthotel.com. \bigcirc 01/475-9666. 246 units. \in 125– \in 165 double. Parking (free). Breakfast not included in lower rates. Amenities: Bar; restaurant; gym; pool; beauty salon; room service; accessible rooms; Wi-Fi (free). Luas: Harcourt St. Bus: 15X, 16, 16A, 19, 19A, 65, 65B, 65X, 83, 122.

Trinity Lodge \star This small hotel is full of quirks—not all of them convenient (there's no elevator and plenty of stairs, for instance), but the bedrooms are comfortable, contemporary, and surprisingly large for a place in this price range. A converted townhouse, the hotel was built in 1785, and some of the bedrooms retain a historic feel to the design. Quadruple rooms offer outstanding value for families. South Frederick Street is little more than a stone's throw from Trinity College; however, it's also a comparative rarity in the city center—it's generally quite peaceful at night. Breakfast is Continental and "express style" (translation: basic), but the neighborhood has plenty of other options. 12 South Frederick St., Dublin 2. www.trinitylodge.com. © 01/617-0900. 16 units. $\in 148-\in 171$ double. Two-night minimum on some

summer weekends. Discounted parking at nearby lot (\in 3 overnight, \in 13 per 24 hr.). Rates include continental breakfast; 10% discount on cooked breakfasts at nearby cafes. **Amenities:** Restaurant; room service (7am–11pm); Wi-Fi (free). Rail: Connolly. Luas: St. Stephen's Green. DART: Pearse. Bus: 7B, 7D, 10, 10A, 11, 11A, 11B, 14, 14A, 15, 15A, 15B, 15C, 15X, 20B, 25X, 27C, 32X, 33X, 39B, 41X, 46B, 46C, 51D, 51X, 58X, 67X, 84X, 92.

Ballsbridge & the Southern Suburbs

South of the canal, this prestigious Dublin residential neighborhood is coveted for its leafy streets and historic buildings. Half the foreign embassies in Dublin are located in this district. It's also growing as a hotel quarter—the distance from the city center means that you'll get so much more for your money by staying here.

EXPENSIVE

InterContinental Dublin $\star\star$ From the elegantly simple guest rooms, with their sumptuously comfortable beds, to the outstanding full-service spa, this place offers a host of thoughtful touches. The spa is excellent; look out for discount packages that include massage treatments. The only real

downside is the location. Views over the rooftops of Ballsbridge are never going to appeal as much as the kind of vista you get at high-end establishments in the city center—but the payoff is greater peace and quiet. (It's only a short train or taxi ride into the center anyway.)

Simmonscourt Rd., Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. www.intercontinental.com/dublin. \bigcirc 01/665-4000. 195 units. $\textcircled{216}{-}\textcircled{302}$ double; $\textcircled{283}{-}\textcircled{743}$ suite. Valet parking (free). Breakfast not included in lower rates. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; spa; pool; Wi-Fi (15). DART: Sandymount. Bus: 4, 7, 7N, 8, 27X.

MODERATE

Aberdeen Lodge ****** Drive up to this elegant Regency building in the springtime, and its front can be so covered in ivy, it looks like a vertical lawn with spaces cut for the windows. Inside, the decor is rather endearingly old-fashioned; neat-as-a-pin public spaces have heavy, antique-style furnishings and embroidered pillows scattered hither and thither. Guest rooms are comfortable and quiet, if a little plain, but modern bathrooms are a big plus. Some have views of the large garden, where guests can take tea—often in the company of the hotel's friendly cat. Aberdeen Lodge is a short walk to the nearest DART station, and from here it's a short hop to the city center. Alternatively, a 5-minute stroll takes you to a pleasant walking path through a park beside the coast. If you do come this way, look out for the grey stone tower, now stuck rather ignominiously between a public toilet and a payphone—it's an example of a Martello Tower, a small defensive fortification that was built by the British to ward off a feared invasion from France in the early 19th century.

53–55 Park Avenue, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. www.aberdeen-lodge.com. \bigcirc 01/283-8155. 11 units. €149–€169 double, €189 suite. Parking (free). Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; use of nearby spa; Wi-Fi (free). DART: Sydney Parade, Sandymount. Bus: 2, 3, 18, 84N.



Ariel House ******* This charming guesthouse in Ballsbridge has won several plaudits over the last few years. And rightly so—it's a smoothly run, great value-for-the-money operation, situated on a quiet Victorian street. The most obvious landmark you can see is, depending on your point of view, either a hideous blot or a great day out—the Aviva Stadium, one of Ireland's major sports grounds, literally a block away. Inside the hotel, the vibe is decidedly old-school, with a subtle contemporary flourish. The small, simple guest rooms are tastefully decorated in earthy oatmeal or cream with brocade-pattern bedspreads. The lounge is a pleasant space with an honesty bar; musically inclined

guests are even free to tickle the ivories of the piano. The breakfast menu doesn't veer too far from the traditional Irish staples, but it's exceptionally well done. So long as you're not staying on a match day, the neighborhood is quiet enough to make you feel cosseted away from the crowds, but with good transport links to central Dublin.

50–54 Lansdowne Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. www.ariel-house.net. \bigcirc 01/668-5512. 37 units. €130–€150 double. Parking (free). Breakfast not included in lower rates. Amenities: Honesty bar; afternoon tea; room service; Wi-Fi (free). DART: Lansdowne Road Bus: 4, 7, 8, 84.

Grand Canal Hotel \star Overlooking the 18th-century Grand Canal—a major part of Dublin's industrial heritage, long since abandoned as anything but a picturesque waterway—this large hotel is a strikingly modern place. Like many hotels in this neighborhood, you can't escape the looming carbuncle of the Aviva Stadium, and this modern hotel is a particular favorite of sports fans in town for a game. But it's also a haven for business travelers and tourists looking for a pleasant but no-frills place to stay. It wins no awards for style, but it's cheerful, spotlessly clean, and the bedrooms are huge by Dublin standards. The city center is a just short journey by public transport. You could even walk if you wanted to work off one of the hearty hotel breakfasts—Trinity College is about 25 minutes on foot.

Grand Canal St. Upper, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. www.grandcanalhotel.ie. \bigcirc 01/646-1000. 142 units. \bigcirc 91– \bigcirc 175 double. Theater and O2 Arena packages available. Parking (free). Breakfast not included in lower rates. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; accessible rooms; Wi-Fi (free). DART: Grand Canal Dock. Bus: 4, 5, 7, 7A, 8, 45, 63, 84.

Mespil Hotel \star Another reasonable option in Ballsbridge, the Mespil is about a 15-minute walk from St. Stephen's Green. Accommodations here are certainly of a higher standard than what you're likely to find uptown for the same price. (Stays of more than one night usually qualify for discounts if you book online). The guest rooms are spacious and feature modern decor and comfortable beds. In common with most hotels of this type, breakfast is served buffet style—tasty and excellent fuel, although all that fried meat and eggs certainly gets wearing after a couple of days. One nice little bonus: An excellent gourmet food market is held just outside by the canal, every Thursday from 11am to 2pm. See www.irishvillagemarkets.com for more details.

50–60 Mespil Road, Dublin 4. www.mespilhotel.com. \bigcirc 01/448-4600. 255 units. €99–€149 double. Parking (limited). Breakfast €12. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; gym; room service; accessible rooms; Wi-Fi (free). Bus: 10, 10A, 15X, 49X, 50X, 66D, 92.

INEXPENSIVE

Quince Cottage ******* This place isn't the most convenient location—it's in Sandyford, a southern suburb about 20 minutes by Luas (tram) from central Dublin—but what Quince Cottage lacks in convenience, it more than makes up for in authenticity. Owners Paula and Brandon have converted their century-old suburban home into a bright and modern B&B. Bedrooms are perfectly pleasant, albeit basic, with modern furnishings and decent-size beds. Breakfasts are hearty and varied—try the American-style pancakes served with fresh fruit. The spacious, buttercream-colored guest lounge adds to the feeling that you are a guest in a pleasant Dublin home, rather than a number in an impersonal hotel. For those seeking even more privacy, there is also a one-bed apartment (the oldest part of the house) that can be rented on a self-catering basis or with breakfast included. Sandyford is about 12km ($7\frac{1}{2}$ miles) south of Dublin city center.

Quince Cottage, Kilgobbin Rd., Sandyford, Dublin 18. www.quincecottage.ie. Ø 01/295-8488. 4 units. €90 double; €80 for 2 or more nights. Parking (free). Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free). Luas: Glencairn Bus: 44.

North of Dublin

Skerries is a pleasant seaside commuter town, north of Dublin. It's most definitely outside of the city

—about 30km ($18\frac{1}{2}$ miles) from Temple Bar—but transport links are reasonably good. Of course, those seeking peace and quiet at the end of the day will see this as a selling point.

INEXPENSIVE

The White Cottages $\star\star\star$ The sea is an ever-present feature at this pleasant, whitewashed little B&B in Skerries, a pretty commuter town just north of Dublin. The coastline is literally feet away from the wooden terrace at the back, and the sound of the waves can help soothe you to a restful sleep at night. Guest rooms are decorated in summery white and blue colors, with jaunty, candy-striped accents. The owners are welcoming and extremely helpful—Joe, the co-owner, is a mine of information about the local area, and his wife Jackie displays some of her art around the house. Breakfasts are good, but you have to fend for yourself at dinnertime (Joe can provide an exhaustive list of places to eat nearby). The only major snag is that Skerries is far outside of the city; the train journey to the center takes about 40 minutes, and the bus over an hour. Still, it's nothing more than local commuters do every day, and you'll be hard pressed to find a more tranquil and welcoming retreat after a long day's sightseeing.

Balbriggan Rd., Skerries, Co. Dublin. www.thewhitecottages.com. **Ø** 01/849-2231. 4 units. €80 double. Parking (free). Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Picnic lunches; Wi-Fi (free). Rail: Skerries. Bus: 33.

WHERE TO DINE IN DUBLIN

The economic boom years of the early 2000s in Dublin brought with it a new generation of international, sophisticated restaurants. Ireland embraced foodie culture in a way that it never really had before. However, as the economy crashed, so too came a minor resurgence in the popularity of traditional Irish fare, even in expensive restaurants. That's not to say that the food in Dublin is on the downswing—far from it—it's just become easier to find traditional-style Irish food in the city than it was a decade ago. In other words, Ireland is both re-embracing and re-inventing its national food heritage.

All that being said, Dublin is still a notoriously expensive city in which to eat out. Prices have certainly come down in recent years, but you're still likely to pay much more for a meal here than in a comparable U.S. city; maybe about the same as you'd expect in Paris or London. But when the food here is good, it's very good, so if you can afford to splurge once or twice while you're in town, do so —you're in for a treat.

Temple Bar Area

Gallagher's Boxty House *** IRISH There's a great story behind this captivating and hugely popular restaurant in Temple Bar. While living in Venezuela as a young man, the owner was struck by the pride his fellow workers took in simple, traditional home cooking. He came home and founded a restaurant to preserve and update some of the Irish traditions in his own style. Boxty is a distinctive kind of potato pancake (see box p. 150). It's the house signature dish, served with a variety of delicious meat and fish fillings. Also on the menu are steaks, seafood, and Irish stews. Their tasty Irish variant on the hamburger is made with cumin-and-garlic-spiced lamb and caramelized onion. Few restaurants come with a greater appreciation for culinary heritage than this one.

20–21 Temple Bar, Dublin 2. www.boxtyhouse.ie. **Ø 01/677-2762.** Main courses €16–€25. Daily noon—10:30pm. Luas: Jervis. Bus: 22, 39B, 49X, 50X, 65X, 66, 66A, 66B, 66D, 67, 67A, 69X, 77X.

The Old Storehouse $\star\star$ IRISH/PUB There isn't much in the way of risk or innovation on the menu of hearty Irish classics at this popular pub in Temple Bar—and that's precisely why it's so popular.

What you get is delicious, traditional pub food mixed with just a hint of bistro style around the edges: Fat, juicy burgers served with vine tomatoes and cocktail sauce; bangers and mash (sausages and mashed potato) with ale gravy; or perhaps some steamed mussels with garlic bread. There's a small wine list, but the beer selection is better. As much of a draw as the food is the nightly live music; all traditional and all free, with up to 20 acts a week in the summer. The Old Storehouse doesn't accept reservations, so be prepared to wait for a table when it's busy.

Crown Alley, off Cope St., Dublin 2. www.theoldstorehouse.ie. \bigcirc 01/607-4003. Main courses $\in 12-\in 19$. Daily noon-10pm. Bus: 39B, 49X, 50X, 65X, 77X.

Queen of Tarts $\star\star$ CAFE This cheerful little tearoom in the heart of Temple Bar is a delightful pit stop for a pot of tea and some form of sweet, diet-busting snack. Cakes and tarts are the specialty; it's all good, but try the lemon meringue pie or the old-fashioned Victoria sponge (white cake with a jam filling and a dusting of sugar on top). They also serve breakfast until noon during the week, 1pm on Saturday, and a decadent 2pm on Sunday. At lunchtime you can order soups or sandwiches, but it's the cakes that keep us coming back.

Cows Lane, Dame St., Dublin 2. www.queenoftarts.ie. **Ø 01/633-4681.** Breakfast €3–€10. Lunch €6–€12. Mon–Fri 8am–7pm; Sat–Sun 9am–6pm. Bus: 37, 39, 39A, 39C, 70, 70A.

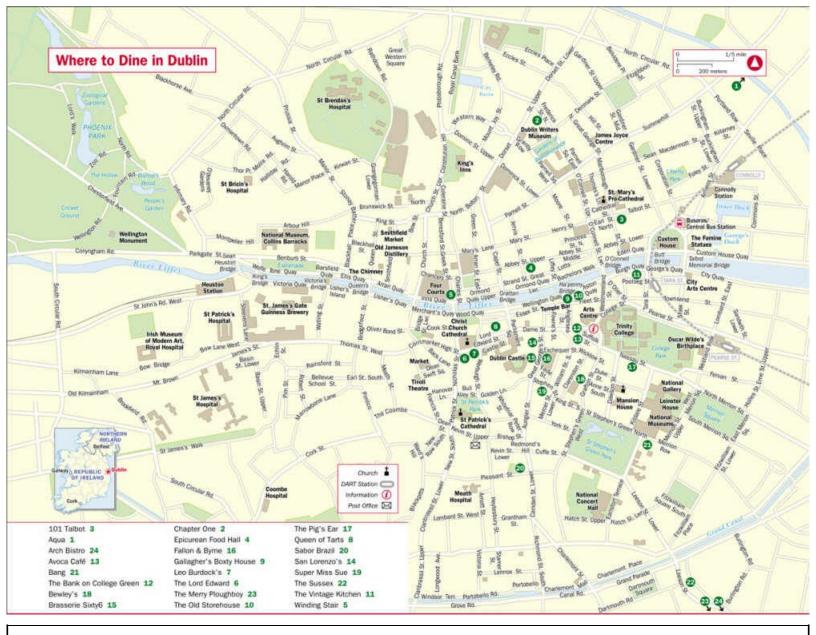
Trinity College Area

Avoca Café ** CAFE So much better than just another department store cafe, this is a great place for breakfast, lunch, or a mid-shopping snack. The morning menu is more varied and interesting than at most hotels; free-range scrambled eggs with arugula salad, several types of pancakes, French toast, and even the ubiquitous "full Irish" with (rarely found in Ireland) American-style bacon. Lunches are healthy and delicious—think crab salad with home-baked bread or a plate of Middle Eastern–style mezze made with Wicklow lamb and served with baba ghanouj and hummus. The delicious soups are famous among locals. Or you could just drop in for a tempting slice of cake and a restorative cup of tea.

11–13 Suffolk St., Dublin 2. www.avoca.ie. **© 01/677-4215.** Breakfast €3–€12. Lunch €13–€20. Mon–Wed 9:30am–4:30pm; Thurs–Sat 9:30am–5:30pm; Sun 11am–4:30pm. Bus: 15X, 32X, 33X, 39X, 41X, 51D, 51X, 58X, 70X, 84X.

The Bank on College Green ** PUB Undoubtedly one of Dublin's most jaw-droppingly handsome interiors, this place would be worth visiting even if it didn't serve great pub food. Built as a bank in 1892, at the height of Victorian opulence, it retained several remnants of the original when it was converted into a pub (including the wonderful old-style safes that you can still see downstairs). A small and fairly traditional lunch menu of burgers, fish and chips, sandwiches, and salads gives way to a more extensive selection in the evening, including steaks, pasta, and a handy sharing plate. It's all very informal but hugely satisfying. Come on Sunday for a leisurely brunch or a traditional roast at lunchtime.

20 College Green, Dublin 2. www.bankoncollegegreen.com. **Ø 01/677-0677.** Main courses €13–€29. Mon–Fri noon–4pm, 6–10pm; Sat–Sun noon–5pm, 6–10pm. Bus: 15X, 32X, 33X, 39B, 39X, 41X, 49X, 50X, 51X, 58X, 65X, 70X, 77X, 84X.



boxty

"Boxty on the griddle, boxty on the pan. If you can't bake boxty, sure you'll never get a man." - Traditional Irish rhyme.

A decade or so ago you'd have been hard pressed to find much in the way of traditional Irish food in Dublin, save for the odd bowl of Irish stew. These days, however, there's a real revival of interest in the old foodie ways—albeit in an updated form. Some of Dublin's trendiest restaurants embrace Ireland's culinary heritage, often with a sophisticated, contemporary twist.

Boxty—which comes from an old Gaelic term meaning "poor bread"—is one such dish that you're likely to encounter on fashionable menus. It's basically a potato pancake, made with buttermilk and sometimes eggs. Each region has its own distinctive spin. Usually boxty is fried, although it can also be baked or served as a dumpling (similar to the Polish *pierogi*). More often than not, modern chefs will accompany their boxty with meat or fish, in various creative (and delicious) ways.

The Pig's Ear *** MODERN IRISH A deliciously inventive approach to traditional Irish tastes pervades at this super-cool restaurant overlooking Trinity College. However, this isn't one of those trendy eateries in which the menu is too concerned with being clever to be satisfying. Classic ingredients are offered with modern flair: roast salt cod cooked in cider and dill oil, or maple-glazed pork served with Jerusalem artichokes. Desserts have a playfully retro edge: brown bread ice cream with spiced prunes, or cheesecake served with Hob Nobs (a brand of cookie liable to give local diners a flush of nostalgia). You certainly won't be able to miss this place from the outside—just look

for the shocking-pink door with a candy-striped awning.

4 Nassau St., Dublin 2. www.thepigsear.ie. Ø 01/670-3865. Main courses €19–€28. Mon–Sat noon–2:45pm, 5:30–10pm. DART: Pearse St. Bus: 25X, 32X, 33X, 41X, 51D, 51X, 58X, 67X, 84X, 92.

The Vintage Kitchen $\star\star$ IRISH An antidote to over-fussy fine dining, the Vintage Kitchen is a stripped-down, funky little restaurant. Vintage artworks line the dining room—everything's for sale, but there are no fixed prices, so just make an offer if you like something. There aren't many tables, and they don't even have an alcohol license-you're encouraged to bring your own bottle if you want wine. But the classic Irish food is excellent, beautifully presented, and generously proportioned. Start with prawn, chili, and herb risotto before tackling an enormous beef sirloin with sautéed potatoes, or a flavorsome dish of cod with red pepper casserole and lumpfish caviar. If dinner here is a bit steep for you, come for lunch—mains are just €12, and small plates half that. Make reservations for dinner. 7 Poolbeg St., Dublin 2. www.thevintagekitchen.ie. Ø 01/679-8705. Fixed-price menus €28 two courses, €34 three courses. Tues-Fri noon-2:30pm and 5:30-10pm; Sat 5:30-10pm. Closed Sun and Mon. DART: Tara St. Bus: 65, 65B.

Near Dublin Castle

Brasserie Sixty6 * * IRISH/INTERNATIONAL This cheerful, well-run bistro near Trinity College is a popular choice with locals for special occasions. Roast meats cooked rotisserie style are a specialty. Try the garlic-and-lemon chicken served with herb stuffing and a bunch of sides, or dig into citrus-glazed duck with potatoes roasted in duck fat. The rest of the menu is made up of modern bistro fare like roast monkfish with artichokes or a simple, juicy steak with fondant potatoes and peppercorn sauce. Vegetarians are well catered to as well, with choices such as vegetable tagine and haloumi Caesar salad. Service is top-notch and the portions generous. It's not cheap, although the pre-theater menu is an excellent value (€25 for 3 courses, served all night Sun to Wed, and until 6:30pm Thurs to Sat). There's also a popular brunch served until 4pm on Sundays, accompanied by a live jazz band.

66 South Great Georges St., Dublin 2. www.brasseriesixty6.com. Ø 01/400-5878. Main courses €12–€33. Mon–Thurs noon–10pm; Fri noon-11pm; Sat 10am-11pm; Sun 10am-10pm. Bus: 15E, 15F, 16, 16A, 19, 19A, 65, 65B, 65X, 83, 122.

Fallon & Byrne ** MODERN EUROPEAN A top-floor adjunct to the wonderful food and wine store, Fallon & Byrne Food Hall (p. 164), this restaurant serves delicious, seasonal Irish fare sourced from artisan producers. Nothing seems to have come very far-crab from the tiny port of Castletownbere, County Cork; lamb from Lough Erne; or oysters from Carlingford. The menu strikes a nice balance between ambitious dishes and more down-to-earth options, so while you may find turbot served with pink grapefruit and crushed new potatoes, you could just as easily opt for a simple burger topped with Cashel blue cheese and smoked bacon. They also have vegetarian and vegan menus. And if you prefer to fend for yourself, an enormous selection of deli items is downstairs, available to go.

11–17 Exchequer St., Dublin 2. www.fallonandbyrne.com. Ø 01/472-1010. Main courses €11–€34. Wed–Thurs noon–3pm, 6–10pm; Fri-Sat noon-3pm, 6-11pm; Sun noon-4pm, 6-9pm; Mon-Tues 12-3pm, 6-9pm. Bus: 15E, 15F, 16, 16A, 19, 19A, 65, 65B, 65X, 83, 122. Leo Burdock's ***** FISH & CHIPS Proof that not all good food experiences come with a hefty price

tag, Leo Burdock's is probably the most famous fish and chip shop in Ireland. In fact, it's virtually de rigueur for passing celebrities to pop in; the photographic "wall of fame" includes Sandra Bullock, Russell Crowe, and Tom Cruise. But don't come expecting cutting-edge cuisine, because Leo Burdock's still trades on the same simple, winning formula that it has since 1913: battered fresh fish (cod, sole, ray or scampi) and thick chips (like very fat steak fries), all cooked the old fashioned way, in beef drippings. There are other options on the menu, including hamburgers, but frankly what's the point of coming to a place like this if you don't order the one thing for which it's world famous?

2 Werburgh St., Dublin 8. www.leoburdock.com. **© 01/454-0306.** Main courses €3–€8. Daily noon–midnight. Bus: 49X, 50X, 54A, 50X,

56A, 77, 77A, 77X, 78A, 150, 151.

The Lord Edward \star SEAFOOD With a believable claim to being the oldest seafood restaurant in Dublin, this super-traditional restaurant above an equally old-fashioned pub has been a city staple since 1890. The dining room looks like your grandma's sitting room, and the menu takes culinary conservatism to almost stubborn heights, but that's also the appeal. Prawns, sole, scallops, lobster, and various other fruits of the sea are served every traditional way you can think of and a few you probably can't. This is certainly not the place to come if you're seeking out what's new and what's hot in the Irish culinary scene. But fans of the Lord Edward (and there are plenty of them) love it for the sense of continuity and old-school charm.

23 Christchurch Place, Dublin 8. www.lordedward.ie. **Ø 01/454-2420.** Main courses €19–€39. Wed–Fri 12:30–2:30pm, 6–10:45pm; Sat 6–10:45pm. Bus: 50X, 56A, 77, 77A, 77X, 150, 151.

San Lorenzo's ** BREAKFAST/ITALIAN This funky Italian restaurant serves good, all-round Italian specials in the evening, but that's not what it's famous for in Dublin. San Lorenzo's is one of the most popular spots in town for brunch at weekends. Abandon your hotel "full Irish" and come here for the heavenly French toast, made with caramelized bananas and topped with a coco-pop square (a kind of breakfast cereal made with chocolate-flavored puffed rice), whipped cream and thick chocolate sauce; or opt for the Belgian waffles with salted caramel ice cream. There's a Latin edge to many of the savory options—huevos rancheros, brunch tacos, or even a pulled pork hash. Just be prepared to wait for a table.

South Great Georges St., Dublin 2. www.sanlorenzos.ie. **Ø 01/478-9383.** Brunch: €9–€19. Lunch main courses: €7–€16. Dinner main courses €8–€38. Mon 5–9pm; Tues 12:30pm–3pm, 5–9pm; Wed–Thurs 12:30–3pm, 5–9pm; Fri 12:30–3pm, 5–10pm; Sat 10:30am–3pm, 5–10pm; Sun 10:30am–4pm, 5:15–9pm. Bus: 15E, 15F, 16, 16A, 19, 19A, 65, 65B, 65X, 83, 122.



Coco pops crunchy French toast at San Lorenzo's

O'Connell Street Area/North of the Liffey

101 Talbot ** INTERNATIONAL This cheery and informal spot, a 3-minute walk from the General Post Office on O'Connell Street, is strong on delicious Irish cuisine with global influences and a healthy twist. The bright, airy dining room is lined with modern art. Specials may include roast vegetables with traditional Gubbeen cheese in a filo pastry parcel, or duck breast with potato rosti and blackberry gravy. The early bird menu (two courses for \in 20) is a particularly good deal and popular with pre-theater diners attending the Abbey Theatre just around the corner.

101–102 Talbot St., Dublin 1. www.101talbot.ie. **© 01/874-5011.** Main courses €16–€22. Tues–Sat noon–3pm, 5–11pm. Luas: Abbey St. Bus: 20B, 32X, 33X, 41, 41A, 41B, 41C, 42, 42A, 42B, 43, 51A, 130, 142.

Chapter One *** MODERN IRISH The vaulted basement of the excellent Dublin Writers Museum (see p. 101) houses one of the city's most feted restaurants. The fixed-price menus make excellent use of local flavors and organic ingredients. Feast on gourmet dishes like poached lobster with smoked haddock mousse or lamb served with fried sweetbreads and garlic sauce. The separate set menu for vegetarians has dishes such as aged Parmesan ravioli with asparagus and wild garlic.

Adventurous diners will relish the chef's table: Seated in a little booth right inside the kitchen, guests are served a special six-course menu (\in 95 per person) while the culinary theater happens before your eyes. The wine list is excellent; consider splurging on a Meerlust Rubicon 2005, an outstanding and little-seen South African vintage with a sublime, smoky flavor. *Tip:* The lunch menu is nearly half the price of dinner.

19 Parnell Sq. North, Dublin 1. www.chapteronerestaurant.com. **© 01/873-2266.** 4 course fixed-price menu €70. Tues–Fri 12:30–2pm, 6–10:30pm; Sat 6–10:30pm. Luas: Abbey St. DART: Connolly St. Bus: 1, 2, 14, 14A, 16, 16A, 19, 19A, 33X, 39X, 41X, 48A, 58X, 70B, 70X.

Epicurean Food Hall ★ MEDITERRANEAN An energetic coming together of flavors from disparate corners of the global village, this delightful food hall is a voyage of discovery for the epicurious. The selection of lunch options changes quite regularly, but long-standing kitchens include **Istanbul**, specializing in Mediterranean dishes and Turkish kebabs; **Saburritos**, which serves a combination of authentic and California-style Mexican street food; **Rafa's Temaki**, which claims to be the first place in Ireland to sell temaki (a healthful, fast-food-style combination of Japanese sushi and sashimi); and a branch of the famous Dublin fish-and-chip takeaway, **Leo Burdock**. The various stalls share a common seating area, or you can get it to go.

1 Liffey St. Lower, Dublin 1. www.epicureanfoodhall.com. **© 01/283-6077.** Main courses €4–€13. Mon–Sat 9am–8pm; Sun 11am–8pm. Luas: Jervis. Bus: 39B, 69X.

Winding Stair ****** MODERN IRISH A sweet old bookstore downstairs and a chic restaurant upstairs, Winding Stair is situated a stone's throw from the Ha'penny Bridge. The views of the Liffey are romantic, but of course it's the inventive modern Irish cooking that pulls in the crowds. After a starter of Dingle Bay crab or spiced beef carpaccio with rocket (arugula) and pickled mushrooms, you could opt for steamed cockles and mussels with brown shrimp mayo or the lamb with pancetta and lentils. The enormous wine list, which is helpfully arranged by character rather than region, features several decently priced options. The fixed-price lunch ($\in 22-\epsilon 30$) comes with a glass of house wine, and the pre-theater menus ($\epsilon 27-\epsilon 31$) are great value—but you must be out by 8:15pm. 40 Lower Ormond Quay, Dublin 1. www.winding-stair.com. **© 01/872-7320.** Main courses $\epsilon 22-\epsilon 28$. Dail, noon-5pm, 5:30-10:30pm. Luas: Jervis. Bus: 39B, 51, 51B, 51C, 51D, 51X, 68, 69, 69X, 78, 78A, 79, 79A, 90, 92, 206.

St. Stephen's Green/Grafton Street Area

Bang \star MODERN IRISH The presence of so many Irish place names on the menu indicates how much this place has embraced the slow food ethos. The vast majority of ingredients are regionally sourced from specialist Irish producers. You may find Clare Island salmon served with local radishes and pickled cucumber; John Dory from Kilkeel; or perhaps a rib-eye steak from County Fermanagh. If it all seems too hard to choose from, you could opt for one of the tasting menus (\notin 71– \notin 81, depending on the number of courses). The wine list is expertly chosen, and there's also a delightfully put together, seasonal cocktail menu—try the behive julep, with spiced whiskey, Manuka honey, and black-walnut bitters.

11 Merrion Row, Dublin 2. www.bangrestaurant.com. \bigcirc 01/400-4229. Main courses \notin 23– \notin 34. Mon–Tues 5:30–10pm; Wed 12:30–10pm; Thurs–Sat 12:30–11pm. Luas: St. Stephen's Green. Bus: 25X, 51D, 51X, 65X, 66X, 67X, 77X.

Bewley's \star CAFE A Dublin landmark since 1927, Bewley's has a literary pedigree as well as an historic one. James Joyce was a regular (it makes an appearance in his book *Dubliners*), and a host of subsequent literary greats made this their regular stop-off for a cup of joe and a slice of cake. It's still hugely popular, but not just for coffee; you can get a pretty good pizza, salad, or burger here, in addition to a more modest menu of light snacks. Fun fact: The distinctive, ornate faux-Egyptian facade

(incongruously framing its never-really-used full name, "Bewley's Oriental Café") owes its existence to the fact that, when the place opened, Europe was in the grip of a craze for all things Ancient Egyptian, following the discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb just 5 years before.

78–79 Grafton St., Dublin 2. www.bewleys.com. \bigcirc 01/672-7720. Main courses breakfast €3–€12. Lunch and dinner €8–€15. Mon–Wed 8am–10pm; Thurs–Sat 8am–11pm; Sun 9am–10pm. Bus: 11, 11A, 11B, 14, 14A, 15A, 15C, 15X, 20B, 27C, 33X, 39B, 41X, 46B, 46C.

Sabor Brazil *** BRAZILIAN A good Brazilian restaurant isn't high on the list of things one expects to find in Dublin—even less so, an innovative and wildly fashionable spot in a slightly dicey neighborhood south of the center. And yet Sabor Brazil not only serves outstanding food, it also delivers a fun and memorable experience. The tiny dining room is decorated in a wry combination of Regency Baroque and Latinate flourishes. The menu (€100 per person for seven courses, no a la carte) fuses contemporary Brazilian flavors with an Irish inflection: grilled prawns with chili and feta dill, for instance, or a *pastel* (kind of like South American dim sum) filled with whatever the chef decides is best that day. A vegetarian alternative is always available. Reservations are essential, preferably a while in advance (with a €25 booking deposit, credited to your bill on the night), and the restaurant will cater to couples only.

50 Pleasants St., Off Camden St., Dublin 8. www.saborbrazil.ie. **© 01/475-0304.** Tasting menu only €100. Tues–Sun 6–11pm. Bus: 65, 65X.

Super Miss Sue ** SEAFOOD There are actually three restaurants here under the Super Miss Sue umbrella, each serving up excellent seafood to a trendy crowd. **Luna** is the most formal of the three, but the quirky **Café** has the best atmosphere. Cod, tuna, salmon prawns and oysters are served several ways, or you could go for one of the enormous house special platters. There are also steaks if the fruits of the sea don't tempt you. They also do a popular brunch at weekends. However, several Dubliners will tell you that the best of the SMS treats are to be had at the third option—**Cervi**, the excellent "chipper." On Friday nights Cervi does delicious fish, chips, and a soda to go for just €10. 2-3 Drury St., Dublin 2. www.supermisssue.com. **© 01/679-9009.** Main courses €12–€26. Platters €45–€60. Mon–Wed, Sun noon–10pm; Thurs–Sat noon–11pm. Bus: 65, 65X.

Fitzwilliam Square Area

The Sussex ** IRISH One of the best proponents of gastropub cuisine—the reinvention of traditional Irish cooking into something chic and fashionable—is this refined pub (above another popular bar) 10 minutes' walk south of St. Stephen's Green. The menu takes classic pub fare, prepares it beautifully, and adds an oh-so-subtle twist—fish and chips with pea and mint puree, perhaps, or linguine served with Dingle Bay prawns, garlic, and lemon. For dessert try the posset (a syllabub-like concoction containing cream and lemon) served with spiced shortbread. As you'd expect, all the ingredients are sourced as locally as possible, with plenty of attention to what's in season. The wine list is well judged, with plenty of reasonably priced options. *Tip:* The lunch menu is an edited version of what's for dinner—but significantly cheaper.

9 Sussex Terrace (at junction of Sussex Road; above M. O'Briens Pub), Dublin 4. www.thesussex.ie. **© 01/676-2851.** Main courses €16–€25. Mon noon–3pm; Tues noon–3pm, 5–11pm; Sun 5–11pm. Bus: 7B, 7D, 11, 11A, 11B, 27C, 39B, 39X, 46B, 46C, 46D, 46E, 58C, 58X, 70B, 70X, 116.

Ballsbridge & the Southern Suburbs

Arch Bistro *** MODERN EUROPEAN One of those places that even locals talk about as a "find," the Arch is an adorable little pub bistro in Churchtown, one of Dublin's southern suburbs. The lovingly crafted vintage vibe of the exterior—all thatched roof and antique Guinness signs—shines

above the urban blandness of the neighborhood. Inside, the space is elegant and cozy. The menu takes contemporary bistro classics and shakes them up with flashes of individuality: beef filet with a blue cheese and herb crust, or sea bass with chorizo and sweet potato fricassee. Vegetarians may be tempted by a black bean and redcurrant risotto. The three-course early bird menu is a great value at just $\in 25$.

Landscape Rd., Churchtown, Dublin 14. www.thearchbistro.com. \bigcirc 01/296-6340. Main courses $\in 18-\in 24$. Tues-Fri 12:30-2:30pm, 5:30-10pm; Sat 5-10pm; Sun noon-3pm, 5-8pm. Bus: 14.

North of Dublin

Aqua ★★★ SEAFOOD With a jaw-dropping view over Dublin Bay, this has to be one of the most romantic dining spots in the region. Service is excellent—attentive without being overbearing—and the seafood is delicious and fresh-as-can-be. You can start with a half dozen oysters from Carlingford Lough, before moving on to John Dory fillet with spicy coconut cream, or try the scallops with pomegranate molasses. There's also a small range of tasty meat options for those who aren't wowed by the bounty of the sea. Early bird specials are available until 7:30pm (6:30pm on Sat). Howth is a small commuter suburb of Dublin, about 16km (10 miles) northeast of the city center. The restaurant is about a 10-minute walk from the Howth DART station, while a cab out here from the city should run you about €30. Definitely worth the splurge.

1 West Pier, Howth, Co. Dublin. www.aqua.ie. \bigcirc 01/832-0690. Main courses €17–€36. Tues–Sat 12:30–3:30pm, 5:30–10pm; Sun noon–5pm, 5:30–8:30pm. DART: Howth. Bus: 31.

South of Dublin

The Merry Ploughboy \star IRISH/PUB An exuberant live show of traditional music and dancing accompanies dinner at this hugely popular pub in Rathfarnham, one of Dublin's farther-flung southern suburbs. Admittedly it's all very touristy, but you certainly get your money's worth—the show runs for 2 hours, and the food, while limited, is actually pretty good. Expect beef braised in Guinness served with root vegetables and rosemary jus, or trout in a dill-and-lemon crust. The only real drawback is the time it takes to get here (Rathfarnham is about $6 \text{km}/3^{3}/_{4}$ miles from the city center), although a dedicated minibus will pick you up and take you back at the end of the night for the bargain price of \notin 7.50 round-trip.

Edmondstown Rd., Rockbrook, Rathfarnham, Dublin 16. www.mpbpub.com. \bigcirc 01/493-1495. Dinner and show \notin 50. Bar menu \notin 9– \notin 24. Daily dinner 7:30pm sharp; show 8:30–10:30pm. Bar food: Mon–Fri 4:30–9:30pm; Sat 12:30–9:30pm; Sun 12:30–8pm. Special bus leaves from and returns to six locations in central Dublin (\notin 7.50 per person; must be pre-booked).

SHOPPING

Although Dublin took its fair share of pain during Ireland's recent economic woes, it remains a world-class shopping town. Independent shops and boutiques have inevitably struggled more than their big-name chain store rivals, but you can still find excellent craftsmanship in the form of hand-woven wool blankets and clothes, high-quality crafts and antiques, and chic fashions from the seemingly limitless line of Dublin designers.

The hub of mainstream shopping south of the Liffey is indisputably **Grafton Street**, a combination of big chains, chichi department stores, and little shops. It's also a popular site for street performers, where you're almost guaranteed an impromptu show on a sunny day. Grafton Street is crowned by the city's most fashionable department store, Brown Thomas (known as BT), and the jeweler Weirs, but much better shopping is on the smaller streets radiating out from Grafton, such as **Duke**, **Dawson**,

Nassau, and **Wicklow.** On these streets you'll find interesting shops that specialize in books, handicrafts, jewelry, gifts, and clothing. For clothes, look out for tiny **Cow's Lane**, off Lord Edward Street—it is popular with those in the know for its excellent clothing boutiques selling the works of local designers. Also in Grafton's penumbra are **William Street South, Castle Market**, and **Drury Street**, all of which have smart boutiques and irresistible tiny shops. On William Street South, check out the **Powerscourt Townhouse Centre**, a small, elegant shopping center in a grand Georgian town house. It has relaxing cafes, antiques shops, shoe shops, and the top-floor Design Centre, which sells works by some of Ireland's top designers. Not far away, the **George's Street Arcade** is a marvelous clutter of bohemian jewelry, used books, vintage clothes, and other things appealing to the alternative crowd (they even have a resident fortune teller).

Generally, Dublin shops are open from 9am to 6pm Monday to Saturday, and Thursday until 9pm. Most shops have Sunday hours, although they vary; some open at 9am, but most are around 11am to 6 or 7pm.

Major department stores include, on the Northside, Arnotts, 12 Henry St., Dublin 1 (www.arnotts.ie; © 01/805-0400), and the marvelously traditional Clerys, 18–27 Lower O'Connell St., Dublin 1 (www.clerys.com; © 01/878-6000); and on the south side, Brown Thomas, 85–95 Grafton St., Dublin 2 (www.brownthomas.com; © 01/605-6666).

Dublin also has several clusters of shops in multistory malls or ground-level arcades, ideal for indoor shopping on rainy days. On the Northside, these include the **ILAC Centre**, off Henry Street, Dublin 1 (www.ilac.ie; @ 01/828-8900), and the Jervis Shopping Centre (www.jervis.ie; @ 01/878-1323), at 125 Abbey St., Dublin 1. On the south side, there's the small Royal Hibernian Way, 49–50 Dawson St., Dublin 2 (© 01/679-5919); the gleaming wrought-iron-and-glass St. Stephen's Green Centre, at the top of Grafton Street, Dublin 2 (www.stephensgreen.com; @ 01/478-0888); and the **Powerscourt** Townhouse Centre, William aforementioned 59 St. S., Dublin 2 (www.powerscourtcentre.com; © 01/679-4144).

Art & Antiques

Caxton $\star\star$ Antique prints from the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries are a specialty of this wonderful art store. The prices can be astronomical, but even if you're not buying, browsing here is like being a kid in a candy store for lovers of the antiquarian. 63 Patrick St., Dublin 8. **© 01/453-0060.** Bus: 49, 54A.

Christy Bird \star "Variety is our specialty" proclaims a sign at this appealing antique store, which has been in business since the 1940s. And it certainly lives up to the promise—stocked with a happy jumble of knick-knacks, collectibles, tat and genuine antiques, the joy is that you never quite know what you're going to find. 32 South Richmond St., Dublin 2. www.christybird.com. © 01/475-4049. Luas: Charlemount, Harcourt St. Bus: 14, 14A, 14B, 15, 15B, 65B, 74, 83, 128.

Danker Antiques ** This friendly, approachable dealer, in an arcade just off Dawson Street, has a fine collection of antique silver tableware and jewelry. They specialise in designs from the Celtic Revival period of the early 20th century, and usually have some beautiful Art Deco pieces too. 4–5 Royal Hibernian Way, Dawson St., Dublin 2. www.dankerantiques.com. © 01/677-4009. Bus: 15A, 15B, 44, 61, 140

The Doorway Gallery *** A mixture of new and established Irish artists display their work at this cheerful art gallery. There's always something wonderful to discover, and many prices are affordable too. 24 S. Frederick St., Dublin 2. www.thedoorwaygallery.com. **© 01/764-5895.** Bus: 4, 7, 8, 7B, 7D, 25, 25A, 25B, 25X, 26, 27X, 46A, 66, 66A, 66A, 66B, 66X, 67, 67X, 120, 145.

Green on Red ** Outstanding contemporary art can be found at this little gallery in the docklands,

about a mile northwest of the city center. They have a dozen or so exhibitions per year. Park Lane, Spencer Dock, Dublin 1. www.greenonredgallery.com. **© 01/671-3414.** Rail: Docklands. LUAS: Spencer Dock. Bus: 151.

Books & Stationery

Cathach Books *** When lovers of Irish literature and antiquarian books die, if they've been good, they get to spend eternity at Cathach Books. This is where to come for rare copies of Joyce, Yeats, Wilde, Behan, Stoker, and just about every luminary of the Irish canon you can think of. Prices range from the barely affordable (\in 375 for a rare 1927 *Dracula*), to the stratospheric (\in 35,000 for a first edition *Ulysses*) but it's simply heaven to browse. 10 Duke St. (off Grafton St.), Dublin 2. www.rarebooks.ie. **© 01/671-8676.** DART: Pearse. Bus: 10, 11A, 11B, 13, 20B.

Eason ★ This multi-storey bookstore on O'Connell Street is one of Ireland's oldest—it's been in business since 1819. Pretty much everything you could want is here, from history and local interest titles, to the latest bestsellers. 40 Lower O'Connell St. www.easons.com. © 01/858-3800. Luas: Abbey St. Bus: 1, 11, 38, 38A, 38B, 39N, 88N, 120, 122, 123, 747.

Hodges Figgis \star Another enormous *grande dame* Dublin bookshop, this one's even older than Eason's—they've been dealing in the printed page here since 1768. Now owned by the Waterstones chain, Hodges Figgis one of the go-to places in the city for books of all kinds. 56–58 Dawson St., Dublin 2. **0**1/677-4754. Bus: 15A, 15B, 44, 61, 140.

The Pen Corner *** Keeping the flame alive for the dying art of letter writing, this place is an utter delight. The Pen Corner sells exquisite fountain pens, paper, and other writing implements. They also stock beautiful notebooks and cards. 12 College Green, Dublin 2. **© 01/679-3641.** Luas: Abbey St. Bus: 9, 13, 16, 16C, 19, 49N, 54A, 83, 83A, 122, 123, 150, 747, 869.

CDs & Music

Claddagh Records *** Renowned among insiders in traditional Irish music circles, this is where to find "the genuine article" in traditional music and perhaps discover a new favorite. Not only is the staff knowledgeable and enthusiastic about new artists, but they're able to tell you which venues and pubs are hosting the best music sessions that week. They have a second branch at 2 Cecilia St., Temple Bar (© 01/677-0262). 5 Westmoreland St., Dublin 2. www.claddaghrecords.com. © 01/888-3600. Luas: Jervis. Bus: 1, 7B, 7D, 9, 11, 13, 16, 16C, 25N, 26, 33N, 39N, 40, 41N, 47, 49, 68, 68A, 69, 69X, 100X, 101X, 133, 150, 700, 704X

Waltons ****** A longtime favorite among Dublin's musically-inclined (of which you might have noticed there are many), Waltons has been in business since the 1920s. They have an excellent stock of Irish folk instruments, including penny whistles, flutes, accordions, and pipes, as well as a huge range of traditional Irish music CDs, books, and t-shirts. 69 South Great George's St., Dublin 2. www.waltons.ie. O 01/475-0661. Bus: 15E, 15F, 16, 16A, 19, 19A, 65, 65B, 65X, 83, 122.

Crafts, Design & Homeware

Avoca Handweavers ★★★ A Dublin institution, Avoca is a wonderland of vivid colors, intricately woven fabrics, soft blankets, light woolen sweaters, children's clothes, and toys, all in a delightful shopping environment spread over three floors near Trinity College. All the fabrics are woven in the Vale of Avoca in the Wicklow Mountains. The store also sells pottery, jewelry, vintage and antique clothing, food, and adorable little things you really don't need, but can't live without. Hands down, this is one of the best stores in Dublin. The top-floor **cafe** is a great place for lunch (see p. 147). 11–13 Suffolk St., Dublin 2. www.avoca.ie. **© 01/677-4215.** Bus: All An Lar (cross-city) buses.

The Design Tower ** A cutting-edge convocation of hot designers and craftspeople work at this

former sugar refinery at the Grand Canal Quay on the eastern side of the city. Occupants include Seamus Gill, who makes extraordinary, almost organic-seeming silverware; conceptual artist and fashion designer Roisin Gartland; and jewelry designer Brenda Haugh, whose work includes interesting modern interpretations of Celtic motifs. Some designers here have walk-in shops, but most prefer appointments, so call ahead if you want to see someone specific. The Design Tower is near Grand Canal Dock DART station, or about a 20-minute walk from Grafton Street. Trinity Centre, Grand Canal Quay, Dublin 2. www.thedesigntower.com. © 01/677-5655. DART: Grand Canal Dock. Bus: 1, 2, 3, 50, 56A, 77A.

House of Ireland \star An excellent "one-stop shop" for quality Irish souvenirs, this is the place to come for Waterford and Galway Crystal, Belleek China, jewelry, linens, and clothing by big-name Irish designers such as Eugene and Anke McKernan, John Rocha, and Louise Kennedy. Just one trip here and nobody back home needs to know that you didn't really scour the country for that perfect knick-knack or gift. If you've really left your souvenir shopping until the last minute, two smaller outlet branches are at Dublin Airport. 37–38 Nassau St., Dublin 2. www.houseofireland.com. © 01/671-1111. Bus: 15X, 25X, 32X, 33X, 39X, 41X, 51D, 51X, 58X, 67X, 70X, 84X, 92.

Mayfly ******* This Temple Bar charmer (look for the cow in the buggy out front) is a treasure trove for deliciously creative, artsy gifts, jewelry, clothing, and other doodads that are impossible to resist. Artists whose work is for sale include Courtney Tyler, who turns old watch faces into interesting jewelry, and James Carroll, a designer of furniture and homeware known for his unusual and playful creations. 11 Fownes St., Dublin 2. www.mayfly.ie. **© 086/376-4189.** Bus: 39B, 49X, 50X, 65X, 77X.

Moss Cottage $\star\star\star$ A real one-of-a-kind craft store, Moss Cottage is the kind of place where you go in for a browse and leave with bags full of souvenirs and a mental note to email the lovely owner pictures of all your finds *in situ* back home. They specialize in "upcycling"—converting old junk into beautiful things—and stock everything from scented candles to vintage homewares. The shop is in the suburb of Dundrum, about 7km (4¹/₂ miles) south of the city center. 4 Pembroke Cottages, Main St., Dundrum, Dublin 14. www.mosscottage.ie. **© 01/215-7696.** Luas: Dundrum. Bus: 14, 14C, 44, 44B.

Powerscourt Townhouse Centre ** In a restored 1774 town house, this four-story complex consists of a central sky-lit courtyard and more than 60 boutiques, craft shops, art galleries, snack bars, wine bars, and restaurants. The wares include all kinds of crafts, antiques, paintings, prints, ceramics, leatherwork, jewelry, clothing, chocolates, and farmhouse cheeses. You can also book a behind-the-scenes tour to learn more about the house's history. You can see the old kitchen and cellars, the former Lord and Lady's bedrooms and dressing rooms, the music room, ballroom, and dining room. For details and booking contact Shireen Gail on © 086/806-5505, or email shireengail@gmail.com. 59 S. William St., Dublin 2. www.powerscourtcentre.com. © 01/679-4144. DART: Pearse. Luas: St. Stephen's Green. Bus: 11, 11A, 11B, 14, 14A, 15A, 15C, 15X, 20B, 27C, 32X, 33X, 39B, 39X, 41X, 46B, 46C, 46N, 46X, 51X, 58X, 65X, 70X, 84X.

Department Stores

Arnott's ★★ Ireland's original department store, Arnott's first opened its illustrious doors in 1843. Its selection of womenswear, menswear, gifts and beauty products is enormous. Weary shoppers will also be delighted to find a branch of that most famous of Dublin coffee houses, Bewley's, next to the Abbey Street entrance on the lower ground floor. Arnott's stays open for late shopping until 9:30pm on Thursdays and 8pm on Fridays. Henry St., Dublin 1. www.arnotts.ie. **© 01/805-0400.** Luas: Abbey St. Bus: 1, 7, 7B, 7D, 8, 11, 38, 38A, 38B, 39N, 40, 88N, 120, 122, 123, 747.

Brown Thomas ★★★ The top-hatted doorman out front sets a deceptively formal tone for this great

old Dublin institution; we've always found it a relaxed and friendly place, even if the credit card seems to take a bit of a beating. Stop by for most of the major fashion labels before getting your nails done, having a one-to-one at the cosmetics counters, and indulging yourself at the bar and cafe or the elegant restaurant. 88–95 Grafton St., Dublin 2. www.brownthomas.com. © 01/605-6666. Luas: St. Stephen's Green. Bus: 11, 11A, 11B, 14, 14A, 15A, 15C, 15X, 20B, 27C, 32X, 33X, 39B, 39X, 41X, 46B, 46C, 51X, 58X, 70X, 84X.

Cleary's ★ As we go to press, it looks like this store may be closing. Before going, do check its website to make sure it's still in business. Cleary's is a traditional favorite among Dublin's trendy set (this one's been keeping them dressed in the height of fashion since 1941). 18–27 Lower O'Connell St., Dublin 1. www.clerys.ie. © 01/878-0600. Luas: Abbey St. Bus: 1, 11, 38, 38A, 38B, 39N, 88N, 120, 122, 123, 747.

Harvey Nichol's ★ The only Irish outpost of the famous British department store chain, "Harvey Nicks" is as renowned for its outstanding food court as it is for its high-end fashion and beauty. There's also a good steakhouse and trendy cocktail bar. Harvey Nichol's is in the Dundrum Town Centre mall, 8km (5 miles) south of Dublin city center. Dundrum Town Centre, Sandyford Rd., Dundrum, Dublin 16. www.harveynichols.com. © 01/291-0488. Luas: Dundrum. Bus: 14, 14C, 44, 44B.

Fashion & Clothing

Alias Tom ★★ This has long been one of Dublin's top boutique clothing stores. Alias Tom made its name in menswear, but now sells designer fashions (mostly Italian) for women, too. Prices tend to be high, but so does the quality. Duke House, Duke St., Dublin 2. www.aliastom.com. © 01/671-5443 (menswear); © 01/677-8842. Bus: 15A, 15B, 44, 61, 100X, 101X, 111, 133, 140.

BT2 \star A more cutting-edge spin-off from the department store Brown Thomas (see above), BT2 sells youthful designer fashions for men and women. They also have the biggest denim bar in Ireland, full of hip brand names such as Supertrash and Seven For All Mankind. They also have a branch in the **Dundrum Town Centre** mall (© 01/296-8400). 28–29 Grafton St., Dublin 2. www.bt2.ie. © 01/605-6747. DART: Pearse. Bus: 10, 11A, 11B, 13, or 20B.

China Blue \star Shelves upon shelves of women's and men's footwear can be found at this trendy shoe store—including an enticing range of designer Doc Martens. They also sell a good selection of kids' shoes. Merchants Arch, Temple Bar, Dublin 2. www.chinablueshoes.com. **© 01/671-8785.** Bus: 25, 25A, 25B, 25N, 37, 39A, 51D, 67N, 69, 69X, 70, 70N, 79, 79A.

Claire Garvey *** One of the top young Irish fashion designers to have emerged in the 21st century so far, Claire Garvey sells beautiful, bold, and feminine creations from her boutique on ubertrendy Cow's Lane. Her creations, which are full of elegance and dramatic flair, are true one-of-akind items. 6 Cow's Lane, Dublin 8. www.clairegarvey.com. **© 01/671-7287.** Bus: 13, 27, 37, 39, 39A, 40, 49, 51D, 69, 69X, 70, 70N, 77A, 77X, 79, 79A, 83, 83A, 123, 145, 747.

Costelloe & Costelloe ★ This sweet clothing and accessories store sells a great range of handbags, pashminas, shrugs, and—delightfully—fascinators and headpieces. Best of all, prices are thoroughly reasonable. 14A Chatham St., Temple Bar, Dublin 2. www.costelloeandcostelloe.com. **© 01/671-4209.** DART: Tara St. Bus: 15A, 15B, 44, 61, 140.

Design Centre *** Located in the Powerscourt Townhouse Centre (see p. 161), this is a great showcase for Irish fashion designers, both new and established. A lot of what's on offer is unsurprisingly expensive, but you can sometimes walk away with a bargain—particularly seconds—and score at the sales, too. Powerscourt Townhouse Centre, Dublin 2. www.designcentre.ie. **© 01/679-5863** or 679-5718. DART: Pearse. Luas: St. Stephen's Green. Bus: 11, 11A, 11B, 14, 14A, 15A, 15C, 15X, 20B, 27C, 32X, 33X, 39B, 39X, 41X, 46B, 46C, 46N, 46X, 51X, 58X, 65X, 70X, 84X.

Kevin & Howlin ***** There's nothing cutting-edge whatsoever about this place—and that's just why

people like it. Dublin's go-to store for Donegal tweed, they've been selling hand-woven jackets, coats, hats and other traditional Irish countryware since the 1930s. 31 Nassau St., Dublin 2. www.kevinandhowlin.com. © 01/633-4576. DART: Pearse. Bus: 7B, 7D, 25, 25A, 25B, 25X, 26, 46A, 66, 66A, 66B, 66X, 67, 67X, 145. Louise Kennedy ★★★ Undoubtedly one of the biggest names in contemporary Irish fashion—so respected that they put her on a postage stamp a few years ago—Louise Kennedy has dressed everyone from heads of state to Hollywood superstars. Her boutique in Merrion Square showcases the best of her current collection. Among the items she's famous for is the gorgeous "Kennedy bag," a limited edition handbag that became the must-have accessory among the Irish *glitterati* in 2013—yours for a mere €1,500. 56 Merrion Sq., Dublin 2. www.louisekennedy.com. © 01/662-0056. DART: Pearse. Bus: 25, 25A, 25B, 26, 66, 66A, 66B, 67.

Mad Hatter \star Going for a day at the races? Preparing for that special event? Talented milliner Nessa Cronin sells her quirky, original, elegant, and fun designs here, alongside hats by other top European designers. She also has a range of handbags, jewelry, and other accessories—but the headgear's always the star. 20 Lower Stephen St., Dublin 2. www.madhatterhat.ie. **© 01/405-4936.** Bus: 9, 16, 49N, 65, 65B, 68, 68A, 83, 83A, 122.

Om Diva *** Proof that not every designer emporium has to be the kind of place where they check your credit rating at the door, Om Diva is a delightful, cheery place, with a great selection of designer women's fashion, handmade jewelry, vintage clothes and accessories. One of Dublin's real finds. 27 Drury St., Dublin 2. www.omdivaboutique.com. **© 01/679-1211.** Bus: 9, 16, 16A, 83.

Gourmet Food

Butlers Chocolate Café ** These chocolatiers now sell their delicious wares all over the world, but the business is still owned and run by the same Dublin family who founded it in 1932. Their Chocolate Cafes are all over Dublin, including Grafton Street, Henry Street and the airport, but the one on Wicklow Street is the flagship. In addition to an enormous selection of gourmet chocolates, they also sell cakes, cookies, flapjacks—and make a mean cup of joe. True chocoholics can now take a tour of the Butler's factory, just north of Dublin (see p. 126). 24 Wicklow St., Dublin 2. www.butlerschocolates.com. **© 01/671-0591.** Bus: 9, 16, 49N, 54A, 65, 65B, 68, 68A, 83, 83A, 100X, 101X, 109, 111, 122, 133, 150.

STEP away FROM THE LEPRECHAUN: THREE ALTERNATIVE DUBLIN SOUVENIRS

Sure, you can stop by any of the multitude of souvenir stores in Dublin for a keychain shaped like a shamrock, or a t-shirt with an "amusing" slogan ("Irish I were drunk!" "Fifty Shades of Green!" A leprechaun with his pants down? Be still our aching sides!) But unless your friends really *do* want a hat shaped like a pint of Guinness, you might score better points back home with one of these more authentic mementos.

- A pennywhistle. At Waltons (69 S. Great Georges St., Dublin 2; www.waltons.ie; © 1/475-0661), which has been in the music business since the 1920s, you'll find sheet music, instructional CDs, and instruments both traditional and modern, ranging from an authentic *bodhrán* (drum) for about €42, to an "absolute beginners" Dublin tin whistle set, complete with DVD tutorial and songbook, for €17.
- Blankets at Avoca. Avoca Handweavers (11–13 Suffolk St., Dublin 2; www.avoca.ie; © 1/677-4215) is known for its lovely clothing and accessories, And for good reason: Their hand-woven Irish wool items, dyed with traditional methods, are soft as silk. Their luxurious blankets are not cheap (starting at around €50), but they are very well made and come in vibrant shades of blue, green, and pink, among many options. Or you can invest instead in a jar of their traditional Irish breakfast marmalade, or perhaps some delightfully named hedgerow jam—each an Avoca specialty costing €4.95.
- Flapjacks. If you ask for a flapjack in Ireland, you won't get a pancake, but a sweet biscuit (cookie to North Americans) made from rolled oats, butter, brown sugar, and honey, often with fruit, nuts, or yogurt added. It's not unlike a posh granola bar. The traditional treats can be bought in boxes at food stores, or grab one in a coffee shop for a euro or two—and they stay fresh for a few days. They are sturdy enough to survive the trip home.

Fallon & Byrne Food Hall *** This exceptional artisan food and wine store is like a high-end deli crossed with an old-fashioned grocer's—albeit a rather posh, modern version. Produce is laid out in open crates and the shelves are stocked with epicurean treats of all kinds, plus cheese, charcuterie, and a great selection of wine. They also have an outstanding restaurant on the top floor (see p. 151). 11–17 Exchequer St., Dublin 2. www.fallonandbyrne.com. **© 01/472-1010.** Bus: 9, 16, 16C, 49N, 65, 65B, 68, 68A, 83, 83A, 122, 150.

Sheridan's Cheesemongers *** Serious cheese lovers need look no further for their fix than this wonderful cheesemonger on South Anne Street. They stock around 100 different varieties of cheese— French, English, Italian, you name it—but unsurprisingly it's the traditional Irish varieties that are a particular specialty. They also sell other deli items, such as wine and cold meats, and do sandwiches to go. 11 South Anne St., Dublin 2. www.sheridanscheesemongers.com. **© 01/924-5110.** Bus: 15A, 15B, 44, 61, 140.

Jewelry

DESIGNyard ★★★ Some of Ireland's leading designers of contemporary jewelry have creations for sale here. Prices tend to be quite high—the cheapest items are around €100 and rise to thousands —but you'll be walking away with something beautiful and unique. They have an especially beautiful range of engagement rings. 25 S. Frederick St., Dublin 2. www.designyard.ie. **© 01/474-1011.** DART: Pearse. Bus: 7B, 7D, 25, 25A, 25B, 25X, 26, 46A, 66, 66A, 66B, 66X, 67, 67X, 145.

Gollum's Precious ★ Come here for classic vintage and designer jewelry—especially French. They have a particularly good collection of contemporary pearl earrings, bracelets and necklaces. Ground floor, Powerscourt Centre, Dublin 2. www.gollumspreciouspowerscourt.yolasite.com. **© 01/670-5400.** DART: Pearse. Luas: St. Stephen's Green. Bus: 11, 11A, 11B, 14, 14A, 15A, 15C, 15X, 20B, 27C, 32X, 33X, 39B, 39X, 41X, 46B, 46C, 46N, 46X, 51X, 58X, 65X, 70X, 84X.

Rhinestones \star This small but delightful jewelry store specializes in costume jewelry, contemporary and vintage. The antique pieces go back to the early Victorian age, but the mid-20th

century collection has a particular air of glamour. 18 St. Andrews St., Dublin 2. **© 01/679-0759.** Bus: 9, 13, 16, 16C, 49N, 54A, 83, 83A, 100X, 101X, 109, 111, 122, 123, 133, 150, 747, 869.

Weir & Sons ****** Established in 1869, this is the granddaddy of Dublin's fine jewelry shops. It sells new and antique jewelry, as well as silver, china, and crystal. The ground floor of the main branch on Grafton Street also has a section devoted to 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-century antique silver from Ireland and Britain. The shop is located on the corner of Grafton and Wicklow Streets. A second branch can be found in Dundrum, about 7km ($4\frac{1}{3}$ miles) south of the city center. 96–99 Grafton St. and 1–3 Wicklow St., Dublin 2. www.weirandsons.ie. **© 01/677-9678.** Bus: 15X, 32X, 33X, 39X, 41X, 51X, 58X, 70X, 84X.

Specialist

Forbidden Planet ★ Geeks, assemble! This treasure trove of comics, books, DVDs, and other assorted memorabilia celebrates everything cult. Their range of comics and graphic novels is enormous. 5–6 Crampton Quay, Dublin 2. www.forbiddenplanet.co.uk. **© 01/671-0688.** Luas: Jervis. Bus: 25, 25A, 25B, 25N, 37, 39, 39A, 51D, 67N, 69, 69X, 70, 70N, 79, 79A.

TEMPLE BAR street markets

On weekends, chic Temple Bar shopping isn't only indoors-it spills outside into three of Dublin's finest street markets.

The most glamorous of the three is the **Designer Mart**, a showcase for fashion designers and craftspeople from all over Ireland, which takes place in uber-trendy Cow's Lane every Saturday from 10am until 5pm. The more low-key **Book Market** takes up residence in Temple Bar Square all weekend, from 11am to 6pm; there's always some piece of printed treasure or other to be unearthed among its second-hand book stalls.

A must for foodies, the **Food Market** makes its presence felt most of all, as tempting aromas waft around Meeting House Square from 10am to 4:30pm on Saturday. Should the weather take a turn for the worse, there's even a fancy retractable roof to keep you dry while you deliberate over which Irish farmhouse cheese to take away, before waiting in line for a freshly cooked snack.

For more information on the Temple Bar street markets, check out www.templebar.ie.

The R.A.G.E. ** Imagine the kind of shop where 1980s teenagers hung out in John Hughes movies and you've got this place about right. A combination of vinyl record store and retro video game emporium, everything here is vintage—all the vinyl can be sampled first, and you can even play some of the old video games on an original arcade machine. 16B Fade St., Dublin 2. www.therage.ie. **© 01/677-9594.** Bus: 9, 16, 49N, 65, 65B, 68, 68A, 83, 83A, 122.

DUBLIN AFTER DARK

Nightlife in Dublin is a mixed bag of traditional old pubs, where the likes of Joyce and Behan once imbibed and where Irish music is often reeling away, and cool modern bars, where the hottest new international sounds fill the air and the crowd knows more about Prada than the Pogues. There's little in the way of crossover, although there are a couple of quieter bars and a few with an alternative angle. Admission to nightclubs varies from free if you arrive early-ish, to around \in 20 for the very fanciest places. Aside from the eternal elderly pubs, things change rapidly in the world of Dublin nightlife, so pick up a copy of local listings magazines, such as *Totally Dublin* (p. 95) if you're looking for the very latest in the club scene.

The tourism website **www.ireland.com** offers a "what's on" daily guide to cinema, theater, music, and whatever else you're up for—click "Destinations" and "Dublin City" from the front page, then follow the "Things to Do" link. You can search by type of experience or view complete events listings by date. The **Dublin Events Guide**, at **www.dublinevents.com**, also provides a

comprehensive listing of the week's entertainment possibilities.

As with any big city, ticket prices for shows vary considerably, from around $\in 5$ to over $\in 100$. Advance bookings for most large concerts, major plays, and so forth can be made through **Ticketmaster Ireland** (www.ticketmaster.ie; **© 81/871-9300** or 353/818-719-300 internationally, including Northern Ireland). The best way to arrange tickets is online or by phone, but if you prefer to speak to a human being in person, you can also drop by one of their small Ticket Centres—central Dublin locations are at **Ticketron**, Jervis Shopping Centre, Jervis St., Dublin 1, and St. Stephen's Green Shopping Centre, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2; and **FAI Umbro Store**, the Football Association of Ireland, 15 Westmoreland St., Dublin 2; the Pavillion at **The Hub**, Dublin City University, Glasnevin.

Of course, foremost in anyone's mind when it comes to Dublin nightlife is bound to be its pubs. These are the secular temples of Ireland, and a cultural export that has conquered the world. The Irish didn't invent the pub, but many would say they perfected it. In *Ulysses,* James Joyce referred to the puzzle of trying to cross Dublin without passing a pub; his characters quickly abandoned the quest as impossible, and stopped to sample a few pints instead. You may want to look upon that as a challenge.

Arenas & Concert Venues

3Arena \star This enormous indoor arena (known as the O2 until 2014) is the biggest venue in Dublin, and the fifth-best attended in the world at this writing. It's the go-to place for major international acts, standup comedy, and other big-ticket entertainment events—all top-of-the-bill stuff. North Wall Quay, Dublin 1. www.3arena.ie. Box Office: © 081/871-9300; Enquiries: 01/819-8888. Luas: The Point. Bus: 151.

National Concert Hall ****** This is the place to come if classical music is more your thing. The program also covers opera, world music, jazz, show tunes, and musicals. Something is on virtually every night; check the website for full listings. Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2. www.nch.ie. **@ 01/417-0000.** Luas: Harcourt. Bus: 100X, 101, 101X, 109, 111, 126, 133.

Vicar Street $\star\star$ This much-loved venue is definitely not Dublin's largest—its capacity is roughly 1/14th that of the 3Arena (see above)—but it attracts consistently big names in music and standup comedy. 58–59 Thomas St., Dublin 8. www.vicarstreet.ie. **© 81/871-9390.** Bus: 13, 25N, 40, 69N, 123.

Bars & Nightclubs

37 Dawson Street ** This sumptuous cocktail bar is crammed with antiques and curios everything from a stuffed bull's head on a polished wood wall to old anatomical drawings and ornate vases. Their cocktail list is as extensive and imaginative as the quirky surroundings would suggest, and at the back of the building is a proper, old-style whiskey bar. They also have a good restaurant. 37 Dawson St., Dublin 2. www.37dawsonstreet.ie. **© 01/902-2908.** Mon noon–11:30pm; Tues–Sat noon–2:30am; Sun noon–11pm. Luas: St. Stephen's Green. Bus: 15A, 15B, 44, 61, 140.



Café en Seine *** This elegant, 1920s-style cafe/bar is the cat's pajamas. The interior is all terribly Gatsby, with hanging lamps, glass ceilings, faux-baroque furniture, and polished brass statuettes. Their cocktail list is straight-up fun, the whiskey menu a page long, and the atmosphere appropriately decadent. They also serve a bistro menu until 9pm, and on Sundays they do a popular jazz brunch from noon to 5pm. 39 Dawson St., Dublin 2. www.cafeenseine.ie. **© 01/677-4567.** Mon noon–11:30pm; Mon–Tues noon–12:30am; Wed–Sat noon–2:30am; Sun noon–12:30am. Luas: St. Stephen's Green. Bus: 15A, 15B, 44, 61, 140.

Dakota ** Small but perfectly curated, this stylish bar on South William Street has a hip clientele and an outstanding selection of bottled beers and cocktails. The crowd is young and the atmosphere raucously sophisticated. 9 S. William St., Dublin 2. www.dakotabar.ie. **© 01/672-7969.** Mon–Wed noon–11:30pm; Thurs noon–12:30am; Fri–Sat noon–2:30am; Sun noon–11:30pm. Bus: 9, 16, 49N, 54A, 65, 65B, 68, 68A, 83, 83A, 122, 150.

Lillie's Bordello \star One of Dublin's real "VIP" clubs, this long-time celebrity magnet has a notoriously snooty door policy and plenty of roped off areas to make you feel excluded from where the real fun is happening. Still, if glamour is your thing, put on your glitziest gear and act like you just *belong* inside. 2 Adam Court, Grafton St., Dublin 2. www.lilliesbordello.ie. **© 01/679-9204.** Daily 11pm–3am. Bus: 15A, 15B, 44, 61, 100X, 101, 101X, 111, 140.

Panti Bar ★★ One of Dublin's most famous gay clubs—its full name is "Pantibar Homo Activity Centre"—this place is hugely popular and riotously good fun. Saturday night is cabaret night, hosted by drag queen Panti herself, and there's a "gay ole' tea dance" from 3pm on Sundays. 7–8 Capel St., Dublin 1. www.pantibar.com. © 01/874-0710. Mon, Wed, and Sun 5–11:30pm; Tues 5pm–2am; Thurs–Sat 5pm–2:30am. Luas: Jervis, Four Courts. Bus: 25, 25A, 25B, 25N, 25X, 26, 66, 66A, 66B, 66N, 66X, 67, 67N, 67X, 69, 69N, 79, 79A.

Sahara ****** This cool Temple Bar nightclub has a dash of celebrity cred to go along with its Near Eastern theme (try the delicious, Moroccan-style twist on a Long Island Iced Tea). The latest sounds are on the turntables, the clientele is young, and the atmosphere suitably laid-back. 10 Westmoreland St., Dublin 2. www.saharadublin.com. © 01/670-8128. Fri and Sat 11pm–3am. Luas: Tara St. Bus: 100X, 133.

Vanilla $\star\star$ A generation ago, this is how everyone thought nightclubs would look in the 21st century—artfully molded furniture, bold lighting effects, an illuminated dance floor, flatscreen TVs—the look (and sound) of this place is so trendy it almost hurts. Dress to impress or you won't make it past the door—but you have to be over 21. 19 Morehampton Rd., Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. www.vanillanightclub.com. **(087/417-4877.** Fri and Sat 11pm–3am. Bus: 7B, 7D, 25X, 39, 39A, 41X, 46A, 46E, 66X, 67X, 116, 118, 145, 700.

The Woolshed Baa and Grill \star If you're looking for somewhere to watch a big game, this is the place to do it. Enormous TV screens flank the bar, showing whatever's hot on in the sporting world—including football (the European kind), rugby, U.S. sports (including football, the American kind), and whatever else happens to be going on. They also serve crowd-pleasing bar food. Parnell St., Dublin 1. www.woolshedbaa.com. © 01/872-4325. Mon-Tues noon-11:30pm; Wed noon-2:30am; Thurs noon-2am; Fri-Sat. noon-1am; Sun noon-11pm. Opening hours may change for major sporting events. Luas: Jervis. Bus: 13, 40, 40B, 40D, 140.

Comedy Clubs

The Comedy Cellar $\star\star$ One of the country's top comedy clubs, the Comedy Cellar showcases the best young pretenders in the world of Irish standup one night a week, on Wednesday night, when it takes over the upstairs room of the International Bar on Wicklow Street. Tickets cost \in 10. The International, 21 Wicklow St., Dublin 2. www.dublincomedycellar.com. **© 01/677-9250.** Wed 9:30pm (doors open 9pm). Bus: 16, 49N, 54A, 83, 83A, 100X, 101X, 109, 111, 133, 150.

Laughter Lines ★★ What is it about Dublin on a Wednesday that everybody needs cheering up? Another midweek pub takeover, this one happens at the Duke on Duke Street, every Wednesday night at 9pm (show starts 9:30pm). The talented company improvises sketches according to whatever the audience suggests. It's chaotic and great fun. Tickets are €5. The Duke, Duke St., Dublin 2. www.laughterlinesdublin-com.webs.com. © 01/679-9553. Wed 8:30pm. Bus: 11, 11A, 11B, 14, 14A, 15A, 15C, 15X, 20B, 27C, 33X, 39B, 41X, 46B, 46C.

Pubs

The Bank on College Green ** This handsome place was built as a bank in 1892, at the height of Victorian opulence. While it's also a quite appealing restaurant (see review p. 147), you can enjoy its stunning interior just as well by simply grabbing a pint or a dram. 20 College Green, Dublin 2. www.bankoncollegegreen.com. **© 01/677-0677.** Mon–Fri noon–4pm and 6–10pm; Sat–Sun noon–5pm and 6–10pm. Bus: 15X, 32X, 33X, 39B, 39X, 41X, 49X, 50X, 51X, 58X, 65X, 70X, 77X, 84X.

The Brazen Head *** This is a serious contender for the coveted title of "oldest pub in Ireland," having served the locals continually since at least 1661 (although an alehouse was reputedly on the same spot for hundreds of years before that—they claim 1198 as the foundation date, and who's to argue?). It was once a hangout for Irish revolutionaries, and Joyce mentioned the place in *Ulysses,* although today it's more famous for lively traditional music sessions. Every night features a different act, and a popular open session is on Sundays from 3:30 to 6:30pm—join in if you think you've got what it takes! 20 Lower Bridge St., Dublin 8. www.brazenhead.com. **© 01/677-9549.** Mon–Thurs 10am–midnight; Fri–Sat 10am–12:30am; Sun 11am–midnight. Luas: Smithfield. Bus: 25, 25A, 25B, 25X, 26, 37, 39, 39A, 51D, 51X, 66, 66A, 66B, 66X, 67.

Listen to the Music

When you're out for a night of traditional Irish folk music, you should know that some pubs charge and some do not; if the band is playing informally in the main bar, as often happens, there's no charge, although they will probably pass a hat at some point, and everybody should toss in a few euro. If there is a charge, the music usually happens in a separate room from the main pub, and the charge will be noted on the door; usually it's about $\notin 5$ to $\notin 10$, and you pay as you go in, cash only.

And, don't worry. If they're selling CDs they'll make sure you know about it. (They'll probably autograph them too, after the set.)

The Cobblestones $\star\star$ A real musician's pub, this place is authentic down to the last note. In fact it's as much a traditional music venue as it is a pub, such is the standard of the music. Free sessions

are in the front bar nightly, plus ticketed acts in the Backroom, a dedicated performance space. The popularity of The Cobblestones with locals is a testament to how good it all is. The pub is on the Northside of the city center, 5-minutes' walk from the Old Jameson Distillery (p. 126). 77 North King St., Smithfield, Dublin 7. www.cobblestonepub.ie. © 01/872-1799. Mon-Thurs 4-11:30pm; Fri-Sat 4pm-12:30am; Sun 1-11pm. Luas: 37, 39, 39A, 70, 70N.

Davy Byrnes ** "He entered Davy Byrnes," wrote Joyce of Leopold Bloom, the hero of *Ulysses*. "Moral pub. He doesn't chat. Stands a drink now and then. But in a leap year once in four. Cashed a cheque for me once." Given the impeccable literary connections of this pub, it's no surprise that so many writers make this a pilgrimage spot when they're in town. Joyce himself was a regular here, although the food has certainly improved since his day—the menu of pub classics and sandwiches is actually pretty good, and reasonably priced too. *Ulysses* fans will be delighted to hear that you can still order a gorgonzola sandwich, Bloom's snack of choice. 21 Duke St., off Grafton St., Dublin 2. www.davybyrnes.com. **© 01/677-5217.** Mon–Wed 11am–11:30pm; Thurs–Fri 11am–12:30am; Sat 10:30am–12:30am; Sun 12:30–11pm. Bus: 11, 11A, 11B, 14, 14A, 15A, 15C, 15X, 20B, 27C, 33X, 39B, 41X, 46B, 46C.

Doheny and Nesbitt *** From the outside, this pub brings to mind a Victorian medicine cabinet, all polished wood with a rich blue-and-gold sign. Its proximity to the political and economic heart of the capital makes it a perennial hangout for politicos, lawyers, economists, and those who write about them—which can make for some spectacularly good eavesdropping. (Indeed the name spawned a whole political shorthand, "the Doheny and Nesbitt School of Economics" to describe the movers and shakers who used to shoot the breeze here during Ireland's boom years of the 1990s and 2000s). If you want to spend time admiring the cozy interior, a midweek daytime visit is best—this place gets packed in the evenings (especially on summer weekends) and even more so when a big sports match is on. 5 Baggot St. Lower, Dublin 2. www.dohenyandnesbitts.ie. **© 01/676-2945.** Wed–Thurs 10am–12:30am; Fri–Sat 10am–2am; Sun noon–11pm; Mon 10am–11:30pm; Tues 10am–midnight. Bus: 10, 10A, 25X, 51D, 51X, 65X, 66D, 66X, 67X, 77X.

Grogan's Castle Lounge *** There's a friendly, chatty vibe at this satisfyingly old-fashioned place, considered one of Dublin's "quintessential" pubs. There's nothing modern or polished about the dimly lit, atmospheric interior, save for the slightly incongruous art collection on the walls (ask if you like a piece—most of it is for sale). Grogan's reputation rests mostly on its mixed clientele, ranging from grizzled old folks who have been coming here for years to hipsterish, artsy types in search of a low-fi hangout. 15 S. William St., Dublin 2. www.groganspub.ie. **© 01/677-9320.** Mon–Thurs 10:30am–11:30pm; Fri–Sat 10:30am–12:30am; Sun 12:30pm–11pm. Bus: 15, 32X, 33X, 39X, 41X, 51X, 58X, 70X, 84X.

Kehoe's ** This lovely old pub is virtually sepia toned, with its burnt-orange walls and acres of polished walnut. That's an appropriate analogy for the atmosphere too—easy-going and frequently packed in the evenings, Kehoe's is best enjoyed in daylight hours, when you can observe the local characters and soak up the old-school Irish pub atmosphere. A particularly appealing feature of this place is that it's retained its original "snugs"—tiny private rooms, almost like booths. 9 South Anne St., Dublin 2. **© 01/677-8312.** Mon–Thurs 10:30am–11:30pm; Fri–Sat 10:30am–12:30am; Sun 12:30pm–11pm. Bus: 15A, 15B, 44, 61, 140.

The Long Hall *** The gorgeous, polished walnut-and-brass interior of this Victorian pub is liable to elicit purs of delight from thirsty patrons as soon as they walk through the door. Undoubtedly one of Dublin's most gorgeously, seductively . . . well, *Irish* of pubs, the Long Hall is named for the bar that runs the entire length of the interior. Regulars have to fight for space alongside the tourist crowd, but it's more than worth squeezing in for a look at the interior. Not that staying here for a few pints is anything like a chore. 51 South Great George's St., Dublin 2. **© 01/475-1590.** Mon–Wed 4–11:30pm; Thurs 1–11:30pm; Fri–Sat 1pm–12:30am; Sun 1–11pm. Bus: 11E, 15F, 16, 16A, 19, 19A, 39X, 65, 65B, 65X, 83, 122.

The Merry Ploughboy ★ In many ways this is sort of the antithesis to The Cobblestones (see above), in that its live music show is very much for tourists. It's cheesy but good fun and hugely popular. They will even ferry you here from the city center and take you back again for just €7.50 round-trip. See p. 157 for full review. Edmondstown Road, Rockbrook, Rathfarnham, Dublin 16. www.mpbpub.com. © 01/493-1495. Daily dinner 7:30pm sharp; show 8:30–10:30pm. Bar food: Mon–Fri 4:30–9:30pm; Sat 12:30–9:30pm; Sun 12:30–8pm. Special bus leaves from and returns to six locations in central Dublin (€7.50 per person; must be pre-booked).

SPINNING AN IRISH yarn OR TWO

The concept of the wonderful **An Evening of Food, Folklore & Fairies ***** is timeless, yet brilliant in its simplicity. No hightech smoke and mirrors, just compelling tales from Irish folklore, passionately told by masters of the storytelling craft. To be clear, this is storytelling for all ages, not just children, and it's a brilliant revival of an ancient art. The whole thing takes place in an atmospherically lit room inside the **Brazen Head** pub (see p. 170), one of the oldest pubs in Dublin. During dinner, the storytellers spin their absorbing yarns. The meal, which is included in the price, is suitably traditional as well: beef and Guinness stew or bacon and cabbage with mashed potatoes. If you haven't had your fill of Irish tradition by the end of it all, you can go downstairs and hear some live music in the bar.

The storytelling evenings are held nightly at 7pm, every night of the week (except in Jan and Feb, when it's only Thurs and Sat nights). Tickets are \notin 46 adults; \notin 42 seniors and students; \notin 29 children. Contact www.irishfolktours.com; O 01/218-8555.

McDaid's ** This was Brendan Behan's favorite pub—and if there ever was a man to be trusted to know a thing or two about such matters, it was surely he. A lively atmosphere always prevails under the high ceilings of this satisfyingly traditional place, well worth dropping in for a slow pint and maybe a browse through one of the antiquarian books on the shelves in the corner. Not that you'll have chance to do much browsing once the evening heats up—ever since Behan spilled the beans, hordes of visitors come here to try it for themselves. Still, it's a welcoming, traditional spot. 3 Harry St., off Grafton St. **© 01/679-4395.** Mon–Thurs 10:30am–11:30pm; Fri–Sat 10:30am–12:30am; Sun 12:30–11pm. Luas: St. Stephen's Green. Bus: 11, 11A, 11B, 14, 14A, 15A, 15C, 15X, 20B, 27C, 33X, 39B, 40A, 40C, 41X, 46B, 46C, 46N, 46X, 51X, 58X, 67X, 70X, 84X.

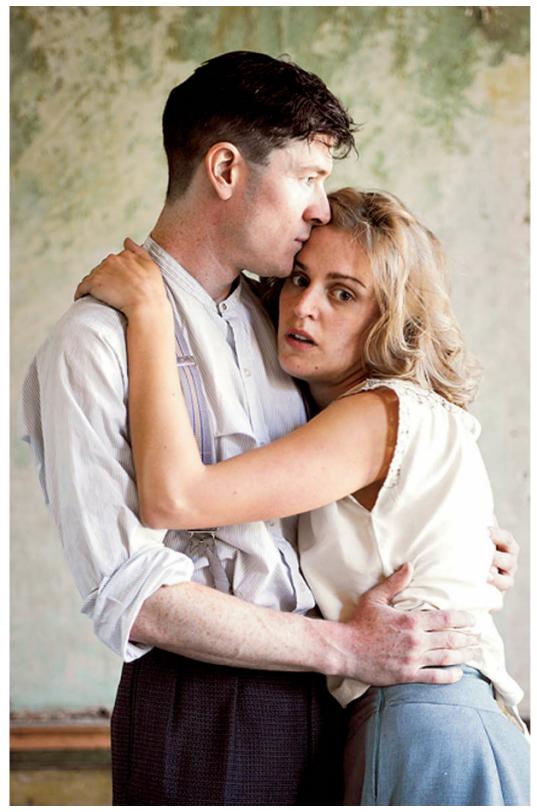
Neary's \star A favorite hangout of Dublin's theatergoers—and actors, stage crews, and just about everyone else from the Gaiety Theatre (below) next door. It's full of Victorian features, such as the wonderful globe lanterns out front, held aloft by a brass arm emerging from the brickwork. The upstairs bar can be something of a quiet retreat during the day. 1 Chatham St., Dublin 2. **© 01/677-8596.** Mon-Thurs 10:30am–11:30pm; Fri–Sat 10:30am–12:30am; Sun 12:30–11pm. Luas: St. Stephen's Green. Bus: 15A, 15B, 61, 140.

The Porterhouse ** This lovely pub in Temple Bar was the first in Dublin to sell only microbrewery beers. Most are produced by the Porterhouse's own mini-chain, and the range is constantly updated, so you never quite know what you're going to get from one visit to the next. The relaxed, jovial vibe and the hearty pub lunches make it a perfect pit stop on a long day's sightseeing. They also do live music every night. 16–18 Parliament St., Dublin 2. www.porterhousebrewco.com. **© 01/679-8847.** Mon-Tues 10:30am-midnight; Wed 10:30am-1:30am; Thurs 10:30am-2am; Fri–Sat. 10:30am-2:30am; Sun noon-midnight. Bus: 13, 27, 37, 39, 39A, 40, 49, 51D, 54A, 56A, 65, 65B, 68, 68A, 69, 69X, 70, 77A, 77X, 79, 79A, 83, 123, 145, 747.

Theater

Abbey Theatre \star Since 1903, the Abbey has been the national theater of Ireland. The original theater, destroyed by fire in 1951, was replaced in 1966 by the current functional, although uninspired, 492-seat house. It remains one of the most respected and prestigious theaters in the country. In addition to its main stage, the theater also has a 127-seat basement studio, the **Peacock**, where it presents newer and more experimental work. 26 Lower Abbey St., Dublin 1. www.abbeytheatre.ie. **(0) 01/878-7222.** Ticket prices vary; generally between about €13–€40. Event times vary; call ahead. Rail: Tara St., Connolly. Luas: Abbey St. Bus: 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 7A, 7B, 7D, 8, 10, 10A, 15, 15A, 15B, 15C, 15E, 15F, 20B, 27B, 27C, 29A, 31, 31B, 32, 32A, 32B, 32X, 33, 33X, 38, 38A, 38C, 41, 41A, 41B, 41C, 41X, 42, 42A, 42B, 43, 45, 46A, 46B, 46C, 46E, 51A, 70B, 70X, 121, 122, 130, 142, 145.

Gaiety Theatre \star The elegant little Gaiety, opened in 1871, hosts a varied array of performances, including everything from opera to classical Irish plays and Broadway-style musicals. And when the thespians leave, the partygoers arrive. On Friday and Saturday from midnight on, the place turns into a nightclub, with four bars hosting live bands and DJs, spinning R&B, indie, blues, or hip hop. There are even occasional cult movie showings. Don't forget to check out the ornate decor before you get too tipsy. The Gaiety Theatre, South King St., Dublin 2. www.gaietytheatre.ie. **©** 081/871-9388. Ticket prices vary; generally between $\epsilon_{15}-\epsilon_{50}$. Event times vary; call ahead. Luas: St. Stephen's Green. Bus: 11, 11A, 11B, 14, 14A, 15A, 15C, 15X, 20B, 27C, 33X, 39B, 40A, 40C, 41X, 46B, 46C, 46N, 46X, 51X, 58X, 67X, 70X, 84X.



Cofounded by William Butler Yeats, the Abbey Theatre is still going strong in the 21st century.

The Gate Theatre \star Just north of O'Connell Street off Parnell Square, this recently restored 370seat theater was founded in 1928 by Irish actors Hilton Edwards and Michael MacLiammoir to provide a venue for a broad range of plays. That policy prevails today thanks to a program that includes a blend of modern works and the classics. Although less known by visitors, the Gate is easily as distinguished as the Abbey. Cavendish Row, Parnell Sq., Dublin 1. www.gatetheatre.ie. **© 01/874-4045.** Ticket prices vary; generally between about €20–€30. Event times vary; call ahead. Bus: 1, 2, 14, 14A, 16, 16A, 19, 19A, 33X, 39X, 40, 40A, 40B, 40C, 41X, 48A, 58X, 70B, 70X, 120. 123.

AN HOUR FROM DUBLIN



D riving in or out of Dublin along the big, bland motorway, it's easy to dismiss the region immediately surrounding the city's urban sprawl. However, you'll find plenty to do within a half-hour drive north, south, or west of Dublin. Rural landscapes, ancient ruins, stately homes—some of Ireland's most iconic sights are surprisingly close to the city. And although it's possible to see any of them on a quick day trip, some fine hotels and restaurants in the area reward visitors who opt to stay overnight instead.

South of Dublin, the Wicklow Mountains rise from the low, green countryside, dark and brooding. A beautiful region, dotted with early religious sites and peaceful river valleys, the hills are perfect for a day trip from Dublin, and make a good starting point for a driving tour of the south of Ireland.

North of Dublin, you'll find the remnants of ancient civilizations at prehistoric sites Newgrange and Knowth. A short distance away, the green hills around the Boyne Valley hold the long-lost home of early Irish kings, who once reigned with a mixture of mysticism and force.

West of Dublin is Kildare, Ireland's horse country. Even if you're not into horseracing, a couple of handsome stately homes and interesting historical sites make this area worth checking out.

ESSENTIALS

Arriving

BY TRAIN Irish Rail (www.irishrail.ie; © 1850/366-222) operates several direct trains daily from Dublin Connolly to Wicklow; the journey takes an hour. Trains leave Dublin's Heuston station for Kildare at least once an hour. The journey takes between 25 and 45 minutes.

BY BUS Bus Éireann (www.buseireann.ie; © 01/836-6111) operates services from the central bus station (Busáras) out to each of the regions listed in this chapter, although there aren't always practical links to the more remote sites. If you're looking to visit attractions by bus, the best bet is probably to take a tour—see the box on p. 197.

BY CAR Most of the attractions listed in this chapter are easily accessible by car in about an hour from Dublin. The roads are good in the regions around the city, although traffic can be a problem—particularly during rush hour, when all roads around Dublin slow to a crawl. In reasonable traffic, Glendalough is about an hour's drive south of the city; Newgrange and Knowth, an hour north; and Kildare Town and its nearby attractions just under an hour to the southwest. The Dublin Tourist Office has excellent road maps.

[FastFACTS] OUT FROM DUBLIN

ATMs/Banks Conveniently located ATMs include the Allied Irish Bank (AIB) on Abbey St. in Wicklow; Ulster Bank on High St. in Trim; and Bank of Ireland on The Square in Kildare.

Dentists For dental emergencies, your hotel will usually contact a dentist for you; otherwise, in Wicklow, try Wicklow Dental, Above Butler's Pharmacy, Abbey St., Wicklow Town (© 040/469977); in Meath, Denis Coughlan on Bective Sq., Kells (© 046/928-2888); or in Kildare, James and Dolores Walsh, Fairgreen Court, Kildare Town (© 045/530088).

Doctors In emergencies, dial @ 999. For non-emergencies, any good hotel will contact a doctor for you. Otherwise, in Wicklow stop

by the Church Street Clinic, Church St., Wicklow Town (© 01/287-5396) or the Bray Medical Centre, Herbert Rd., Bray (© 01/286-2035). In Meath try The Surgery, Finnigans Way, Trim (© 046/943-6215) or the Abbey House Medical Centre, Abbey Rd., Navan (© 046/905-1500). In Kildare check out the Naas General Practice Centre, Dublin Rd., Naas (© 045/876129) or the Kildare Medical Centre, Bride St., Kildare Town (© 045/521361).

Emergencies For police, fire, or other emergencies, dial @ 999.

Pharmacies In Wicklow, there the Butler's Pharmacy on Abbey St., Wicklow Town (© 040/467395); in Meath, O'Shaughnessy's Pharmacy on Haggard St., Trim (© 046/943-1928) or Lynch's Pharmacy, Farrel St., Kells (© 046/924-0515); in

Kildare, Whelan's Pharmacy in the Kildare Shopping Centre, Clargate St., Kildare (© 045/531426) or Boots the Chemist in the Monread Shopping Centre, Monread Rd., Naas (© 045/899322).

Taxis The best way to get a taxi is usually to ask the hotel or restaurant you're in to call you one; otherwise, in Wicklow, try Church St. Cabs, Wicklow Town (© 040/469500), or Cabs Direct, Bray (© 01/286-5555); in Meath contact Tobins Taxis, Trim (© 046/943-7086) or Kells Taxi Hire (© 087/250-4242); and in Kildare, call Naas Cabs, Naas (© 045/871414) or Hoggy's Taxi, Kildare Town (© 087/613-3280).

SOUTH OF DUBLIN: COUNTIES WICKLOW & CARLOW

Wicklow's northernmost border is just a dozen or so miles south of Dublin, making it one of the easiest day trips from the city. The centerpiece of the region is the beautiful **Wicklow Mountains**, traversed by the well-marked **Wicklow Way** walking path, which wanders for miles past mountain tarns and secluded glens. Tucked into the mountains, you'll find the isolated monastery of **Glendalough** and picturesque villages such as **Roundwood**, **Laragh**, and **Aughrim**.



Counties Louth & Meath Hill of Tara 11 Knowth 8 Loughcrew 2 Monasterboice 4 Newgrange 7

Newgrange Farm 9 Old Mellifont Abbey 5 Proleek Dolmen 1 St. Colmcille's House 3 St. Peter's Church of Ireland 6 Trim Castle 10

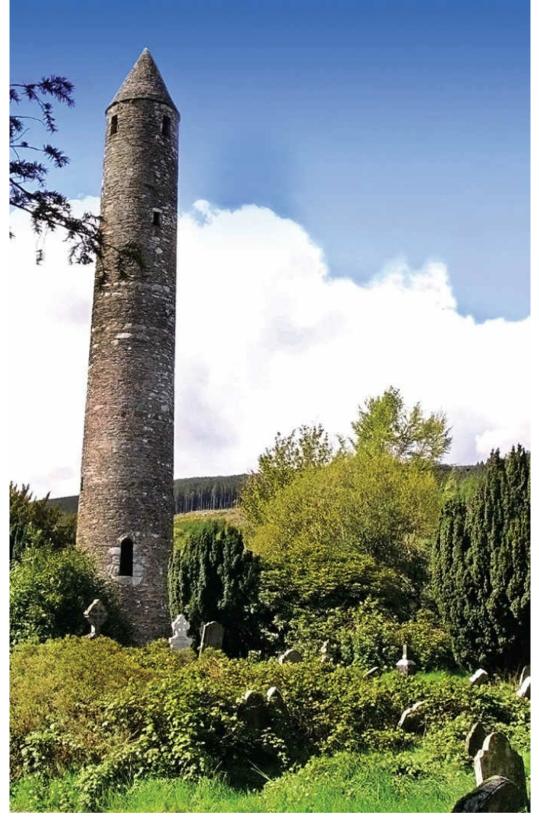
County Kildare Castletown 12 The Curragh Racetrack 15 Irish National Stud 13 Irish Pewtermill 20 Japanese Gardens 14 Moone High Cross 19 St. Brigid's Cathedral 16

Counties Wicklow & Carlow Browne's Hill Dolmen 26 Glendalough 22 Glenmacnass Waterfall 23 Huntington Castle 27 Mount Usher Gardens 24 The Powerscourt Estate 18 Russborough House 17 St. Mullin's Monastery 28 Vale of Avoca 25 Wicklow Mountains National

Park 21



Along the coast, the bright and busy upscale town of **Bray** is 12.6km (7 ³/₄ miles) south of Dún Laoghaire. Farther south are the sweet little harbor town of **Greystones** and, just inland, the charming riverside village of **Avoca**. A handful of historic homes dot the countryside.



An easy day trip from Dublin, Glendalough is a world apart from the bustling capital.

Just over the border of County Wicklow lies **County Carlow**, one of Ireland's smallest counties, bordered to the east by the Blackstairs Mountains and to the west by the fertile limestone land of the Barrow Valley and the Killeshin Hills. Its most prominent feature is the 5,000-year-old granite formation known as **Browne's Hill Dolmen**.

Visitor Information

The Wicklow Tourist Office, Fitzwilliam Square, Wicklow Town (www.visitwicklow.ie; © 040/469117), is open Monday to Friday year-round from 9:20am to 1:15pm and 2 to 5:15pm. The Carlow Tourist Office, Library Building, College Street, Carlow Town (www.carlowtourism.com; © 059/913-0411), is open Monday to Friday year-round, from 9:30am to 5:30pm. Both are also open selected Saturdays in the summer; call before you visit.

Exploring South of Dublin

Browne's Hill Dolmen \star ANCIENT SITE Looking not unlike an elephant about to topple slowly to one side, this megalithic stone table has crouched in this green field for millennia. No one knows its purpose, though archaeologists suspect the dolmen was built to mark the burial place of a long-dead king. The gigantic stack of stones is estimated to be 5,000 years old, and for many centuries, locals believed it had been built by giants. Today, archaeologists say the vast capstone—believed to weigh a colossal 100 tons—was likely rolled into place up an earthen ramp that was then destroyed. Faced with the sheer massiveness of these stones, you may well choose to stick with the tale about the giants.

Off Rathvilly Rd., Carlow, Co. Carlow. No phone. Free admission. Daily dawn-dusk. Access via parking lot and enclosed pedestrian pathway.

DARKNESS & light: THE RISE & FALL OF GLENDALOUGH

The ruins of Glendalough date from the 6th century, when a monk named Coemgen chose this secluded setting to build a great church. He is thought to have been born in 498, to parents named Coemlog and Coemell, at a place called "the Fort of the White Fountain" in Leinster. However, given that the date of his death is placed by most sources as 618—a highly improbable lifespan for the age—none of this is certain. "Coemgen" was later anglicized to Kevin, the name by which he was eventually canonized in 1903.

It is thought that Kevin chose this site because of its isolation, although there's also a Bronze-Age tomb here, suggesting that the place already had some religious significance when Kevin got here.

Over the next 4 centuries, Kevin's church became a center of religious learning, attracting thousands of students from all over Europe. Unfortunately, Glendalough's success was its downfall. The monastery soon came to the attention of Vikings, who pillaged it repeatedly between A.D. 775 and 1071. On one such raid they stole timbers that were used to construct the biggest Viking ship ever known to have been built.

Despite suffering centuries of attack, the monastery at Glendalough always somehow managed to rebuild and bounce back. However, the crushing blow came in 1398, when it was virtually destroyed by invading English troops. Even then, attempts were made to resuscitate it once more, and the monastery limped on—just a shadow of all it had been—until the 17th century, when it was finally abandoned forever.

Glendalough *** RELIGIOUS SITE Tucked away amid deep forests and surrounded by rolling hills, this evocative, misty glen is a truly magical place. First established by a monk known as St. Kevin in the 6th century, Glendalough was originally devoted to Christian worship and scholarly learning. Sacked first by the Vikings and later by the English, it was eventually abandoned by the monks who once sought refuge here. Those beautiful round towers were actually hideouts with retractable ladders that the monks would pull up after them when the raiders arrived. Most of the buildings were destroyed in repeated attacks, but enough survives to ensure the ruins are a striking and evocative sight. The site sprawls, so stop by the visitor center at the entrance to pick up a map. Each of the many walking trails traversing the area takes in different hidden ruins tucked away amid

the lakes and hills. Highlights include the oldest ruins, the **Teampall na Skellig**, across the lake at the foot of towering cliffs (unfortunately there's no boat service and they cannot be visited) and the cave known as **Kevin's Bed**, believed to be where St. Kevin lived when he first arrived at Glendalough. Follow the path from the upper lake to the lower lake and walk through the remains of the monastery complex. There's a nearly perfect round tower, 31m (102 ft.) high and 16m (52 ft.) around the base, as well as hundreds of timeworn Celtic crosses and several chapels. One of these is St. Kevin's Chapel, often called **St. Kevin's Kitchen**, a fine specimen of an early Irish barrel-vaulted oratory with a miniature round belfry rising from a stone roof. Climb the hills to take in the beauty of this extraordinary site from above.

Signposted from R756, 2km (1.3 miles) west of Laragh, Co. Wicklow. www.glendalough.ie. \bigcirc 040/445-352. Admission \in 3 adults; \in 2 students; \in 1 children; \in 8 families. Mid-Mar to mid-Oct daily 9:30am–6pm; mid-Oct to mid-Mar daily 9:30am–5pm; last admission 45 min. before closing.

Glenmacnass Waterfall \star NATURE SITE A wide strip of silver running down a rugged hill, the Glenmacnass Waterfall is more pretty than spectacular. It doesn't plummet so much as slip through the rugged countryside and down the side of Mt. Mullagheleevaun. Follow signs to the waterfall—there's a parking lot near the top of the hill, and a well-signposted path to the falls, but take care on the rocks, which can be slippery.

Laragh, Co. Wicklow. Follow Military Rd. through the Sally Gap and Laragh to the top of Glenmacnass Valley, and then watch for signs to the waterfall. Free admission.

Huntington Castle ** CASTLE This place has all the makings of a spectacular haunting. It's built on the site of a 14th-century abbey, which was itself built on top of a Druid temple (there's a modern shrine to the Goddess Isis in the basement). And it certainly looks the part—the rambling, 17thcentury crenelated manor house is overgrown with vines that turn blood red in the fall. Therefore it should come as no surprise that the castle claims to be the most haunted building in Ireland. According to the owners it is "plagued by ghosts of druids" who cause mists in the fields and showers of blood. Aside from that though, it's very nice. The gardens are beautiful—many of the plants date back to the 18th century—and the unusual 17th-century water features have been restored to working condition. Don't miss the walking path guarded on either side by ancient yew trees. If you're not afraid of ghosts, the castle offers bed-and-breakfast and self-catering accommodations in the elegant Georgian gatehouse; email info@huntingtoncastle for prices and information.

Clonegal, County Carlow (off N80, 6.5km/4 miles from Bunclody). www.huntingtoncastle.com. \bigcirc 053/937-7552. Guided tours: \bigcirc adults; \bigcirc 7 children 12–18; \bigcirc 4 children 11 and under. June–Aug daily tours hourly from 2–5pm. May, Sept open weekends only. Gardens only: \bigcirc 5 adults; \bigcirc 4 children 12–18; \bigcirc 2.50 children 11 and under. May–Sept daily 10am–6pm; last admission 1 hr. before closing.



Huntington Castle in Clonegal, County Carlow.

Mount Usher Gardens ** GARDENS Spreading out on 8 hectares (20 acres) at the edge of the River Vartry, this peaceful and romantic site was once an ancient lake. These days, it's a riverside garden, designed in a distinctively informal style. Fiery rhododendrons, fragrant eucalyptus trees, giant Tibetan lilies, and snowy camellias compete for your attention. Informal and responsive to their natural setting, these gardens have an almost untended feel—a sort of floral woodland. A spacious cafe, run by the fantastic Avoca chain, overlooks the river and gardens. The courtyard at the entrance to the gardens contains an interesting assortment of shops filled with seeds, gardening supplies, and books.

Ashford, County Wicklow (off the N11). www.mountushergardens.ie. **Ø 040/440205.** Admission €7.50 adults; €6 seniors and students; €3 children 5–16; free for children 4 and under. Mar–Oct daily 10am–6pm; last admission 40 min. before closing. Avoca Garden Café: year-round Mon–Fri 9:30am–5pm; Sat–Sun 10am–5pm.

The Powerscourt Estate *** GARDENS/HISTORIC HOUSE The 20th century was not kind to this magnificent estate; abandoned and then gutted by fire, it took more than 30 years to restore the Palladian house to its former glory. The gardens are magnificent, with classical statuary, a shady grotto made of petrified moss, a peaceful Japanese garden, and a massive, over-the-top fountain from which statues of winged horses rise. The landscaper Daniel Robertson designed the gardens between

1745 and 1767. Legend has it that due to crippling gout, he oversaw the work while being carted around in a wheelbarrow, sipping port as he went. When the bottle was dry, work was done for the day. At the garden center you can learn everything there is to know about the plants that thrive here and pick up seeds to take home (although beware of customs rules for such things). A few rooms of the house are open to the public. There's also a playground and gift shops. If you feel energetic, follow the well-marked path over 7km (4 miles) to the picturesque **Powerscourt Waterfall**—the highest in Ireland at 121m (397 ft.). Or you can drive, following signs from the estate.

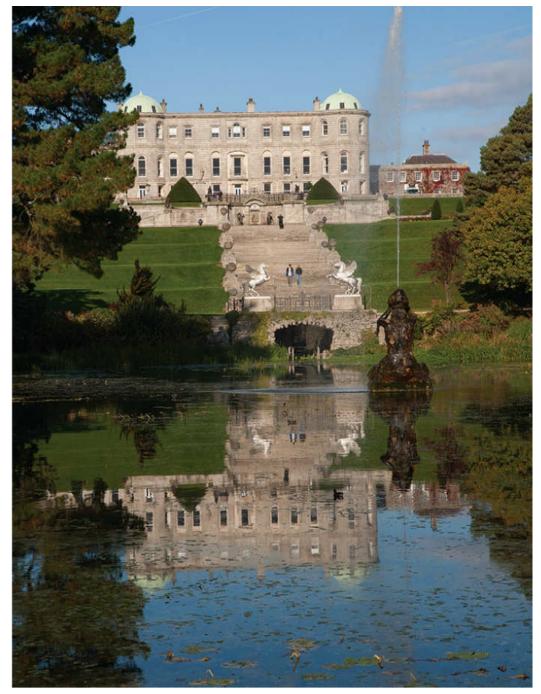
On R760, Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow. www.powerscourt.ie. \bigcirc 01/204-6000. Gardens: &8.50 adults (&6.50 from Nov–Feb); &7.50 seniors and students; &5 children 15 and under; &25 families. Waterfall: &5.50 adults; &5 seniors and students; &2.50 children 15 and under; &16 families. Gardens: daily 9:30am–5:30pm (or at dusk if earlier). Garden Pavilion: Mon–Sat 9:30am–5:30pm; Sun 10am–5:30pm. Ballroom and Garden Rooms: May–Sept Sun–Mon 9:30am–1:30pm; Oct–Apr 9:30am–1:30pm. Powerscourt Waterfall: Jan–Feb, Nov–Dec 10:30am–4:30pm; Mar–Apr, Sept–Oct 10:30am–5:30pm; May–Aug 9:30am–7pm. About 20km (12½ miles) south of Dublin. Bus: 44, 185 (nearest stop is Enniskerry village, approx. 1–2km/ $\frac{2}{3}$ –1½ mile walk).

THE curse OF POWERSCOURT HOUSE

This grand house in Enniskerry has a history of misfortune. It was designed in the 18th century by Richard Cassels, who also designed Russborough House (see p. 185) and Dublin's Parliament building. The same family lived in the building for 350 years until the 1950s, but their fortunes gradually declined. By the time they moved out and donated the once-magnificent house to the state, it was in terrible condition, and the country had little money to restore it. Plagued with financial problems, the renovation limped along, eventually taking 2 decades to complete.

Finally, in 1974, the work was done, and a grand reopening was planned. The day before the event was due to take place a fire broke out, completely gutting the building. So the slow process of reconstruction began again—this time the renovation lasted more than 30 years.

At last, though, the house has a new lease on life as one of the region's biggest tourist attractions. Even though only a small part may currently be seen in its fully restored condition, it's still worth a visit for its gorgeous exterior architecture and exquisite gardens.



View of Powerscourt House and Gardens, Wicklow.

Russborough House $\star\star$ HISTORIC HOUSE Sprawling low across the green landscape, this somber grey-stone villa was built between 1741 and 1751. The designer was Richard Cassels, the same man who designed the much more fanciful Powerscourt House (see p. 183). Today, however, Russborough is known not for its architecture but for housing a small but mighty art gallery. In the 1950s, the house was bought by Sir Alfred Beit, a member of the De Beers diamond family, specifically to hold his massive personal art collection, and it displays one of the most exquisite small rural art collections you're likely to find anywhere. Although many of the most valuable paintings have been moved to other museums after a series of robberies, the collection still includes works by Vermeer, Gainsborough, and Rubens. You can see the house only by guided tour, and there is certainly a lot to see—ornate plaster ceilings by the Lafranchini brothers, huge marble mantelpieces, as well as fine displays of silver, porcelain, and furniture. Kids will be kept amused by a fiendish maze.

Signposted from N81, 3.2km (2 miles) south of Blessington, Co. Wicklow. www.russboroughhouse.ie. \bigcirc 045/865-239. House: \in 10 adults; \in 6 seniors and students, children 15 and under. Combined ticket: \in 12 adults; \in 8 seniors and students; \in 8 children 15 and under;

€30 families. Maze: €3. Daily house tours hourly 10am–5pm. 3D exhibition: 10am–5pm. Bus: 65.

St. Mullin's Monastery \star RELIGIOUS SITE This monastery's idyllic setting—in a sleepy hamlet beside the River Barrow, surrounded by low hills—is reason enough for a visit. These are the ruins of a monastery founded by St. Moling (Mullin) in roughly A.D. 614. Plundered again and again by the Vikings in the 9th and 10th centuries, it was annexed in the 12th century by a nearby Augustinian abbey. Here, too, are a steep grassy motte (the mound on which a castle was built) and the outline of a bailey (the outer wall or court of a castle) constructed by the Normans in the 12th century. In the Middle Ages, the monastery ruins were a popular destination, especially during the height of the Black Death in 1348. By tradition, pilgrims would cross the river barefoot, circle the burial spot of St. Mullin nine times, and drink from the healing waters of the saint's well. These ruins and waters are still the subject of an annual pilgrimage on or near July 25th. Adjoining the monastery buildings is an ancient cemetery still in use, where, contrary to common practice, Protestants and Catholics have long lain side by side. A number of rebels from the 1798 Rising are buried here.

On the Barrow Dr., 12km (7¹/₂ miles) north of New Ross, St. Mullins, Co. Carlow. Free admission. Daily dawn-dusk.

Vale of Avoca \star NATURE SITE Basically a peaceful, green river valley, the Vale of Avoca is the "Meeting of the Waters" where the Avonmore and Avonbeg rivers join to form the Avoca River. Pleasant as it is, we'd probably never have heard of it were it not for the 19th-century poet Thomas Moore who wrote, "There is not in the wide world a valley so sweet as the vale in whose bosom the bright waters meet . . ." Three kilometers (2 miles) away, the charming riverside village of Avoca makes a good stop.

Rte. 755, Avoca, County Wicklow.

Wicklow Mountains National Park *** NATURE SITE Sprawling around Glendalough, this hilly national park is popular with hikers walking the Wicklow Way, a hiking trail that cuts across the park (see p. 188). In the high season, you'll find an information station at the Upper Lake at Glendalough where you can get maps and route guides. Behind the center is a sweet little "sensory garden" (free admission), containing a variety of plants chosen for their scent, texture, and even the sounds of the wildlife they attract. The closest parking is at Upper Lake, where you'll pay a couple of euro per car; or just walk up from the Glendalough Visitor Centre, where the parking is free. *Note:* The Irish National Parks and Wildlife Service warns that ticks carrying Lyme disease are known to live in the hills. Although the risk of contracting the disease is small, you should dress in long sleeves, wear a hat, avoid hiking in shorts, and check for ticks afterward.

Glendalough, County Wicklow. www.wicklowmountainsnationalpark.ie. **© 040/445425.** Free admission. No opening restrictions to park. Information office May–Sept daily 10:30am–5:30pm; Oct, Feb–Apr Sat–Sun 10am–5pm; Nov–Jan Sat–Sun 10am–4pm.



Sally Gap in Wicklow Mountains.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

CYCLING To hire a mountain bike, try **Wicklow Adventures**, Hidden Valley Holiday Park, Rathdrum, Co. Wicklow (www.wicklowadventures.ie; © 086/727-2872). They do rentals for $\in 15$ per day, including helmet and map. Also, **Cycling Safaris** (www.cyclingsafaris.com; © 01/260-0749) offers a weeklong tour of the area for upward of $\in 730$ per person, including bed, breakfast and one night's dinner. They also do shorter 3- and 4-night tours.

GOLF If you're looking for cachet, head to the championship **Druids Glen Golf Club**, Newtonmountkennedy, Co. Wicklow (www.druidsglen.ie; \bigcirc 01/287-3600), a beauty of a championship course that bears more than a fleeting resemblance to Augusta and has hosted the Irish Open four times. Greens fees are \notin 75 midweek, \notin 90 weekends. It also has a partner course nearby, **Druid's Heath.** The Arklow Golf Club, Arklow, Co. Wicklow (www.arklowgolflinks.com; \bigcirc 0402/32492), a seaside par-68 course, charges fees of \notin 25 to \notin 60 depending on the time of day.

HORSEBACK RIDING The hillside paths of Wicklow are perfect for horseback riding. More than a dozen stables and equestrian centers offer horses for hire and riding lessons. Rates average around \notin 30 to \notin 50 per hour. **Brennanstown Riding School,** Hollybrook, Kilmacanogue, Co. Wicklow (www.brennanstownrs.ie; © 01/286-3778), offers beginner's treks up the picturesque Little Sugar Loaf Mountain, which has views across Dublin Bay. Another leading stable in the area is the **Paulbeg Riding School,** Shillelagh, Co. Wicklow (© 053/942-9100), where experienced riders can explore the surrounding hills, and beginners can take lessons.

WATERSPORTS & ADVENTURE SPORTS Deep in the Wicklow Mountains, the Blessington Lakes are a 2,000-hectare (4,940-acre) playground of tranquil, clean, speedboat-free water. Less than an hour's drive from Dublin center, and signposted on N81, **Blessington Lakes Leisure**, Blessington, Co. Wicklow (© 045/857844), provides all you need for canoeing, kayaking, sailing, and windsurfing, as well as land-based sports such as archery, orienteering, tennis, and pony trekking. And at the Hidden Valley Holiday Park in Rathdrum, Wicklow Adventures (www.wicklowadventures.ie; © 086/727-2872) offer a variety of high-octane outdoor activities, including kayaking and laser tag.

Where to Stay South of Dublin

BrookLodge ** A winning combination of top-end hotel, spa, and holiday village, BrookLodge is a luxurious hideaway. Guestrooms are understated and contemporary in design, while suites—which come with a stylish mezzanine level—offer plenty of extra room for not much greater cost. The hotel's award-winning spa, **Wells**, is worth trying out—most 1-hour treatments cost around \in 75. The main restaurant, the excellent **Strawberry Tree ***** (see p. 190), was the first in Ireland to gain full organic certification—many of the ingredients are so local that there's a good chance your dinner was at least partly foraged by the kitchen staff. The hotel is surrounded by an entire village of activities, from golf, hiking, and horseback riding, to an artisan baker, deli, and crafts store.

Macreddin Village (btw. Aughrim & Aghavannagh), Co. Wicklow. www.brooklodge.com. **© 040/236444.** 86 units. €170–€275 double; €175–€310 suite. Free parking. Breakfast included. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bars; 2 pubs; room service; spa; gym; pool; golf course; Wi-Fi (free).

WALK THIS WAY: hiking IN COUNTY WICKLOW

Loved by hikers and ramblers for its peace, isolation, and sheer beauty, the **Wicklow Way** is a 132km (82-mile) signposted walking path that follows forest trails, sheep paths, and country roads from the suburbs south of Dublin, up into the Wicklow Mountains, and down through country farmland to Clonegal. It takes about 5 to 7 days to walk its entirety, with overnight stops at B&Bs and hostels along the route. Most people, however, choose to walk sections as day trips (*Tip:* The southern section, through Tinahely, Shillelagh, and Clonegal, is much gentler and less hilly.). You can pick up information and maps at the Wicklow National Park center at Glendalough, or get more information on the Wicklow Way at **www.irishways.com**.

St. Kevin's Way, an ancient pilgrims' route more than 1,000 years old, has recently been restored. The path runs for 30km (19 miles) through scenic countryside from Hollywood to Glendalough, following the route taken by pilgrims who visited the ancient monastic site, and winds its way through roads, forest paths, and open mountainside. It takes in many of the historical sites associated with St. Kevin, who traveled the route in search of a mountain hermitage, as well as areas of geological interest and scenic beauty.

Leaflets containing maps and route descriptions for less strenuous walks can also be found at tourist offices. Folks who prefer less strenuous walking may enjoy the paths around the lakes at **Glendalough**.

The Lord Bagenal \star This cheerful hotel on the banks of the River Barrow looks like a traditional Irish country inn from the outside, but the interior is completely modern. Although it loses points for character, the bedrooms are spacious and comfortable and the service efficient. It's a good choice for families, because the staff will help organize activities, such as kayaking or fishing on the river, and the bar also has a designated family area. The in-house restaurant serves rich, French-influenced cuisine in a formal setting, while the bar, with its cozy open fires and relaxed atmosphere, offers a casual menu (think fish and chips and burgers).

Main St., Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow. www.lordbagenal.com. **Ø 059/977-4000.** 39 units. €90–€130 double. Breakfast included. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; room service; Wi-Fi (free).

Powerscourt Hotel $\star \star \star$ The grand, sweeping Palladian frontage of this gorgeous hotel is almost as impressive as its namesake, Powerscourt House (see p. 183). Guestrooms are large and elegantly

furnished; some have balconies with views of the Wicklow Mountains. Everything here is above par. The lounges are gorgeous, with soaring ceilings, beautiful furniture, and exquisite views. The inhouse spa, **Espa**, is positively sci-fi in its sleek, high-tech design—the pool is lit by illuminated Swarovski crystals—and the menu of treatments includes a 90-minute "warming peat ritual" and a "shillelagh massage" in which you are, we kid you not, rubbed with a lucky stick (both treatments are €145). The hotel has three eateries of varying levels of formality: The **Sika** restaurant serves outstanding modern European cuisine (truffled goats' cheese, duck breast with blood-orange puree) at sky-high prices. The **Sugar Loaf** lounge is marginally less formal and offers a gorgeous afternoon tea. If you're looking for something casual, **McGill's Pub** is the place to go. Needless to say, the service throughout the hotel is impeccable.

Powerscourt Estate, Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow. www.powerscourthotel.com. \bigcirc 01/274-8888. 200 units. \in 180– \in 275 double; \in 315– \in 700 suite. Free parking. Breakfast \in 22– \in 28. Amenities: 2 restaurants; bar; pub; room service; gym; pool; spa; Wi-Fi (free).

Wicklow Way Lodge ** Though the outside of the building looks plain, it's hard to fault this modern B&B, just 6km (4 miles) from Glendalough (see p. 181). Guestrooms are simple but tastefully furnished, with lots of polished wood and toasty underfloor heating. They also have—how could they not?—enormous windows to take advantage of the picture-perfect surroundings. There's one family room (children are charged at a 50% reduction on the adult rate), although because of the split-level design of the house, very young kids aren't allowed. Hosts Marilyn and Seamus are a joy; genuinely kind and helpful, they're full of tips for the best walking paths. There's homemade bread at breakfast, with fresh local eggs—and you should try the porridge too! A haven of tranquility and charm.

Oldbridge, Roundwood, Co. Wicklow. www.wicklowwaylodge.com. Ø 01/281-8489. 5 units. €90 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free in lounge only).

Where to Dine South of Dublin

Brunel ** MODERN IRISH This place has won plenty of accolades over the years, and still deserves its reputation for excellent modern Irish cuisine. All meats and produces are sourced regionally. The menu changes regularly, but you can expect to find such dishes as butter-rich seafood chowder or tender Wicklow steaks. Vegetarians are well served, with a full menu of non-meat choices. The only flaw is the service, which can be hit or miss.

At the Tinakilly Country House Hotel, Rathnew, Co. Wicklow (on R750, off the N11). www.tinakilly.ie. **© 040/469274.** Reservations recommended. Main courses €18–€32. Mon–Sat 6–10pm; Sun noon–4pm.

Chakra by Jaipur $\star\star$ INDIAN If you need a break from Irish food, or just fancy something a little more adventurous, this outstanding Indian restaurant is a great choice. It's not the most idyllic location, in a concrete-and-glass shopping mall down a rather nondescript street in Greystones, but inside it's bright and cheerful. And the food is outstanding. You might start with a *murgh malai* kebab, made with free-range chicken, saffron mascarpone and beetroot; before following on to the *lahsooni machhi*, a curry made with local monkfish, turmeric, cilantro and rock salt; or the succulent *tawa jhinga kadai*—griddled tiger prawns in a sauce made with caramelized onions.

1st Floor, Meridian Point, Church Rd., Greystones, Co. Wicklow. www.jaipur.ie. Ø 01/201-7222. Main courses €14–€24. Mon–Sat 5:30–11pm; Sun 1–5pm.

Poppies \star DELI/IRISH This is a great pit stop for a cheap and cheerful lunch in Enniskerry, a few minutes' drive from Powerscourt House (see p. 183). Don't expect anything fancy, but it's all freshly made—panini, sandwiches, salads, quiches, and meat pies. The shepherd's pie is a local favorite. Treat yourself to one of the delicious cakes for dessert. You can also get anything on the menu to go. The Square, Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow. www.poppies.ie. **© 01/282-8869.** Main courses €5.50–€10. Daily 10am–6pm.

Roundwood Inn \star MODERN IRISH/EUROPEAN This cozy, welcoming inn has been in business since the 1600s, yet it's wonderfully unpretentious. An open fire roars in the grate, traditional Irish bands play later in the evening—it's a lively, friendly place. The inn has German owners, so the mostly Irish menu has a European twist. Regulars swear by the goulash soup and rollmops (pickled herring rolled and served cold), but you might lean toward the grilled steak, local seafood, roasted game, or hearty stews. The owners have won awards for their excellent wine list. The Roundwood Inn is not far from Glendalough (see p. 181), so the resulting mix of hungry hikers, chatty locals, and passing tourists makes for a cheerful crowd.

Main St., Roundwood, Co. Wicklow. **© 01/281-8107.** Main courses €9–€14. Daily noon–9:30pm.

The Strawberry Tree *** MODERN IRISH The main restaurant of the excellent BrookLodge complex (see p. 187) is rightly regarded as one of the best places to dine in the region. The beautiful, blue-tinged dining room makes a wonderful setting for any gathering. This was the first restaurant in Ireland to receive full organic certification, and that ethos guides the outstanding modern Irish menu, which takes localism seriously. Depending on the season, you might find wild mackerel with shaved fennel, or grilled Irish beef loin with a celeriac puree. If you're feeling gregarious, book a place on the "big table"—a communal table that seats up to 40, on which you're served a set menu in the style of a feast.

At the BrookLodge, Macreddin Village (btw. Aughrim and Aghavannagh), Co. Wicklow. www.brooklodge.com. @ 040/236444. Fixed-price menus €65. Tues–Sun 7–9pm.

NORTH OF DUBLIN: COUNTIES MEATH & LOUTH

North of Dublin's conurbation, the River Boyne rolls through the rich, fertile countryside of counties Meath and Louth. The Boyne is more than a river—it's an essential part of Irish lore, linking Ireland's ancient past (the prehistoric passage tombs of Newgrange, the storied Hill of Tara) with more modern history (the infamous 1690 Battle of the Boyne, when King William III defeated the exiled King James II for the crown of England). Today the Boyne Valley is a much more peaceful place, but it offers visitors a wealth of historic treasures tucked away among miles of farmland and smooth, rolling hills.

Visitor Information

The **Dundalk Tourist Office** is on Market Square, Dundalk, Co. Louth (© 042/935-2111). It's open Monday to Saturday from 9:30 to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm. The **Drogheda Tourist Office**, West St., Drogheda, Co. Louth; © 041/987-2843) is open Monday to Saturday from 9:30am to 5:30pm (closed Saturdays from December to April). The **Bru na Boinne Visitor Center**, the center for Newgrange and Knowth, is at Newgrange, Donore, Co. Meath (© 041/988-0300). Its opening hours are February to April and October, daily 9:30am to 5:30pm; May and the second half of September, daily 9am to 6:30pm; June to mid-September, daily 9am to 7pm; and November to January, daily 9am to 5pm.

Exploring North of Dublin

Hill of Tara $\star\star$ ANCIENT SITE Legends and folklore place this hill at the center of early Irish history. Ancient tombs have been discovered that date back to the Stone Age; pagans believed that the goddess Queen Maeve reigned from here. By the 3rd century, it was a ceremonial residence had been built here for the most powerful men in Ireland—the high kings, who ruled as much by myth as by military strength. Every 3 years they would hold a weeklong *feis* (a kind of giant party-cumgovernment session), at which more than 1,000 princes, poets, athletes, priests, druids, musicians,

and jesters celebrated. Laws were passed, disputes settled, and matters of defense decided. But the last *feis* was held in A.D. 560, and thereafter Tara went into a decline as the power shifted. Today, little is left of the hill's great heritage, save for grassy mounds and some ancient pillar stones. All that survives of the Iron Age forts are depressions in the soil. That said, it's still a magnificent spot with views that extend for miles. You can learn the hill's history at a visitor center in the old church beside the entrance. Guided tours are available for those who want to know what lies beneath the smooth, green surface.

Signposted on N3, about 12km south of Navan, Co. Meath. www.hilloftara.org. \bigcirc 046/902-5903 (summer); 041/988-0300 (winter). Admission \notin 4 adults; \notin 3 seniors; \notin 2 students and children; \notin 10 families. Hill open all year round. Visitor Centre: Mid-May-mid-Sept daily 10am-6pm.

Knowth ******* ANCIENT SITE This extraordinary prehistoric burial site was only discovered in 1968, and much of it is yet to be excavated. It is mainly composed of two massively long underground burial chambers, the longer of which stretches for 40m (131ft.). In the mound, scientists found the largest collection of passage tomb art uncovered thus far in Europe, as well as a number of underground chambers and 300 carved slabs. Surrounding the mound, 17 satellite graves are laid out in a mysterious, complex pattern. And still, nobody can give a definitive answer to the biggest riddle of all: What was it all for? Even now, all of Knowth's secrets have not been uncovered—excavation work is quite constant here, and you may get a chance to see the archaeologists digging. All tickets for here and Newgrange ******* (see p. 195) are issued at the Brú na Bóinne Visitor Centre near Donore. As with Newgrange, there is no direct access to the monument; a shuttle bus takes visitors over.

Brú na Bóinne Visitor Centre, on N51, 2km (1¹/₄ miles) west of Donore, Co. Meath. www.knowth.com. **©** 041/988-0300. Visitor center and Knowth: \in 5 adults; \in 3 seniors; \in 3 students and children; \in 13 families. Combined ticket with Newgrange: \in 11 adults; \in 8 seniors; \in 6 students and children; \in 28 families. Feb–Apr, Oct daily 9:30am–5:30pm; May daily 9am–6pm; June–mid-Sept daily 9–7pm; mid–end Sept daily 9am–6:30pm; Nov–Jan daily 9am–5pm.

COUNTY MEATH: ANCIENT wonders UNDERFOOT

On the surface, County Meath looks like placid farm country—there seems to be nothing but rolling hills covered in emerald green grass. But don't be fooled—its most breathtaking historical sights lie underground.

Meath's fertile soil and rich riverland has attracted settlers for more than 8,000 years, and much of what they left behind has yet to be found. Archaeologists believe they have uncovered only a fraction of the archaeological wealth of this region, and discoveries are made constantly. The county's burial grounds give us a fascinating glimpse of what life was like very long ago. The most intriguing site is **Newgrange** $\star\star\star$ (see p. 195), with its mysterious underground carvings and huge stone passage tombs. Nearby, **Knowth** (see above) is a hugely long passage tomb; under the ground, long dark tunnels lead to enigmatic central chambers, the purpose of which we can only imagine. Not far away, **Loughcrew** $\star\star$ (see facing page) contains an extraordinary thirty passage tombs, most of which have never been fully excavated.

There's so much history here-who knows what ancient wonders still lie undiscovered beneath the soil?



A Stone Age burial ground, Knowth contains Europe's largest collection of passage tomb art.

Loughcrew Cairns and Gardens ** ANCIENT SITE Loughcrew is a two-for-one deal beautiful 19th-century pleasure gardens dotted with lakes, perfect for picnicking, and also, a short distance away, one of the biggest megalithic burial grounds in Ireland. The 30 passage tombs of Loughcrew are known locally as *Slieve na Calliaghe*, which translates as "The Hill of the Witch." It certainly is an eerie sight, three hills topped like crowns with symmetrical tombs—you can see them from miles away. The site is aligned with both the equinox and the pagan day of Samhain (Halloween)—twice a year, the dawn sun lights a heavily carved stone within one cairn. Crowds gather each year to see the phenomenon. Access to the cairns is free.

Outside Oldcastle, Co. Meath. www.loughcrew.com. \bigcirc 049/854-1356. Free admission to cairns. Gardens: \in 6 adults; \in 5 seniors; \in 3 children; \in 20 families. Mid-Mar–Oct Mon–Fri 9:30am–5:30pm, Sat–Sun 11am–5:30pm; Nov–mid-Mar Sat–Sun 11am–4pm. From N3, take R195 through Oldcastle toward Mullingar; 2.4km (1½ miles) out of Oldcastle, look for signposted left turn. The next left turn into Loughcrew is also signposted.

HIGH CROSSES: icons OF IRELAND

You see them all over Ireland, often in the most picturesque rural surroundings, standing alone like sentries: high Celtic crosses with faded stories carved into every inch of space. Haunting and ancient as they seem to us today, when they were created, these carved stones served a practical purpose: They were books, of sorts, in the days when books were rare and precious. Think of the carvings, which inevitably explain the stories of the Bible, as cartoons explaining the Bible to the uneducated population. Originally, the crosses were probably brightly painted, but the paint has long been lost to the wind and rain.

The **Muiredeach Cross** (see below) at Monasterboice has carvings telling, from the bottom up, the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, David and Goliath, and Moses, as well as the wise men bringing gifts to the baby Jesus. At the center of the old cross, the carving is thought to be of Revelations, while at the top St. Paul stands alone in the desert. The western side of the cross tells the stories of the New Testament, with, from the top down, a figure praying, the Crucifixion, St. Peter, Doubting Thomas, and, below that, Jesus's arrest. On the base of the cross is an inscription of the sort found often carved on stones in ancient Irish monasteries. It reads in Gaelic, "A prayer for Muiredach for whom the cross was made." Muiredach was the abbot at Monasterboice until 922, so the cross was probably made as a memorial after his death.

Another excellent example of a carved high cross is the Moone High Cross **★**, which is not too far away (see p. 203).

Monasterboice \star RELIGIOUS SITE This atmospheric monastic site holds a peaceful cemetery, one of the tallest round towers in Ireland, ancient church ruins, and two excellent high crosses, all surrounded by trees and green fields. The site is said to have been founded in the 4th century by a follower of St. Patrick named St. Buithe. The name "Buithe" was corrupted to Boyne over time, and thus the whole region is named after him. A small monastic community thrived here for centuries, until it was seized and occupied by Vikings in the 10th century. The Vikings were, in turn, defeated by Donal, the high king of Tara, who is said to have single-handedly killed 300 of them. Today only a little is left, but the **Muiredeach's High Cross** is worth the trip all on its own. Dating from 922, the near-perfect cross is carved with elaborate scenes from the Old and New Testaments. Two other high crosses are more faded, and one was smashed by Cromwell's forces.

Off the main Dublin rd. (N1), 9.7km (6 miles) northwest of Drogheda, near Collon, Co. Louth. Free admission. Daily dawn-dusk.

Newgrange $\star \star \star$ ANCIENT SITE Ireland's best-known prehistoric monument is one of the archaeological wonders of Western Europe. Built as a burial mound more than 5,000 years ago-long before the Egyptian Pyramids or Stonehenge-it sits atop a hill near the Boyne, massive and mysterious. Newgrange is so old, in fact, that when it was being built there were still woolly mammoths living in parts of Europe. The mound is 11m (36 ft.) tall and approximately 78m (256 ft.) in diameter. It consists of 200,000 tons of stone, a 6-ton capstone, and other stones weighing up to 16 tons each, many of which were hauled from as far away as County Wicklow and the Mountains of Mourne. Each stone fits perfectly in the overall pattern, and the result is a watertight structure, an amazing feat of engineering. The question remains, though: Why? Even as archaeologists found more elaborate carvings in the stones, they deduced no clues as to whether it was built for kings, political leaders, or long-forgotten rituals. Inside, a passage 18m (59 ft.) long leads to a central burial chamber that sits in pitch-darkness all year, except for 5 days in December. During the winter solstice (Dec 19–23), a shaft of sunlight travels down the arrow-straight passageway for 17 minutes when it hits the back wall of the burial chamber. You can register for a lottery to be in the tomb for this extraordinary event, although competition is fierce. As part of the daily tour, you can walk down the passage, past elaborately carved stones and into the chamber, which has three sections, each with a basin stone that once held cremated human remains. *Tip:* The site has no direct access; you have to come via the Brú na Bóinne Visitor Centre near Donore, where you park and take a shuttle bus the rest of the way.

Brú na Bóinne Visitor Centre: on N51, 2km (1¹/₄ miles) west of Donore, Co. Meath. www.newgrange.com. \bigcirc 041/988-0300. Visitor center and Newgrange: &6 adults; &5 seniors; &3 students and children; &15 families. Combined ticket with Knowth: &11 adults; &8 seniors; &6 students and children; &28 families. Feb–Apr, Oct daily 9:30am–5:30pm; May daily 9am–6pm; June–mid-Sept daily 9–7pm; mid- to late-Sept daily 9am–6:30pm; Nov–Jan daily 9am–5pm.

Newgrange Farm \star FARM After all that spooky history, the kids will thank you for bringing them to this busy farm, where farmer Willie Redhouse and his family will take them on a 1½-hour tour. You can feed the ducks, groom a calf, and bottle-feed the lambs and kid goats. Children can hold a newborn chick, pet a pony, and play with the pigs. In the aviaries are pheasants and rare birds. You can take a ride on a tractor for an extra €2.50. The high point of the week occurs every Sunday afternoon (and on Irish national holidays), when the sheep take to the track with teddy bear jockeys for the weekly derby. (Call to check race times.) Demonstrations show farm skills such as threshing and horseshoeing, and sheepdogs show off their herding skills. The farm has a coffee shop and plenty of picnic space. The price is a little steep, however.

Off N51, 3.2km (2 miles) east of Slane (signposted off N51 and directly west of Newgrange monument), Co. Meath. www.newgrangefarm.com. **© 041/982-4119.** Admission \notin 9 adults and children; \notin 15– \notin 42 families. Mid-Mar to early Sept daily 10am-6pm; last admission 1 hr. before closing.

Old Mellifont Abbey \star RELIGIOUS SITE/RUINS Founded in the 12th century, this was the first Cistercian monastery on the island, and it grew to be the most spectacular. Much of it is gone now, but enough is left just a few miles north of Drogheda to give you an idea of what Mellifont was like in its day, when it was the center of Cistercian faith in Ireland, with more than 400 monks living and working within its walls. You can see the outline of the cross-shaped nave, as well as the remains of the cloister, refectory, and the warming room (the only part of the monastery with heating—after all, monks were supposed to live lives of suffering). Mellifont was closed in the 16th century during the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, and a manor house was soon built on the site for an English landlord, using the abbey stones. A century later, that house would be the last place where Hugh O'Neill, the final Irish chief, stayed before surrendering to the English and then fleeing to Europe in 1607, in the "flight of the Earls." At the good visitor center next door, you can find out more about the monastery and its complex and lengthy history.

Signposted off R168, 9.7km (6 miles) west of Drogheda, Co. Louth. www.heritageireland.ie. \bigcirc 041/982-6459. Admission \notin 4 adults; \notin 3 seniors; \notin 2 students and children; \notin 10 families. June–Aug daily 10am–6pm; last admission 45 min. before closing.

Proleek Dolmen \star ANCIENT SITE This huge dolmen is said to resemble a giant's finger when viewed from a distance. That is, to say the least, rather subjective. But finger or not, it's still an impressive sight. A massive 35-ton capstone looks alarmingly precarious, balanced on top of three smaller stones like a crude, misshapen tripod. The top of the capstone is invariably covered with pebbles, due to a local legend that if you can throw a stone and it stays there, your wish will come true. You can reach the dolmen down a paved footpath from the parking lot of the **Ballymascanlon House Hotel** (www.ballymascanlon.com; **0 042/935-8200**) near Dundalk. The Dolmen is a 5-minute walk away. To find the hotel from Dublin, take exit 18 for Dundalk North off the M1, then take the N52 off the first roundabout, and the road to Ballymascanlon from the second. The hotel is about 3km (1³/₄ miles) down this road.

On the grounds of the Ballymascanlon House Hotel, Dundalk, Co. Louth. No phone; hotel © 042/935-8200. Free admission.

St. Colmcille's House \star RELIGIOUS SITE Sitting incongruously near more modern houses in Kells, like a memory of Ireland's past, this narrow, grey-stone house is all that's left of a long-lost monastic settlement that once stood where the town now sprawls. Most of the nearly windowless building dates to the 10th century, although some sections predate that by another hundred years. Some

experts believe it was once a scriptorium, where monks wrote and illuminated books. The first-floor room still contains traces of an ancient fireplace and entryway. A narrow staircase ascends to a dark vault just under the roof. The small building is believed by some to be the place where the Book of Kells was written.

About 180m (about 590 ft.) northwest of St. Columba's Church, Church Lane, Kells, County Meath. No phone. Free admission. June–Sept 10am–5pm. Ask for key from caretaker, Mrs. Carpenter, who lives next door to the oratory on Church Lane.

bus trips FROM DUBLIN

Although you'll need a car to fully explore what the regions around Dublin have to offer, it's possible to see virtually all of the big attractions by taking guided bus tours. Most leave from central Dublin, quite early in the day, and deposit you back around 5 or 6pm. Book tours directly with the operator; Dublin tourist offices can also help. Here are a few of the most popular ones.

Bus Éire ann (www.buseireann.ie; © 01/836-6111) runs daytrips from the main bus station in Dublin. The Glendalough, Powerscourt Garden and Wicklow Panorama stops at Glendalough, Powerscourt, and the Wicklow Gap. The price includes a guided tour of Glendalough. It runs from about April to September, from Thursday to Saturday. The Boyne Valley and Newgrange Tour, which also stops at the Hill of Tara, includes admission to Newgrange. It also runs from about April to September, on Thursday and Saturday. Both tours cost €34.

Glendalough Bus (www.glendaloughbus.com; O 01/281-8119) runs daytrips from the top of Dawson Street, Dublin 2 (opposite the Mansion House), to Glendalough every day at 11:30am. Tickets cost \notin 20 and you buy them from the driver.

Newgrange Tours by Mary Gibbons (www.newgrangetours.com; \bigcirc **086/355-1355**) are among the most respected of the guided tours that visit the ancient burial site. Mary is an excellent guide, and her tours have an allocated entry slot at Newgrange, meaning you don't have to wait. They run daily from several pickup points in Dublin, starting at 9:30am Monday to Friday and 7:50am Saturday and Sunday. The cost is €35.

Coach Tours of Ireland (www.coachtoursofireland.ie; \bigcirc 01/898-0700 or 087/996-6660) runs a popular Day Tour of Wicklow, including the scenic Sally Gap mountain pass and Glendalough. Tours cost \in 26 adults, \in 20 children.

The Wild Wicklow Tour (www.wildwicklow.ie; \bigcirc 01/280-1899) takes in Dún Laoghaire Harbour and Dalkey, before heading to Glendalough and the Sally Gap. They even take you to a pub for lunch (not included in the price). The tours—which are perhaps skewed toward youthful travelers—leave from several points in Dublin, starting at 8:50am. Tickets cost \in 28.

Paddy Wagon Tours (www.paddywagontours.com; \bigcirc 01/823-0822) run a number of rather touristy trips from Dublin as far as Kilkenny, including ones that cover Kildare, Trim Castle, and the Browne's Hill Dolmen. Tickets start at \in 19.

St. Peter's Church of Ireland \star CHURCH This modest, grey-stone church dating from the 18th century is a low-key but lovely place, approached through frilly wrought-iron gates. Inside the simple, peaceful nave are several heavily carved tombs, including one spooky carving featuring skeletons wearing shrouds, a motif often associated with the Black Death. St. Peter's is notorious for an incident that occurred here during the battle of Drogheda in 1649. A group of Irish men, fleeing the losing battle, sought refuge in this Protestant church. When Cromwell's forces invaded the church, the men climbed into the steeple. Cromwell's troops used the pews as timber to start a fire, and the men were burned alive, an act so terrible that some of Cromwell's own men refused the order, risking a charge of mutiny. This is the second rebuilding of St. Peter's since that infamous event. William St., Drogheda, Co. Louth. No phone. Free admission. Daily 10am–3pm.

Trim Castle \star CASTLE A skeletal reminder of the clout once wielded by Anglo-Normans in Ireland, this ruined edifice is a magnificent sight. The Norman lord Hugh de Lacy occupied the site in 1172 and built the enclosed cruciform keep. In the 13th century, his son Walter enlarged the keep, circled it with a many-towered curtain wall, and added a great hall as an upgraded venue for courts, parliaments, and feasts. After the 17th century, though, it was abandoned and lay in ruins for hundreds of years. Few paid much attention to it, until Mel Gibson chose to use it as a setting for the 1995 film

Braveheart. The Irish Heritage Service restored it as a "preserved ruin." Entry to the main part of the castle is by guided tour only, but arrive early if you're visiting in summer—space is limited and the tour can't be booked in advance, so it frequently sells out. *Note:* The hour-long tour is unsuitable for small or unruly children, and for anyone unable to maneuver steep climbs or afraid of formidable heights.

Castle St., Trim, Co. Meath. www.heritageireland.ie. \bigcirc 046/943-8619. Admission €4 adults; €3 seniors; €2 students and children; €10 families. Mar–Oct daily 10am–6pm; Nov–Mar weekends 9am–5pm; last admission 1 hr. before closing.

A Gruesome Find at Trim Castle

In 1971, when excavation work was underway at Trim Castle, workers made a macabre discovery: While digging to the south of the central keep, they uncovered the remains of 10 headless men. Historians believe that the bodies date from the 15th century. During a time of high crime in 1465, King Edward IV ordered that all robbers should be beheaded, and their heads displayed on spikes to intimidate those who might be thinking of a career in crime. Presumably, these men had all suffered that fate.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

CYCLING You can rent bikes from the **Boyne Valley Activities**, Trim, Co. Meath (www.boynevalleyactivities.ie; © 086/734-2585). The cost is around €20 per day.

GOLF The Headfort Golf Club, Kells, Co. Meath (www.headfortgolfclub.ie; \bigcirc 046/924-0146), has two courses and its greens fees are \notin 45 to \notin 70 weekends, depending on the time of year. Even more reasonably priced is the par-73 County Meath Golf Club, Trim (www.countymeathgolfclubtrim.ie; \bigcirc 046/943-1463), with greens fees of \notin 20 to \notin 35. If you prefer links courses, the Laytown and Bettystown Golf Club, Bettystown, Co. Meath (www.landb.ie; \bigcirc 041/982-7170), charges greens fees of \notin 40 weekdays, \notin 45 weekends.

HORSEBACK RIDING Visitors can expect to pay an average of €25 per hour for trekking or trail riding in the countryside. To arrange a ride, contact the Kells Equestrian Centre, Kells, Co. Meath (www.kellsequestrian.com; © 046/924-6998).

Where to Stay North of Dublin

Bellinter House \star On the banks of the River Boyne outside Navan, this imposing grey-stone Palladian country house was designed by the same man who built Russborough House (p. 185) and Powerscourt (p. 183). The hotel has been restored to resemble a 19th-century country getaway, with an atmosphere of relaxed elegance. The lounges are gorgeous, with oak-paneled walls, fires crackling at the hearth, and deep leather chairs to sink into with a good book. Most guestrooms are less glamorous than the public areas; the more expensive rooms are, inevitably, the most beautiful. But all have large, modern bathrooms and comfortable beds. The restaurant is highly rated for its butter-rich, French-influenced Irish cuisine and locally sourced meat and produce. Breakfasts are huge—even the tea selection is enormous. There's a tiny spa, with a hot tub and steam room, and guests are free to explore the sprawling grounds and to fish on the river. Excursions to nearby sites can be arranged. Get directions from the hotel before setting out—on a tiny farm road, this place can be hard to find. Bellinter, Navan, Co. Meath. www.bellinterhouse.com. **@ 046/903-0900.** 34 units €100-€210 double. Free parking. Breakfast included.

Amenities: Restaurant; bar; spa; Wi-Fi (free).
Ghan House ★★ Overlooking Carlingford Lough, Ghan House is a sweet, old-fashioned hotel.
Guestrooms are good-sized and traditionally furnished, with antiques and sofas. Most are in the main

17th-century building, though there is also a modern extension, and many have views of the lake or mountains. "Superior" rooms have half tester beds and deep Victorian bathtubs. The award-winning restaurant serves excellent modern Irish menus—roasted boar or fresh local beef—and the owners hold cooking and wine tasting classes on site. Check the website for special offers, including midweek packages that include dinner for two.

2 Ghan Rd., Carlingford, Co. Louth. www.ghanhouse.com. **Ø 042/937-3682.** 12 units. €100–€210 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; Wi-Fi (free).

Headfort Arms Hotel \star This pleasant, cheery hotel is a 5 minute walk from **St. Colmcille's House** \star (see p. 196) in the center of Kells. The picture-postcard front of the building—all hanging baskets and neat little shutters—gives way to a more modern interior, and bedrooms are simple but large and tidy. Executive rooms have two copper-sprung beds. Family rooms have plenty of space for kids. The small spa offers massage and beauty treatments at extremely reasonable prices—several cost just €25 on Wednesdays only. The hotel restaurants and bars are reliably good—the **Vanilla Pod** $\star \star$ (p. 201) is one of the best in the area.

Headfort Place., Kells, Co. Meath. www.headfortarms.ie. **Ø 046/924-0063.** 45 units. €130 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; room service; spa; Wi-Fi (free).

Trim Castle Hotel \star This modern hotel a stone's throw from the castle (you really could hit it with a rock quite easily) is a great option for an overnight stay. Lounges and restaurants are bright and cheerful. Guestrooms are not huge but are well-appointed, with modern bathrooms. Some rooms have direct views of the evocative ruins. The good, bistro-style restaurant offers reasonably priced classic Irish fare (€25 for 3 courses), and a lovely rooftop patio overlooking the castle is a fine place to take a coffee and soak up the view. Book early for the best rates. There are lots of half-priced deals in the spring, in particular.

Castle St., Trim, Co. Meath. www.trimcastlehotel.com. \bigcirc 046/948-3000. 68 units. \notin 85– \notin 150 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; Wi-Fi (free).

Where to Dine North of Dublin

The Bay Tree ** IRISH This restaurant isn't much to look at from the outside, but inside it's a cozy, even romantic option. The cooking is top-notch, allowing the freshest, local ingredients plenty of space to shine without overloading the palate. Start with some grilled oysters with garlic and parsley, before moving on to a plate of spiced duck breast with mulled cranberry jus, or perhaps a simple sirloin with hand-cut potatoes. Follow it up with a decadent steamed chocolate fondant, or maybe a plate of well-selected cheeses. The Bay Tree has an attached B&B, where pleasant, modern bedrooms cost from \notin 90 per night for a double.

Newry St., Carlingford, Co. Louth. www.belvederehouse.ie. \bigcirc 042/938-3848. Main courses $\in 18 - \in 30$. Wed–Thurs 6–9pm; Fri–Sat 6–9:30pm; Sun 1–4:30pm and 6–8pm.

Java Juice \star CAFE Sometimes all you need is a quick lunch or a caffeinated pick-me-up, in which case this cheerful cafe in the center of Trim is the place to go. Good, simple lunches are served with minimal fuss—fresh salads, wraps, sandwiches, and burgers lead the menu. The all-day breakfasts are popular with locals. Be sure to try the coffee—as the sign behind the counter reads, "a day without coffee is like a day without sunshine."

Haggard St., Trim, Co. Meath. www.javajuice.ie. **Ø 046/943-8771.** Main courses €5–€9. Mon–Sat 8am–4pm.

Vanilla Pod $\star\star$ MODERN EUROPEAN Imaginative Irish cooking with international influences is the focus of this great little restaurant in Kells. The menu is seasonal and features local ingredients. Think bon-bons made with crab harvested from Clogher Head in County Louth; lemon sole filet

served with fennel and chorizo; or perhaps a simple potato-and-pear tart with blue cheese from the Boyne Valley. Vanilla Pod is in the popular **Headfort Arms Hotel** \star (see p. 200).

At the Headfort Arms Hotel, John St., Kells, Co. Meath. **⊘** 046/924-0084. Main courses €16–€23. Mon–Thurs 5–10pm; Fri–Sat 5–11pm; Sun 12:30–9:30pm.

WEST OF DUBLIN: COUNTY KILDARE

The flatlands of Kildare are rich in more ways than one. The fertile soil produces miles of lush green pastures perfect for raising horses, and the population is one of the most affluent in the country, with plenty of cash for buying horses. Driving through the smooth rolling hills, home to sleek thoroughbreds, you might notice a similarity to the green grass of Kentucky—in fact, the county is twinned with Lexington, Kentucky. This is the home of the Curragh, the racetrack where the Irish Derby is held, and of smaller tracks at Naas and Punchestown.

Once the stronghold of the Fitzgerald Clan, Kildare comes from the Irish *cill dara*, or "Church of the Oak Tree," a reference to St. Brigid's monastery, which once sat in the county, surrounded by oak trees. Brigid was a bit ahead of her time as an early exponent for women's equality—she founded her coed monastery in the 5th century.

Visitor Information

The **Kildare Heritage Centre** is in Market Square, Kildare Town (© 045/530672). It's open Monday to Saturday from 9:30 to 1pm and 2 to 5pm.

Exploring West of Dublin

Castletown ** HISTORIC HOUSE The fine, symmetrical architecture of this spectacular Palladian-style mansion has been imitated many times across Ireland over the centuries. Made of clean, white stone, with elegant rows of tall windows, Castletown was built between 1722 and 1729, designed by Italian architect Alessandro Galilei for then-speaker of the Irish House of Commons, William Connolly. Today, it's beautifully maintained, and the fully restored interior is worth the price of admission. Visitors are free to wander around the surrounding parkland, and a cafe offers tea and cakes should you need a rest. Two glorious follies on the estate were built as make-work for the starving population during the Famine: One is a graceful obelisk, the other an extraordinarily playful barn, created as a slightly crooked inverted funnel, around which winds a stone staircase. Its name, appropriately enough, is the "Wonderful Barn."

Signposted from R403, off main Dublin-Galway rd. (N4), Celbridge, Co. Kildare. www.castletownhouse.ie. \bigcirc 01/628-8252. Admission \notin 7 adults; \notin 5 seniors; students and children; \notin 17 families. Tours mid-Mar–Oct Tues–Sun 10am–4:45pm. Call ahead to confirm times, as they change frequently.

The Curragh \star RACECOURSE The country's best-known racetrack, The Curragh has hosted races for hundreds of years. The first recorded race took place here in 1727, but historians believe races were held here long before then. Today it's a modern flat track—there's nothing left of whatever stands may have stood here centuries ago. But its place in history is assured, and it is home to the **Irish Derby**, the premier horserace of Ireland, held every spring. Races take places at least one Saturday a month from March to October. The Curragh website has full details on all races and tickets, including premium packages. Derby day tickets are inevitably more expensive than for other races; expect to pay upwards of €30 or €40 with transport to and from Dublin (prebooking essential). The nearest train station is Kildare Town (a free shuttle runs from there to the track on race days); trains run direct from Waterford, Cork, Limerick, Galway, and Dublin's Heuston station. Fares start at

around €14. Dublin Coach (www.dublincoach.ie; © 01/465-9972) runs a "Race Bus" from Westmoreland Street in central Dublin. Fares start at around €10.

Dublin-Limerick rd. (N7), Curragh, Co. Kildare. www.curragh.ie. \bigcirc 045/441205. Standard race days \in 15 adults; \in 8 seniors and under 25; children under 16 (accompanied by adult) free. Classic race days \in 20 adults; \in 10 seniors and under 25; children under 16 (accompanied by adult) free. Hours vary; 1st race usually 2pm, but check newspaper sports pages.



Connemara mare and foal at the Irish National Stud, home of many of Ireland's finest thoroughbred race horses.

Irish National Stud with Japanese Gardens & St. Fiachra's Garden ★ FARM/GARDENS Some of Ireland's fastest horses have been bred on the grounds of this government-sponsored stud farm. Horse lovers and racing fans will be in heaven walking around the expansive grounds, watching the well-groomed horses being trained. A converted groom's house has exhibits on racing, steeplechase, hunting, and show jumping; plus a rather macabre display featuring the skeleton of Arkle, one of Ireland's most famous horses. The peaceful **Japanese Garden**, dating from 1906, has pagodas, ponds, and trickling streams, and the beautifully designed visitor center has a restaurant and shop. A garden dedicated to St. Fiachra—the patron saint of gardeners—is in a beautiful natural setting of woods and wetlands, and the reconstructed hermitage has a Waterford crystal garden of rocks and delicate glass orchids.

Off the Dublin-Limerick rd. (N7), Tully, Kildare, Co. Kildare. www.irishnationalstud.ie. \bigcirc 045/522963. Admission \in 12 adults; \in 9 seniors and students; \in 6.50 children 5–15; \in 28 families. Daily 9am–6pm; last admission 1 hr. before closing. Tours daily noon, 2:30pm, 4.

Irish Pewtermill Centre \star CRAFT FACTORY In an 11th-century mill originally constructed for the nunnery of St. Moling, Ireland's oldest pewter mill makes for a nice diversion. Six skilled craftsmen cast pewter in antique molds, some of which are 300 years old. Casting takes place most days, usually in the morning. The showroom has a wide selection of high-quality, hand-cast pewter gifts for sale, from bowls to brooches, at reasonable prices.

Timolin-Moone Rd. (signposted off N9 in Moone), Co. Kildare. © 087/909-0044. Free admission. Mon–Fri 10am–4:30pm, Sat–Sun 11am–4pm.

Moone High Cross \star RELIGIOUS SITE Amid the picturesque ruins of Moone Abbey, this magnificent high cross is nearly 1,200 years old. The abbey, established by St. Columba in the 6th century, lies in evocative ruins around it. The cross features finely crafted Celtic designs as well as biblical scenes: the temptation of Adam and Eve, the sacrifice of Isaac, and Daniel in the lions' den. Among the carvings are several surprises, such as a carving of a Near Eastern fish that reproduces when the male feeds the female her own eggs, which eventually hatch from her mouth. Signposted off N9 on southern edge of Moone, Co. Kildare. No phone. Free admission. Daily dawn–dusk.

St. Brigid's Cathedral * CHURCH Built on the site of St. Brigid's monastery, which was founded in the 5th century, this beautiful 13th-century church dominates central Kildare. Its exquisite stained-glass windows portray Ireland's three great saints: Patrick, Colmcille, and Brigid. The round tower on the grounds dates to the 10th century, and is the second tallest in the country (33m/108 ft.). Somewhere down the line, its pointed roof was replaced by a Norman turret. If the groundskeeper is in, you can climb the stairs to the top for $\notin 4$. The strange-looking stone with a hole at the top near the tower is known as the "wishing stone"—according to lore, if you put your arm through the hole and touch your shoulder when you make a wish, then your wish will come true. The Cathedral is closed to visitors from October to April.

Market Sq., Kildare Town, Co. Kildare. **© 045/521229.** Free admission to Cathedral; round tower €4. May–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–1pm, 2–5pm; Sun 2–5pm. Closed Oct–Apr.

local hero: **ST. BRIGID**

Modern-day feminists have embraced this 5th-century Irish saint, and for good reason. Brigid was a headstrong girl who fought against the oppressive, patriarchal rules of her time. When her father picked a husband for her, she refused to marry him. Legend holds that when her father insisted that the wedding should go forward, she pulled out her own eye to prove she was strong enough to resist his plans. He backed down, and the mutilated girl joined a convent. When she took her vows, however, the bishop accidentally ordained her as a bishop rather than a nun. It is said that as soon as that happened, she was miraculously made beautiful again.

As she grew older, Brigid remained a rebel. She founded a monastery in Kildare, but insisted that it be open to both nuns and monks—something unheard of at that time. Word of the monastery, and of its unusual abbess, soon spread throughout Europe, and she became a powerful figure in European Christianity. Her followers marked their homes with a plain cross woven from river reeds. In some Irish homes, you'll still find crosses made in precisely that way.

One of Brigid's strangest rules for her monastery was that a fire should always be kept burning, day and night, tended by 20 virgins. Long after she died, the fire at St. Brigid's burned constantly, tended as she said it should be. This continued as late as 1220, when the bishop of Dublin insisted that the tradition, which he viewed as pagan, be stopped. But there is still a fire pit at **St. Brigid's Cathedral** \star (see p. 203), and a fire is lit in it every February 1, on St. Brigid's feast day.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

CYCLING Kildare's flat-to-rolling landscape is perfect for gentle cycling. Bike rental shops are surprisingly few in County Kildare, but **Cahill Cycles**, Fishery Lane, Naas, Co. Kildare (www.cahill.ie; © 045/881-585) comes highly recommended.

GOLF The flat plains here create excellent parkland layouts, including two 18-hole championship courses. On the pricey end of things, the Arnold Palmer–designed, par-72 Kildare Hotel & Country Club (also known as the K Club), Straffan, Co. Kildare (www.kclub.com; © 01/601-7200), has two courses, with greens fees ranging from €95 to €120 for non-residents. For a less costly game, try the par-72 championship course at the Curragh Golf Club, Curragh, Co. Kildare (www.curraghgolf.com; © 045/441714), with greens fees of €25 to €35, depending on the time of year.

HORSEBACK RIDING To arrange a trek in the Kildare countryside, contact the Kill International Equestrian Centre, Kill, Co. Kildare (www.killinternational.ie; © 045/877-333). A semi-private lesson costs around €45.

WALKING The way-marked **Grand Canal Way** is a long-distance walking path that cuts through part of Kildare. The route passes through scenic towns, including Sallins, Robertstown, and Edenderry, where you can find a room and stock up on provisions. For more information see **www.irishtrails.ie/Trail/Grand-Canal-Way/18**, or contact the tourist office.

Where to Stay West of Dublin

Barberstown Castle ** Although parts of this hotel were built as recently as the early 2000s, enough genuine old castle is still on view as you approach for it to look and feel satisfyingly, well, *castle*-like. The oldest section dates from the 12th century, and even the modern guestrooms manage to feel pleasantly antique; some have four-poster beds. Family rooms are available too. The formal **Barton Rooms** restaurant serves classic Irish bistro fare (although it's very pricey), and there's also a tearoom. One spot of trivia: For what it's worth, Barberstown Castle was the home of Eric Clapton in the 1970s.

On R403, Straffan, Co. Kildare. www.barberstowncastle.ie. **© 01/628-8157.** 55 units. €150–€220 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Restaurant; room service.

Griesmount ** The ancestors of the great British polar explorer Ernest Shackleton built this charming country manor set amid acres of gently rolling green hills. There must be something in the water here, as current owners Carolyn and Robert have a rather adventurous past of their own, having traveled and lived in Africa for many years before settling down to run Griesmount as a B&B. Guestrooms are traditionally furnished, with famously comfortable beds—the guestbook is full of praise for the heavenly four poster—and two rooms have views of the River Griese. Carolyn's delicious, hearty breakfasts are served in a room overlooking an old ruined mill. Dinners can also be arranged with notice. Griesmount has a 2-night minimum stay on weekends.

Fullers Court Rd., Ballitore, Co. Kildare. www.griesemounthouse.com. **© 059/862-3158.** 3 units. €80–€140 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Martinstown House ** An elegant country house getaway near the famous Curragh racecourse (see p. 202), Martinstown dates mostly from the 1830s. Bedrooms are decorated with more than a few nods to its early Victorian origins, with heritage color schemes and antique-style furniture. Excellent four-course dinners (\in 49) are served around a single, long, candlelit table, which gives the appealing sense of an upper-class house party from a bygone age. Expect seasonal fare such as roast duck with crispy roast potatoes, or grilled sole with lemon and caper butter. *Note:* Although the Curragh is just 8km (5 miles) away, a frustrating road layout means driving between the Martinstown and the racecourse takes up to a half hour each way.

Off L6078 (follow signs for Martinstown), Ballysaxhills, Curragh, Co. Kildare. www.martinstownhouse.com. 🖉 045/441269. 6 units.

€150–€250 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Where to Dine West of Dublin

Cunninghams \star THAI/PUB FOOD Inside and out, Cunningham's is a fairly traditional, run-of-themill Irish pub—which makes it all the more unlikely that it also serves some of the best Thai food in the area. Delicious authentic-style meals are prepared by the Thai chef, Chock, and served in the bar nightly. You could go for a spicy red, green, or panang curry, made with coconut and chili, or a classic pad Thai served with crispy wontons. The menu also has a few traditional pub options, such as burgers and steaks, but it's the Thai food that packs in the crowds. Some nights include live music. Main St., Kildare, Co. Kildare. www.cunninghamskildare.com. © 045/521780. Main courses $\in 11-\in 21$. Mon–Sat 10:30am–10pm.

Silken Thomas \star INTERNATIONAL Named for a real-life knight and dashing rebel (see facing page), this atmospheric pub offers simple, tasty, unfussy meals in a jovial atmosphere. The menu is something of a global tour, with Mexican fajitas, Chinese stir-fries, and Indian curries happily served alongside burgers, steaks, fish and chips, and other familiar Irish fare. They do a popular "carvery" (buffet-style roast lunch) on Sundays, and if you're here on a Friday and Saturday night and just not ready to go home, stick around after 11:30pm, when it becomes a nightclub.

The Square, Kildare, Co. Kildare. www.silkenthomas.com. **Ø** 045/522232. Main courses €7–€22. Mon–Sat 10:30am–10pm.

Trax Brasserie ** IRISH This laid-back but elegant brasserie in tiny Naas, about 22km ($13\frac{1}{2}$ miles) northeast of Kildare, is a real find. The 1880s building was originally a railway shed, hence the subtle hints of the industrial in the dining room, such as exposed stone walls and "slabs of slate" serving plates. The fixed-price two-and three-course menus focus on classic Irish flavors with an international flair. You might start with some oak-smoked salmon, before moving on to a main of seared scallops served with zucchini tempura, or confit duck leg with an orange glaze.

Friary Rd., Naas, Co. Kildare. www.traxbrasserie.ie. **Ø 045/889333.** Fixed-price menus €24–€28. Mon–Sat 5–10pm; Sun 12:30–2:45pm, 5–8pm.

local hero: SILKEN THOMAS

Nobleman and rebel rolled into one, Silken Thomas was an unlikely revolutionary.

More properly known as Thomas FitzGerald, the 10th Earl of Kildare, he was born in 1513 to illustrious parents—his father was governor of Ireland—and spent much of his childhood at the court of King Henry VIII in England.

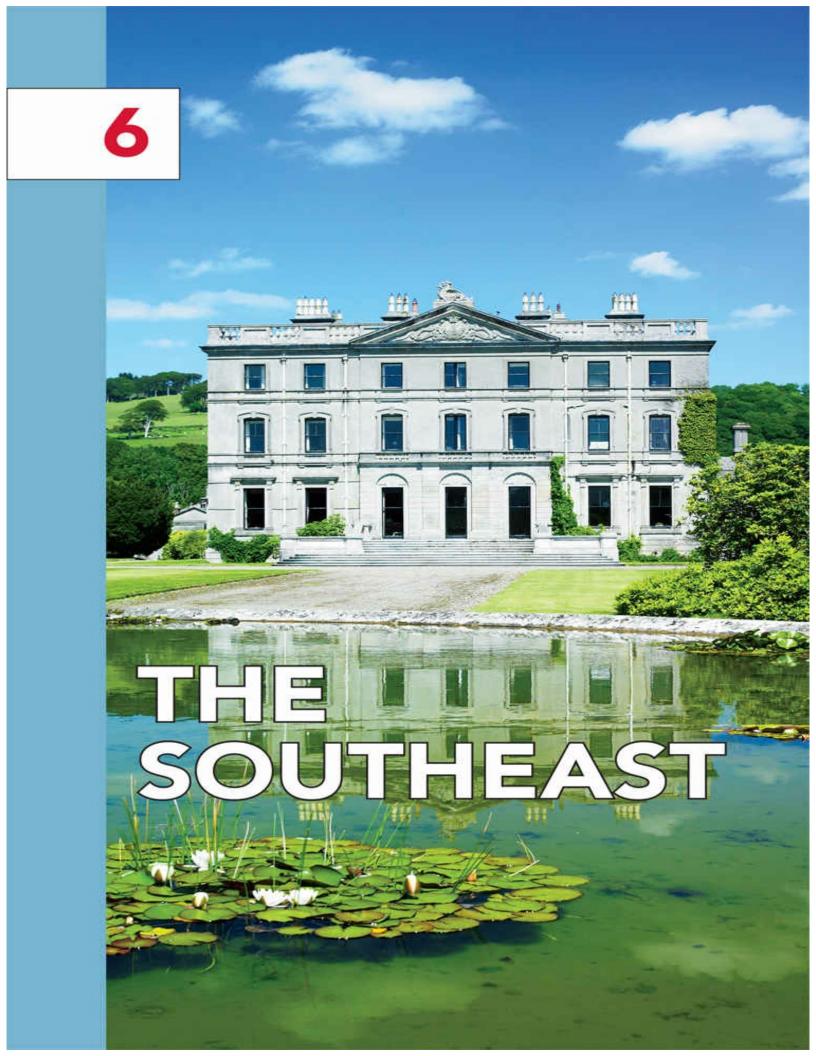
Thomas returned to Ireland as a young man, all set to follow in his father's footsteps and rule on behalf of the king. However, when word reached him that his father had fallen out with Henry and been executed, Thomas raised a rebellion.

It began with a blistering attack on Dublin Castle. Even though that failed, the English were rattled. Thomas and his men retreated to the relative safety of County Kildare, expecting a counter-attack at any moment. And indeed it came . . . but by stealth. While Thomas was temporarily absent from his garrison, a guard was bribed to let in a small group of English soldiers, who massacred everybody inside.

Despite that huge blow to the rebellion, Thomas and his remaining men fought valiantly on for a while longer. The struggle was futile, however, and Thomas eventually agreed to surrender in return for a promise that he and his closest compatriots would be spared. But King Henry wasn't one for keeping his word. Thomas and his men were sentenced to death by hanging, drawing, and quartering.

What happened next is enough to make the blood run cold. On a bleak February morning in 1537, they were dragged through the streets of London to a site of public execution. Thomas and the others were hanged by the neck, but cut down before they died. Then they were cut open, and their bowels and genitals were removed and burned in front of their eyes. They were finally killed by beheading. Their bodies were then cut into quarters and placed on spikes. Such was the wrath of kings.

Despite this most chilling end, Thomas remains a folk hero in Ireland. But why the unusual nickname? The sobriquet "Silken Thomas" comes from a wonderful footnote to history. It is recorded that Thomas was a dashing and handsome man, always dressed in the height of fashion. And when his army of 200 men rode into battle, they wore strands of silk streaming from their helmets.



Curraghmore House, County Waterford, home of the Marquis of Waterford.

D ramatic coastline, misty mountains, and evocative historic monuments characterize the lush counties south of Dublin. The area also has a distinctive, mellifluous dialect, peppered with unique words and phrases—remnants of the ancient Yola language that was once spoken here. The three main tourist centers of the Southeast—**Waterford**, **Wexford**, and **Kilkenny**—are close enough together that you could use any as a base for exploring the region by car. And make no mistake: It's not long before you really start to feel like you've left the city behind and entered the real countryside. But "city" is a relative term out here: Waterford, the biggest population center in the region, has a population of just 46,000.

ESSENTIALS

Arriving

BY BUS Bus Éireann (www.buseireann.ie; \bigcirc 01/836-6111) operates direct service several times a day from the central bus station (Busáras) on Store Street, Dublin, into Kilkenny, Wexford, and Waterford. The journey to Kilkenny takes upwards of two hours; to Wexford and Waterford, closer to three.

BY TRAIN Irish Rail (www.irishrail.ie; © 1850/366-222) operates several trains daily between Dublin and Kilkenny, Wexford, and Waterford. The journey to Kilkenny takes about an hour and a half; to Waterford, a little over two hours; and to Wexford, $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

BY FERRY Ferries from Britain sail to Rosslare Harbour, 19km (12 miles) south of Wexford Town. Call **Irish Ferries** (www.irishferries.ie; © 0818/300-400) or Stena Line (www.stenaline.com; © 01/204-7777) for bookings and information. Irish Ferries also sail to Rosslare from northern France.

BY CAR The journey from Dublin to Kilkenny, Waterford, or Wexford is nearly all via motorway. For Kilkenny, take E20, then M7 southwest out of Dublin, then split off onto M9. If you're heading to Waterford, stay on M9 for another 50km (31 miles) after the turnoff for Kilkenny. From Dublin to Wexford, take N11 south (you may want to loop around and join it via N81 and M50 if you're starting on the north side), then keep heading south on this road until you reach Wexford. The drive to Kilkenny is about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours, and to Waterford or Wexford, about 2 hours—but remember that traffic can be terrible around Dublin, especially during rush hour.

BY PLANE Tiny Waterford Airport is in Killowen (www.waterfordairport.ie; © 051/846-600), 9km (5²/₃ miles) south of Waterford Town. The British budget airline Flybe (www.flybe.com) flies here a few times per week from Birmingham, Edinburgh, and Aberdeen in the U.K.

Getting Around

Getting from Dublin to the centers of Kilkenny, Wexford, or Waterford by public transport is easy. It's also relatively simple to travel between them; however, as with most rural areas in Ireland, getting *around* the countryside by public transport once you're here is extremely difficult. Unless you're sticking to the big towns, your best option is to rent a car.

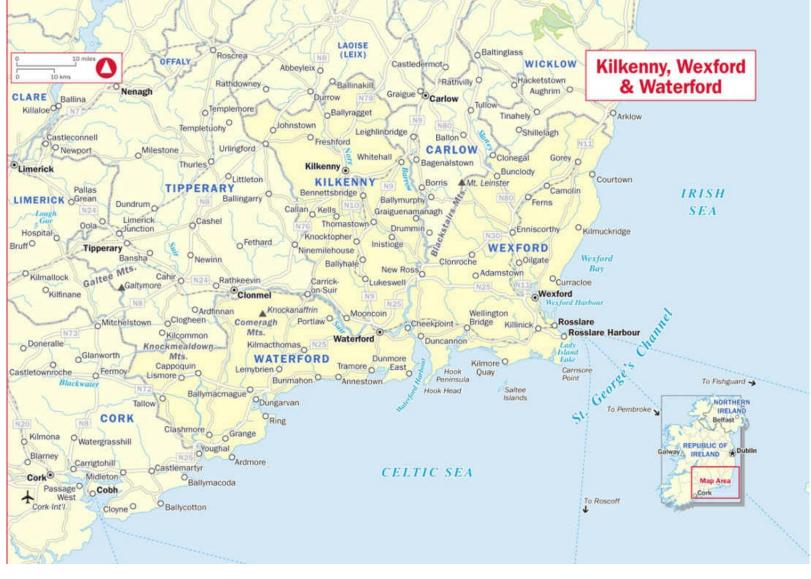
BY BUS A handful of buses per day run between Kilkenny and Waterford; the journey takes 1 to 2

hours, depending on if you have to change buses (which you almost always do). No convenient bus routes connect Kilkenny and Wexford. A couple of direct services per day run between Waterford and Kilkenny, plus slightly more if you don't mind changing buses; journey times are also 1 to 2 hours. Direct buses connect Waterford and Wexford every couple of hours; most journeys take an hour.

BY TRAIN A half-dozen or so trains daily go between Kilkenny and Waterford; the journey takes 35 minutes. Getting from Kilkenny or Waterford to Wexford by train involves multiple changes and can take all day; avoid this route if at all possible.

BY CAR To rent a car from Dublin, try Hertz (www.hertz.ie) at Dublin Airport (© 01/844-5466); 151–157 South Circular Rd., Dublin 8 (© 01/709-3060); or 2 Haddington Rd., Dublin 4 (© 01/668-7566). Europcar also has branches at Dublin Airport (© 01/812-2800) and Marks St. (off Pearse St.), Dublin 2 (© 01/648-5900). In Kilkenny, try Enterprise-Rent-a-Car at Barlo Nissan, Dublin Rd. (www.enterprise.ie; © 056/775-3318). Hertz has a branch in Wexford Town, on Ferrybank (© 053/915-2500), or you can try Budget Car Rental at Rosslare Ferryport (www.budget.ie; © 053/913-3318). In Waterford, Enterprise has a branch on Tranmore Rd.

BY FERRY Driving between Waterford and Wexford involves a circuitous route via New Ross unless you cut the distance in half by taking the handy car ferry from the poetically named **Passage East,** about 12km ($7\frac{1}{2}$ miles) east of Waterford (www.passageferry.ie; © 051/382-480). Regular crossings run April to September, Monday to Saturday 7am to 10pm, Sunday and public holidays 9:30am to 10pm; October to March, Monday to Saturday 7am to 8pm, Sunday and public holidays 9:30am to 8pm. Tickets per car are €8 one-way, €12 round-trip.



[FastFACTS] THE SOUTHEAST

ATMs/Banks Convenient locations include the Allied Irish Bank (AIB) on Dublin Rd., Kilkenny, and 72 The Quay, Waterford; and Bank of Ireland at 29 Parnell St., Waterford, and Custom House Quay, Wexford.

Dentists For dental emergencies, your hotel will usually contact a dentist for you; otherwise, in Kilkenny contact Market Cross Dental Surgery, James St. (© 056/772-1386); in Waterford, O'Connell Street Dental Clinic, 38 O'Connell St. (© 051/856-800); and in Wexford, Allsmile Dental Practise, 27 St. John's Gate (© 053/912-1748).

Doctors In emergencies dial © 999. For non-emergencies, any good hotel will contact a doctor for you. Otherwise, in Kilkenny check out the Ayrfield Medical Practise, Granges Rd. (© 056/772-1320); in Waterford, Catherine Street Medical Centre, 18 Catherine St. (© 051/875338); and in Wexford, Whiterock Family Practise, Whiterock Hill (© 053/916-0070).

Emergencies For police, fire, or other emergencies, dial @ 999.

Pharmacies In Kilkenny try White's Pharmacy, 5 High St. (© 056/772-1328); in Waterford, Gallagher's Late Night Pharmacy, 29 Barronstrand St. (© 051/878103); and in Wexford, Boots the Chemist, 54 North Main St. (© 053/914-7851).

Taxis In Kilkenny, call Ray Cabs (© 086/888-2777) or Town & County Taxi (© 056/776-5714); in Waterford, Rapid Cabs (© 051/858-585) or A-One Cabs (© 051/851-000); and in Wexford, Wexford Cabs (© 053/912-3123) or Wexford Taxi Services (© 053/914-6666).

COUNTY WATERFORD

Waterford City's unprotected proximity at the edge of the ferocious Atlantic Ocean makes it Ireland's Windy City, where a sea breeze is always blowing. Not only is it the main seaport of southeast

Ireland, its oceanside location has a lot to do with its status as the oldest city in the country, founded by Viking invaders in the 9th century.

Visitor Information

The Waterford Tourist Office is at The Granary, The Quay, Waterford (www.waterfordtourism.com; © 051/875788). In May, June, and September, it's open Monday to Saturday 9:30am to 5:30pm; July and August, Monday to Friday 9pm to 6pm, Saturdays 9:30 and to 5:30pm, and also Sundays 11am to 5pm from late July to mid-August; and from October to April, Monday to Friday 9:15am to 5:15pm.



local hero: THOMAS FRANCIS MEAGHER

The **Granville Hotel** \star on Waterford Quay (see p. 220) has another claim to fame—as the birthplace of the colorful 19th-century politico Thomas Francis Meagher.

Twice elected mayor of Waterford (the city's first Catholic mayor since the 16th century), Meagher was arrested for treason in 1848 after joining an anti-British rebellion. His death sentence, however, was commuted to exile in Australia—from where he eventually escaped. Fleeing to America, wily Meagher resurfaced in the Civil War as a senior Union officer.

By 1867, he had become governor of the Montana Territory, only to die suddenly, falling—or was he pushed?—from a steamboat into the Missouri River. Rumor has it he was made a target, possibly in retaliation for his military campaigns against Native American tribes. Having escaped death so often, it finally caught up with him.

Exploring Waterford City

Bishop's Palace $\star\star$ MUSEUM One of three separate museums that are known collectively as *Waterford Treasures*, the Bishop's Palace focuses on life in the city from 1700 until the mid-20th century. The collection covering the 18th century is by far the most impressive, including furniture, art, fashion, and some exquisite glass and silverwork. The Georgian drawing room is dominated by Willem Van der Hagen's fascinating 1736 landscape painting of Waterford City—the oldest landscape of an Irish city in existence—depicting long-vanished Waterford landmarks such as the medieval Christ Church Cathedral, demolished in 1773. Appropriately enough, given its close proximity to the famous factory (see p. 215), the museum also holds the earliest surviving pieces of Waterford Crystal, including a decanter dating from 1789. The Bishop's Palace, itself an elegant example of Georgian architecture, was built by Richard Cassels (1690–1751), who was also the architect of Leinster House \star in Dublin (see p. 113).

The Mall. www.waterfordtreasures.com/bishops-palace. \bigcirc 051/849650. Admission \notin 7 adults; \notin 6 seniors and students; children 13 and under free. Combined ticket with Medieval Museum \notin 10 adults; \notin 9 seniors and students. June–Aug Mon–Sat 9am–6pm; Sun and public holidays 11am–6pm. Sept–May Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun and public holidays 11am–5pm.

Christ Church Cathedral \star CATHEDRAL Waterford's most important church building is a beautiful example of late 18th-century architecture. The Italianate style that so enthralled the Georgians is plain to see—so much so that the interior looks almost like a stately home rather than a place of worship. Corinthian columns top grand marble plinths, rising up to meet the grand stucco, with its delicate filigreed detail. The current building, one of two cathedrals in the city designed by John Roberts, was finished in 1773, replacing one built by the Vikings in the 11th century. (One solitary pillar remains from the original building.) This was where Strongbow, the first English lord to invade Ireland, married an Irish princess—thus gaining a permanent foothold into the nobility of Ireland. Christ Church's Catholic counterpart, the Cathedral of the Most Holy Trinity, is on Barronstrand Street (see below).

Cathedral Square. www.christchurchwaterford.com. © 051/858958. Free admission. Easter–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–5pm. Oct–Easter Mon–Sat noon–3pm.

City Hall \star MUSEUM Headquarters of the local city government, this late-18th-century building houses a few pieces of interesting local memorabilia, including an exhibit on the extraordinary life of Thomas Francis Meagher. Leader of an Irish insurrection in 1848, Meagher eventually fought in the American Civil War and became governor of Montana (see facing page).

The Mall. © 051/860856. Free admission. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm.

Garter Lane Arts Centre \star ARTS CENTER One of Ireland's largest arts centers, the Garter Lane occupies two buildings on O'Connell Street. Number 5 holds exhibition rooms and artists' studios, and no. 22a, a former Friends Meeting House, is home of the Garter Lane Theatre, along with an art gallery and courtyard. The gallery showcases works by contemporary and local artists, plus a varied program of music, dance, and films.

O'Connell St. www.garterlane.ie. \bigcirc 051/855038. Many events and exhibits free; ticketed events \notin 5– \notin 20. Tues–Sat 11am–10pm; Sun 7–10pm; individual performance times vary.

Holy Trinity Cathedral \star CATHEDRAL Waterford has two impressive cathedrals, one Catholic and the other Protestant, both built by one equal-opportunity architect, John Roberts (the other being Christ Church Cathedral in Cathedral Square, see above). This is the Catholic version, the only baroque cathedral in Ireland, which has 10 unique Waterford crystal chandeliers. Roberts lived 82 years (1714–96), fathered 22 children with his beloved wife, and built nearly every significant 18th-century building in and around Waterford.

Barronstrand and Henrietta sts. www.waterford-cathedral.com. © 051/875166. Free admission. Open daily; hours can vary but generally 7:30am-7pm.

House of Waterford Crystal \star FACTORY TOUR One of the best-known Irish brands in the world, Waterford Crystal has been made in the city (with significant periods of hiatus) since 1783. In 2009, the company filed for bankruptcy—perhaps Ireland's most high-profile victim of the financial crisis—but new owners were soon found, and with them came this shiny, purpose-built factory and visitor center, right in the heart of Waterford. You can tour the factory to watch the glittering products being molded, blown, cut, and finished, mostly using traditional methods that have changed little in 200 years. Or, if you'd rather just drop in for sparkly souvenirs, you can visit the enormous gift shop without taking the tour.

The Mall. www.waterfordvisitorcentre.com. \bigcirc 051/317000. Admission \in 13 adults; \in 10 seniors and students; \in 5 children 6–18; children 5 and under free; \in 30 families. Tour: Apr–Oct Mon–Sat 9am–4:15pm; Sun 9:30am–4:15pm. Nov–Dec Mon–Fri 9:30am–3:15pm. Jan–Feb Mon–Fri 9am–3:15pm. Mar Mon–Sat 9am–3:15pm; Sun 9:30am–3:15pm. Store has same opening times but stays open until 6pm Apr–Oct and until 5pm Nov–Mar.

Medieval Museum ** MUSEUM The latest addition to the multi-site Waterford Treasures, the Medieval Museum has some beautiful artifacts from the city's medieval period, including richly embroidered cloth-of-gold vestments, intricate metal badges worn by pilgrims to the Holy Land, and the lavishly illustrated Charter Roll of Waterford dating from 1373. The building itself is as much of a treasure as the items on display. Closed off for years, the impressive 13th-century Choristor's Hall with its vaulted stone ceiling now forms one of the main areas of the museum, together with a 15th-century wine vault.

Cathedral Sq. www.waterfordtreasures.com/medieval-museum. **© 051/849501.** Admission €7 adults; €6 seniors and students; children 13 and under free; combined ticket with Bishop's Palace €10 adults; €9 seniors and students. May–Sept Mon–Fri 9:15am–6pm, Sat 9:30am–6pm, Sun 11am–6pm; Sept–May Mon–Fri 9:15am–5pm, Sat 10am–5pm, Sun 11am–5pm. Last admission 40 min. before closing.

Reginald's Tower ** MUSEUM Claimed to be Ireland's oldest building that's still in day-to-day use, Reginald's Tower was built around the year 1000 by the Viking invaders who founded the city. Today it houses a museum devoted to that period in Waterford's history; inevitably much of it is interpretive in nature, with displays that tell the story in absorbing detail, but a surprising number of actual items are on display too. Highlights include fragments of Viking pottery, coins, and jewelry—including a stunning ornamental clasp, intricately patterned with fine threads of gold and silver.

The Quay. www.waterfordtreasures.com/reginalds-tower. \bigcirc 051/304220. Admission \in 3 adults; \in 2 seniors; \in 1 students and children; \in 8 families. Late Mar to mid-Dec daily 9:30am–5:30pm; Jan to early Mar Wed–Sun 9:30am–5pm.

Waterford City Walking Tours ** TOURS Local guide Jack Burtchaell is well versed in the history, folklore, and witty anecdotes of his home city. He conducts this engaging hour-long tour of the old city twice daily, leaving from the tourist office at 11:45am and 1:45pm, and the reception area of the Granville Hotel on the Quay at noon and 2pm. You don't have to book—just show up a little before departure time.

The Quay. www.jackswalkingtours.com. **Ø 051/873711.** Tour €7. Daily 11:45am, 2pm.

Farther Afield in County Waterford

Ardmore High Cross \star RELIGIOUS SITE Ardmore (Irish for "the great height") is a very ancient Christian site—St. Declan, its founder, is said to have been a bishop in Munster as early as the mid–4th century, well before St. Patrick came to Ireland. Tradition has it that the small stone oratory in a cemetery high above Ardmore marks his burial site. St. Declan's Oratory is one of several stone structures composing the ancient monastic settlement. The most striking is the perfectly intact 30m-

high (98-ft.) round tower. On site are also ruins of a medieval cathedral and, nearby, St. Declan's well and church. Ardmore is near the border with County Cork, about 70km (43 miles) southwest of Waterford City.

On R673, Ardmore. Free admission. Daily dawn-dusk. From the main N25 road, turn onto R673 and follow signs to Ardmore.

Lismore Castle Gardens \star GARDENS High above the River Blackwater, this turreted medieval fortress dates from 1185, when Prince John of England (later the infamous King John who signed the Magna Carta) established a castle on this site. The grounds, surrounded by thick defensive walls dating from 1626, are spread across nearly 3 hectares (7 acres). They're peaceful and quite lovely to wander around, dotted with sculptures and with views of the massive castle. You're free to wander the whole 3,200-hectare (7,904-acre) estate of gardens, forests, and farmland—but not the castle itself. Lismore is owned by the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, wealthy British aristocrats, who won't let the general public in. That said, they're not above a spot of entrepreneurism; the castle can be rented, complete with the Duke's personal staff, for around €35,000 per week. Although if you can afford that, you've probably got a castle of your own.

Lismore. www.lismorecastlegardens.com. **Ø 058/54061.** Admission €8 adults; €5 seniors, students, and children. Mid-Apr to mid-Oct daily 10:30am–5:30pm. Last admission 1 hr. before closing. From Cappoquin, take N72 6.5km (4 miles) west.



Lismore Castle in Lismore, County Waterford.



Comeragh Mountains, County Waterford.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

BEACHES Wide sandy beaches are at Tramore, Ardmore, Clonea, or Dunmore East.

CYCLING From Waterford City, you can ride 13km (8 miles) to Passage East and take the ferry (fare with bicycle $\in 2$ one-way, $\in 3$ round-trip) to Wexford and the beautiful Hook Peninsula (see p. 227). Or continue on from Passage East to Dunmore East, a picturesque seaside village with a small beach hemmed in by cliffs. The road from there to Tramore and Dungarvan is quite scenic. For bicycle hire, try **Altitude Cycle and Outdoor Store** at 22 Ballybricken, Waterford City (www.altitude.ie; **©** 051/870356), just outside the city center, about 15 minutes' walk from the Waterford Treasures museums (see p. 214).

FISHING For some fine sea trout and salmon fishing, try the Colligan River, the River Blackwater, and the River Slaney, which can be fished from the old bridge in Enniscorthy. Knockaderry **Reservoir** is an enormous, 28-hectare (70-acre) fishery 12km ($7\frac{1}{2}$ miles) southwest of Waterford City, great for catching rainbow trout. Permits (\notin 25) must be purchased from the Centra supermarket on the main R680 road in Kilmeaden. Boats can also be hired for \notin 15 from Pat Smith, the treasurer of the local angling association (\bigcirc 051/384428). Meanwhile, the Fort William Fishery, Glencairn, Lismore (www.fortwilliamfishing.ie; \bigcirc 087/829-2077) is renowned for wild salmon; permits cost

between $\notin 20$ and $\notin 100$ per day, depending on length of time covered. They also rent cottages, sleeping up to 7, for $\notin 500$ to $\notin 700$ per week; see the website for more details. If you're seeking a bigger challenge, deep sea angling trips (including reef and wreck dives) can be organized by **Gone Fishing**, 42 Lower Main St., Dungarvan (© 058/43514). They also rent rods and other fishing gear.

A WALK TO mahon falls

The point where the narrow Mahon River reaches the top of the Comeragh Mountains makes for a beautiful, rugged view, as it tumbles hundreds of feet down the rocky slopes in a spray of silvery white. The walk to the falls is popular with hikers, both for the sheer stony loveliness of it (you can see all the way from the falls to the sea), and because it's a fairly short distance—about fifteen minutes' walk in each direction. The 80m (262½ ft.) waterfalls are on the R676 between Carrick-on-Suir and Dungarvan. At the tiny village of Mahon Bridge, 26km (16 miles) south of Carrick-on-Suir, turn west on the road marked for Mahon Falls, then follow signs for the falls and the Comeragh Drive. In about 5km (3 miles), you reach a parking lot along the Mahon River (in fact, just a tiny stream). The trail, indicated by two boulders, begins across the road. Follow the stream along the floor of the valley to the base of the falls. From here you can see the fields of Waterford spread out below you, and the sea a glittering mirror beyond. Walking time is about 30 minutes round-trip.



Mahon Falls in the Comeragh Mountains.

GOLF County Waterford's golf venues include three 18-hole championship courses. Waterford Castle Golf and Country Club, The Island, Ballinakill, Waterford (www.waterfordcastle.com/golf.html; © 051/871633), is a par-72 parkland course; greens fees are $\in 15$ to $\in 30$. Faithlegg Golf Club, Faithlegg House, Waterford (www.faithlegg.com; © 051/382000), a par-72 parkland course beside the River Suir, charges greens fees of $\in 25$ to $\in 45$. Dungarvan Golf

Club, Knocknagranagh, Dungarvan (www.dungarvangolfclub.com; © 058/41605), a par-72 parkland course, has greens fees of $\in 20$ to $\in 40$. In addition, the 18-hole par-71 inland course at Waterford Golf Club, Newrath, Waterford (www.waterfordgolfclub.com; © 051/876748), is 1.6km (1 mile) from the center of the city. Its greens fees are $\in 30$ to $\in 40$.

HORSEBACK RIDING Arrange to ride at Killotteran Equitation Centre, Killotteran, Waterford (www.kec.ie; © 051/384158). Fees average around €25 per hour.

SAILING, WINDSURFING & SEA KAYAKING From May to September, the **Dunmore East Adventure Centre**, Dunmore East (www.dunmoreadventure.com; © 051/383783), offers courses of 1 to 4 days that cost around €45 to €100 per day, including equipment rental. Summer programs for children are also available.

Where to Stay in County Waterford

Granville Hotel ** With its elegant, Sienna-colored frontage, this welcoming hotel was built in the late 1700s and has been in business continuously since 1865. The interior retains something of a manor house feel, with rich color schemes, deep red carpeting, and antique furniture. Guestrooms are comfortable and reasonably spacious—although not all have air conditioning, so make sure you request this when you book if it's important to you. Some rooms overlook Waterford Quay, with its field of gently bobbing yacht masts. The hotel bar is popular with locals, and the modern Irish **Bianconi Restaurant** is excellent. Staff could hardly be friendlier or more helpful. You can book a relaxing (and reasonably priced) massage beauty treatment in the Therapy Room.

Meagher's Quay. www.granville-hotel.ie. \bigcirc 051/305555. 98 units. \notin 73– \notin 149 double. Parking at nearby lots (no discount) \notin 3.50– \notin 5 overnight; \notin 5– \notin 17 for 24 hr. Breakfast not included in lower rates. Dinner, bed and breakfast packages available. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; Wi-Fi (free).

Samuel's Heritage ** This charming B&B on the outskirts of Waterford (just a little too far to be considered walking distance from the center) overlooks open fields on one side and the River Suir on the other. Sally, Des, and their family have converted their home into a modern, well-equipped lodging, including amenities such as a mini-gym and infrared sauna, rare in a countryside B&B. The bright and cheery guestrooms have ample space, and a few extras such as flatscreen TVs and free Wi-Fi. Family rooms sleep up to four. The delicious breakfast options include smoked salmon with eggs from their own hens.

Halfway House, Dunmore Rd. www.samuelsheritage.com. **© 051/875094.** 6 units. €90 double. Rates include breakfast. Free parking. Amenities: Gym; sauna; Wi-Fi (free).

Waterford Marina Hotel \star This modern, well-run hotel overlooking the River Suir isn't particularly characterful—but it's in a great location, a short walk from the center of Waterford. Rooms are clean and have everything you need, with comfortable beds. Family rooms are an exceptionally good value—they sleep up to four, usually for just $\in 10$ or so more than the standard double rates. (You'll pay a $\in 25$ supplement for kids between 12 and 16.) Some bedrooms have lovely views over the water. Special offers are often listed on the website, including packages that cover dinner in the excellent restaurant. *Tip:* Ask for an upper floor room—the views are better and, since there can be street noise at night, particularly on weekends, you're just a bit above the ruckus.

Canada St. www.waterfordmarinahotel.com. **© 051/856-600.** 81 units. €69–€89 double. Parking (free). Breakfast not included in lower rates. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; room service; accessible rooms; Wi-Fi (free).

windsurfing IN IRELAND

Vast flotillas of colorful sails and wet-suited windsurfers spring up all along Ireland's coasts these days as the sport of windsurfing continues to boom in popularity. Windsurfing schools with boards for rent can be found in most regions of the country, with the greatest concentration on the southeast and southwest coasts.

In the southeast, the top spots are **Cahore** and **Rosslare** in County Wexford, and **Dunmore East** and **Dungarvan** in County Waterford. Beyond the southeast, check out **Cobh** in County Cork (see p. 271), **Brandon Bay** on the Dingle Peninsula (see p. 337), **Roundstone** in Galway (see p. 397), **Achill Island** in Mayo (see p. 441), and in Donegal, **Magheroarty** (see p. 482) and **Rossnowlagh** (see p. 474).

Where to Dine in County Waterford

Waterford's restaurant scene is pretty impressive for such a small city. Luxury restaurants such as **Richmond House** $\star\star\star$ (see below) really raise the bar, but cheaper options also abound, and it's perfectly possible to dine well without stretching the wallet.

Bodega! ** MODERN IRISH/EUROPEAN A restaurant with an exclamation point in the name is hardly the sort of place in which one expects to sit up straight, and Bodega! certainly does its best to cultivate an upbeat, funky vibe. The menu reads like a list of regionally sourced ingredients: County Cork crab and haddock cakes with saffron and lemon aioli, or local lamb with mustard crust. Even the burgers come with a delicious smoked farmhouse cheese that's travelled barely an hour to get here. The long cocktail list should help maintain the buzz.

54 John's St. www.bodegawaterford.com. **© 051/844177.** Main courses €16–€28. Mon–Sat noon–10pm.

The Munster \star BISTRO This cozy bar, across the street from the House of Waterford Crystal visitor center (see p. 215), serves a smallish menu of unpretentious, traditional pub grub—think sandwiches, Irish stew, seafood pie, and an enormous house burger. The early evening menu has a few slightly more ambitious choices, such as chicken breast with chorizo and parmesan cream, or salmon fishcake served with chili jam. It may lack frills, but everything's well done.

Bailey's New Street. www.themunsterbar.com. **Ø 051/874656.** Main courses €10–€14. Mon 12:30am–2:30pm; Tues–Fri 12:30–2:30pm, 5–9pm; Sat 5–9pm; Sun 4–8pm.

Richmond House *** MODERN IRISH The grounds of this 18th-century mansion hide away a bountiful produce patch, where the chef gets most of the fruit and vegetables for the restaurant's kitchen. This is something of a dining destination for people in this part of Ireland, and it's easy to see why—the menu is a hugely successful combination of Irish and Continental flavors. Menus change daily, according to what's fresh and in season, but you're likely to find locally sourced lamb, beef, and seafood served with sides like champ (mashed potato and spring onion) or something freshly picked from the garden. The wine list includes a better than average selection of wines by the glass—a relief, given the price of dinner. Those wanting to sample some of this sumptuous home cooking on a budget may want to check out the €33 early bird menu, served until 7:30pm. They also have a few guestrooms (€120–€300) if you like it so much you don't want to leave.

Singposted from N72, Cappoquin. www.richmondhouse.net. **© 058/54278.** Fixed-price menus: 3 courses €55. Daily 6–9pm. Closed Dec 22–Jan 10.

COUNTY WEXFORD

The countryside in this area feels so bucolic and peaceful, Dublin might as well be hundreds of miles away. Wexford is known for its long stretches of pristine beaches and for the evocative historic

monuments in Wexford Town and on the Hook Peninsula. The modern English name of Wexford evolved from *Waesfjord*, which is what the Vikings called it when they invaded in the 9th century. The Normans captured the town at the end of the 12th century, and you can still see remnants of their fort at the Irish National Heritage Park.

Visitor Information

The **Wexford Tourist Office** is on Crescent Quay, Wexford (www.visitwexford.ie; **© 053/912-3111**). It's open Monday to Saturday from 9:15am to 5:15pm. From late July to mid-August it's also open on Sundays from 10:30am to 5pm.

Exploring Wexford Town

The Bull Ring \star SQUARE/STATUE In the 17th century, this town square was a venue for bull baiting, a sport introduced by the butcher's guild. (Tradition maintained that after a match, the hide of the ill-fated bull was presented to the mayor and the meat was used to feed the poor.) But it played a greater part in history in 1798, when the first declaration of an Irish republic was made here. A memorial statue honors the Irish pikemen who fought for the cause. Today, activity at the ring is much tamer: An excellent outdoor market is every Friday and Saturday from 10am to 4:30pm. Off N. Main St.

Commarket \star SQUARE Until a century ago, this central marketplace buzzed with the activity of cobblers, publicans, and more than 20 other businesses. Today it's just a wide street dominated by the Wexford Arts Centre, a structure dating from 1775. Off Upper George's St.

Irish National Heritage Park ** HERITAGE SITE On the banks of the River Slaney, just outside of Wexford Town, this 14-hectare (35-acre) living-history park is great fun. It provides an ideal introduction for visitors of all ages to life in ancient Ireland, from the Stone Age to the Norman invasion. Each reconstructed glimpse into Irish history is well crafted and has its own natural setting and wildlife. There's also a nature trail and interpretive center, complete with gift shop and cafe. Kids can easily be amused for half a day here.

Ferrycarrig. www.inhp.com. \bigcirc 053/912-0733. Admission \notin 9 adults; \notin 7 seniors and students; \notin 4.50 children 13–16; \notin 4 children 5–12; children 4 and under free; \notin 24 families. May–Aug daily 9:30am–6:30pm (last admission 5pm); Sept–Apr 9:30am–5:30pm (last admission 3pm). About 4.8km/3 miles west of Wexford, signposted from N11.

John Barry Monument ★ STATUE This bronze statue, a gift from the American people in 1956, faces out to the sea as a tribute to the titular Mr. Barry, a Wexford native who became the father of the American Navy. Born at Ballysampson, Tacumshane, 16km (10 miles) southeast of Wexford Town, Barry immigrated to the colonies while in his teens and volunteered to fight in the American Revolution. One of the U.S. Navy's first commissioned officers, he became captain of the *Lexington*. In 1797, George Washington appointed him commander in chief of the U.S. Navy. Crescent Quay.

St. Iberius Church ★ CHURCH Erected in 1660, St. Iberius was built on hallowed ground—the land has been used for houses of worship since Norse times. The church has a lovely Georgian facade and an interior known for its superb acoustics. Concerts are sometimes held here—call for details. N. Main St. © 087/970-3377. Free admission. May–Sept daily 10am–5pm; Oct–Apr Tues–Sat 10am–3pm.

Selskar Abbey and Westgate Heritage Centre * RELIGIOUS SITE/MUSEUM This picturesque abbey dating from the early 12th century has often been the scene of synods and parliaments. The first Anglo-Irish treaty was signed here in 1169, and it's said that Henry II spent Lent 1172 at the abbey

doing penance for having Thomas à Becket beheaded. Although the abbey is mostly in ruins, its choir is part of a Church of Ireland edifice, and a portion of the original tower is a vesting room. Connected to the abbey (and operated as a single attraction), the **Westgate Heritage Centre** is housed in what was once a tollgate on the western approach to the city, part of the 12th-century defensive walls. The center has some diverting exhibits relating to Wexford's town history, plus an informative film. Opening times are somewhat variable, so it's a good idea to call ahead.

Westgate St. **© 053/914-6506.** Admission €7 adults; €3 children and students. May–Aug Mon–Fri 10am–6pm, Sat–Sun noon–6pm; Sept–Apr Mon–Fri 10am–5pm.

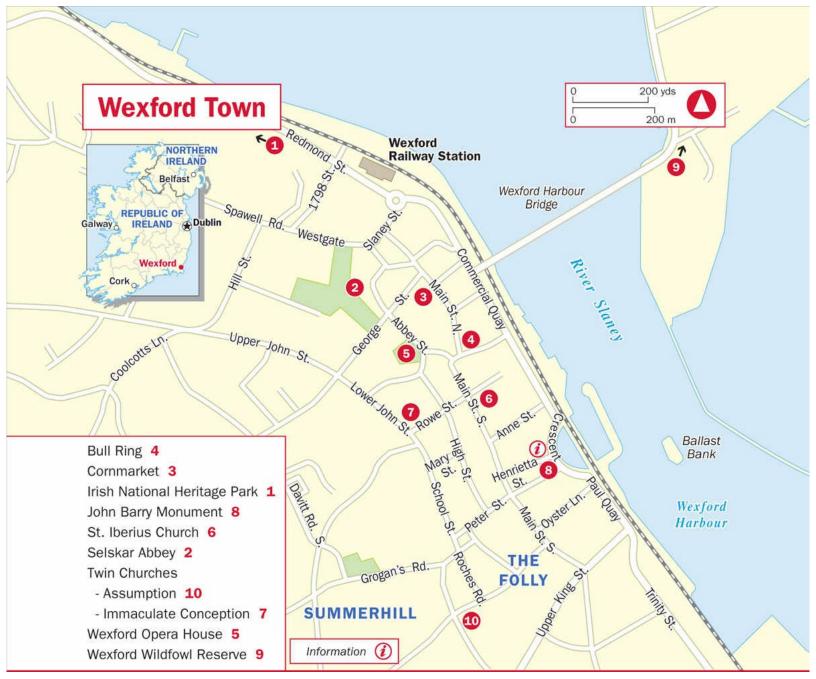
The Twin Churches: Church of the Assumption and Church of the Immaculate Conception \star CHURCHES Dominating Wexford's skyline, a pair of 69m (226-ft.) spires top these twin Gothic Revival structures (1851–58), designed by architect Robert Pierce, a pupil of Augustus Pugin. Mosaics on the main doors of both churches give a good bit of local history.

Bride and Rowe sts. © 053/912-2055. Free admission; donations welcome. Daily 8am–6pm.

Wexford Opera House \star PERFORMANCE HALL This modern opera house is a somewhat awkward addition to the Wexford skyline, with its large but rather garish copper-plated tower. The biggest event in the opera house's calendar is, unsurprisingly, the Wexford Festival Opera (www.wexfordopera.com). Held over two weeks each October/November, this prestigious event attracts aficionados from all over Ireland and beyond. Opera lovers will be in heaven—but book early if there's something you want to see. Tickets start at around €10, rising to about €100 for the best seats.

High St. www.wexfordoperahouse.ie. **Ø 053/912-2144.** Ticket prices vary; generally between €15–€35. Event times vary; call ahead.

Wexford Walking Tours $\star\star$ TOURS Proud of their town's ancient streets and antique buildings, the people of Wexford began conducting guided tours for visitors more than 30 years ago. Now the tourism office runs the tours on a more formal basis, but they're still led by locals, whose knowledge of the town and its history is unrivaled. The regular historical tour runs March to October, Monday to Saturday, and costs \in 5 per person. It departs at 11am from the Tourist Office (see p. 222),which also handles booking. The whole tour takes about 90 minutes. They also offer ghost tours and a walk of the surviving sections of the medieval town walls.



Wexford Wildfowl Reserve \star NATURE RESERVE This national nature reserve is part of the unfortunately named North Slob, adjacent to Wexford Harbour, 5km (3 miles) east of Wexford Town. About 10,000 Greenland white-fronted geese—more than one-third of the world's population—winter here, as do brent geese, Bewick's swans, and wigeons. The reserve has a visitor center, an informational film, an exhibition hall, and an observation tower and blinds. North Slob. www.wexfordwildfowlreserve.ie. © 076/100-2660. Free admission. Daily 9am–5pm.

Farther Afield in County Wexford

Hook Lighthouse & Heritage Centre *** LIGHTHOUSE The Hook Head Peninsula (see p. 230) is one of southern Ireland's loveliest drives, full of captivating vistas and hidden byways to discover. Nestled at the end of it all is this picturesque old lighthouse, the oldest part of which dates from the 13th century, making it the world's oldest lighthouse still in continuous use. Guided tours do an excellent job of telling the history of the lighthouse and of the surrounding peninsula, which has been occupied since at least the 5th century A.D. There is an active program of special events too, from art courses to ghost tours. *Tip:* The drive from Waterford is drastically shorter if you take the Passage East Car Ferry; see "Fast Facts" at the start of this chapter for details.

Hook Head. www.hookheritage.ie. \bigcirc 051/397-055. Admission \in 6 adults; \in 4.50 seniors and students; \in 3.50 children 5–16; children 4 and under free; \in 18– \in 20 families. Visitor center: June–Aug daily 9:30am–6pm; May and Sept 9:30am–5:30pm; Oct–Apr 9:30am–5pm. Lighthouse tours: June–Aug half-hourly 10am–5:30pm; Sept–May hourly 11am–5pm. 30km (18²/₃ miles) southeast of Waterford, 47km (29 miles) southwest of Wexford.



Johnstown Castle, home of the Irish Agricultural Museum.

Irish Agricultural Museum and Famine Exhibition $\star\star$ MUSEUM Absorbing and at times deeply affecting, this excellent museum on the grounds of Johnstown Castle illuminates how important agriculture has been to the history of this region. Exhibits are devoted to, among other things, dairy farming, country furniture, traditional crafts, and historic machinery. Of course, no farming museum in Ireland would be complete without mention of its greatest catastrophe—the Great Famine, which killed about a million people in the mid-19th century (and was responsible for the emigration of a million more). A special section puts it all into perspective in a thought-provoking way. Johnstown Castle was built in the 1400s; today it's used as a government building, but you can still wander the beautiful grounds.

Johnstown Castle Estate, Bridgetown Road, off Wexford-Rosslare Road (N25). www.irishagrimuseum.ie. **Ø** 053/918-4671. Gardens and museum: €8 adults; €6 seniors; €4; €24 families. Museum: Mar–May and Sept–Oct Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; Sat–Sun and public holidays 11am–5pm. Jun–Aug Mon–Fri 9am–6:30pm; Sat–Sun and public holidays 11am–6:30pm. Nov–Feb Mon–Fri 9am–4pm; Sat–Sun and public holidays 11am–4pm. Gardens: Mar–Oct daily 9am–5:30pm; Nov–Mar daily 9am–4:30pm.

A TRIP THROUGH history: EXPLORING THE RING OF HOOK

A wild and rugged place of rocky headlands and secluded beaches, the **Hook Peninsula** juts out between Bannow Bay and Waterford Harbour in southwest County Wexford. In medieval times, these inlets were significant landing spots for travelers from Britain to Ireland, as archaeological remains attest. Today, the peninsula is a popular driving or cycling route, as well as a magnet for hikers on the Wexford Coastal Pathway (see p. 231) and for birders watching the spring and fall passerine migration.

Start your exploration at the town of **Wellington Bridge**. Just west of town on R733 is a roadside stop on the left by a cemetery; from here you can look across Bannow Bay to the ruins of **Clonmines**, a Norman village established in the 13th century. It's a fine example of a walled medieval settlement, with remains of two churches, three tower houses, and an Augustinian priory. You can drive to the ruins—just follow R733 another mile west to a left turn posted for the Wicklow Coastal Pathway, and continue straight on this road where the pathway turns right. The ruins are on private land, so you should ask permission at the farmhouse at the end of the road.

Continuing west on R733, turn left on R734 at the sign for the Ring of Hook, and turn right at the sign for **Tintern Abbey** \star (see p. 228). Founded by Welsh monks in the 13th century, its beautiful grounds contain a restored stone bridge that spans a narrow sea inlet.

As R734 continues south, you come to **Baginbun Head**, where the Norman presence in Ireland was first established with a victory over the Irish at the Battle of Baginbun. Today it's a peaceful scene, with a fine beach nestling against the cliffs, but from the beach you can still see the outline of the Norman earthwork fortifications on the head.

The **tip of the peninsula**, with its line of low cliffs eroded in places for blowholes, has been famous for shipwrecks since Norman times. Its historic **lighthouse** (see p. 225) has been on this site since the early 13th century.

The Ring of Hook road returns along the western side of the peninsula, passing the beaches at **Booley Bay** and **Dollar Bay**. On a promontory overlooking the town of **Duncannon** is a **fort** built in 1588 to protect Waterford Harbour from the Spanish Armada. Just north of Duncannon, along the coast at the village of **Ballyhack**, a ferry runs to County Waterford (see p. 210), and a Knights Hospitallers castle on a hill.

A visit to the Hook Peninsula wouldn't be complete without a stop at **Dunbrody Abbey**, in a field beside the road about 6.5km (4 miles) north of Duncannon. The abbey, founded in 1170, is a magnificent ruin and one of the largest Cistercian abbeys in Ireland. Despite its grand size, it bears remarkably little ornamentation. Tours are sometimes available; inquire at the visitor center across the road.

SS *Dunbrody* **Famine Ship Experience ***** MUSEUM This huge, life-sized reconstruction of a 19th-century tall ship is exactly the kind of vessel on which a million or more people emigrated from Ireland to escape the Great Famine. An interpretive history center, the SS *Dunbrody* is an engaging way to learn about that history—particularly for youngsters, who will find it less stuffy than a conventional museum. Actors in period dress lead the tours, describing in great detail what life on board was like for the passengers. The SS *Dunbrody* is in New Ross, 36km ($22\frac{1}{3}$ miles) west of Wexford.

The Quay, New Ross. www.dunbrody.com. \bigcirc 051/425239. Admission €8.50 adults; €7 seniors; €5 students and children; €20–€25 families. Apr–Sept daily 9am–6pm (first tour 9:45am, last tour 5pm); Oct–Mar daily 9am–5pm (first tour 10am, last tour 4pm).



Hook Lighthouse at Hook Head, County Wexford.

Tintern Abbey \star In a lovely rural setting overlooking Bannow Bay, Tintern Abbey was founded in the 12th century by William Marshall, the Earl of Pembroke, as thanks to God after he nearly died at sea. Please note: This is not the Tintern Abbey that William Wordsworth wrote about in his famous poem, although the monks who named this abbey were Cistercians from the other Tintern, which is located in Wales. They gave both abbeys the same name, leading to some confusion. The parts that remain—nave, chancel, tower, chapel, and cloister—date from the early 13th century, though they have been much altered since then. The grounds are extraordinarily beautiful and include a stone bridge spanning a narrow sea inlet. A small coffee shop is on site.

Saltmills, New Ross. © 051/562650. Free admission. Mid-May to late Sept daily 10am–5pm. Signposted 19km (12 miles) south of New Ross off of R733.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

BEACHES County Wexford's beaches at **Courtown, Curracloe, Duncannon,** and **Rosslare** are ideal for walking, jogging, and swimming.

BIRD-WATCHING A good starting place for bird-watching in the region is the **Wexford Wildfowl Reserve** \star (see p. 225). The on-site warden can direct you to other places of interest.



The **Great Saltee Island** is excellent for watching seabirds, especially during May, June, and July, when the cliffs on the island's southernmost point are mobbed with nesting birds and their young. You can get up close and personal with puffins, which nest in underground burrows, or graceful guillemots. Other species include cormorants, kittiwakes, gannets, and Manx shearwaters. The island is privately owned, but visitors are welcome on the condition that they do nothing to disturb the bird habitat and the island's natural beauty. You can usually charter a boat to the Saltees from the Kilmore Quay; alternatively, contact Kilmore Quay Angling (www.kilmoreangling.com; © 053/912-9723 or

087/213-5308), or **Sailing Ireland** (www.sailingireland.ie; **© 053/913-9163** or 086/171-3800). Landings generally take place only in summer, and not in rough weather.

LOCAL HERO: JFK, great-grandson OF NEW ROSS

U.S. President John F Kennedy was born in America, but Patrick Kennedy (1823–58), his great-grandfather, was a son of Ireland, raised in the small waterfront city of New Ross in County Wexford. That connection to the Kennedy family history draws thousands of visitors a year.

New Ross is a modest-sized working city, with rows of stone buildings leading down to a busy port, that's usually dotted with fishing boats. It was from this port that Patrick Kennedy sailed to England in 1848 to begin his journey to America. After working for a time in Britain, in 1849 he boarded a packet ship in Liverpool, the *Washington Irving*, and travelled to the U.S. to begin a new life.

The house near New Ross where he lived until 1848 has been converted into a museum dedicated to the Kennedy family's Irish history. The **Kennedy Homestead** (www.kennedyhomestead.ie; **\bigcirc 051/388264**) in the tiny village of Dunganstown, 8km (5 miles) south of New Ross, is a humble, one-story traditional stone building. There's a modern visitors' center on the grounds, where you can see rare memorabilia (some acquired through the Kennedy Library archival collection in Boston), and learn what the family's life was like in the dangerous world of 19th-century Ireland, as well as the circumstances that led to Patrick Kennedy's decision to emigrate. From February to November it's open daily, 9:30am to 5:30pm; entry costs €8 adults, €7 seniors, €5.50 students, and €21 families.

Another nearby JFK site of interest is the **Kennedy Memorial Arboretum** (www.heritageireland.ie; \bigcirc 051/388171), a beautiful lakeside garden and wildlife haven dedicated to the late President. It's purely a memorial—there's no strong connection between the family and the park—but it's a popular stop for those visiting the area. It's signposted from R733, about 12km (7¹/₂ miles) south of New Ross. Opening times are: May to August, daily 10am to 8pm; April and September, daily 10am to 6:30pm; and October to March, daily 10am to 5pm. Entry costs €4 adults, €3 seniors, €2 students and children, and €10 families.

Hook Head is a good spot for watching the spring and autumn passerine migration—the lack of sizable cliffs means that it isn't popular with summer nesting seabirds. In addition to swallows, swifts, and warblers, look out for the less common cuckoos, turtledoves, redstarts, and blackcaps.

While driving south from Gorey toward Ballycanew on R741, keep an eye out for a reddish **cliff** on the left, about $2\text{km}(1\frac{1}{4} \text{ miles})$ out of Gorey; this is a well-known peregrine aerie, with birds nesting until the early summer. The land is private, but you can watch the birds from the road.

CYCLING You can rent mountain bikes in Wexford Town at Hayes Cycle Shop, 108 S. Main St. (www.hayescycles.com; © 053/912-2462). From Wexford, the road north up the coast through Curracloe to Blackwater is a scenic day trip.

DIVING The Kilmore Quay area, south of Wexford Town, offers some of the most spectacular diving in Ireland, especially around the Saltee Islands and Conningbeg rocks. For all your diving needs, consult the **Pier House Diving Centre**, Kilmore Quay (email:scubabreaks@eircom.net; © 053/29703).

GOLF In recent years, Wexford has blossomed as a golfing destination. One of the newest developments is an 18-hole championship seaside par-72 course at St. Helens Bay Golf Club, Kilrane (www.sthelensbay.ie; © 053/913-3234). Greens fees are $\in 18$ to $\in 30$. The Enniscorthy Golf Club, Knockmarshall, Enniscorthy (www.enniscorthygc.ie; © 054/923-3191), is an inland par-70 course with greens fees of $\in 20$ on weekdays, $\in 55$ on weekends.

SAILING/FISHING The town of **Kilmore Quay**, south of Wexford Town on R739, is a center for sea angling in Wexford. The most popular rivers for fishing are the Barrow and the Slaney, where the sea trout travel upstream from mid-June to the end of August. **Blackwater Anglers (© 053/912-7318)** offers fishing on a lake stocked with rainbow and brown trout from spring until late in the year.

WALKING Along the entire coastline you'll see brown signs with a picture of a hiker on them. The signs mark the **Wexford Coastal Pathway**, which meanders along the coast via pristine beaches and country lanes. Unfortunately, the roads are often too busy for it to be a good idea to walk the whole route—especially on the bypass around Wexford Town. The markers are handy, however, for shorter walks between Wexford's beaches. In the northern part of the county, the section of beach from Clogga Head (County Wicklow) to Tara Hill, 14km (8 miles) south, is especially lovely, as is the walk to the top of Tara Hill, which offers views across sloping pastures to the sea. Farther south, the path veers off the roads, sticking to the beach from Cahore Point south to Raven Point and from Rosslare Harbour to Kilmore Quay.

Another good coastal walk is near the town of Wexford in the **Raven Nature Reserve**, an area of forested dunes and uncrowded beaches. To get there, take R741 north out of Wexford, turn right on R742 to Curracloe just out of town, and in the village of Curracloe, turn right and continue for just over a mile to the beach parking lot. The nature reserve is to your right. You can get there by car, driving a half-mile south, or walk the distance along the beach. The beach extends another 5km (3 miles) to Raven Point, where at low tide you can see the remains of a shipwreck, half-buried in the sand.

On the border between counties Wexford and Carlow, the long, rounded ridge of peaks are the **Blackstairs Mountains**, which allow for plenty of walks in an area unspoiled by tourism. Get a guidebook and maps from any sizable Wexford tourist office.

Where to Stay in County Wexford

In Wexford, choice within the town is limited; you'll do much better opting for a place in the countryside, where there's a satisfying mixture of bucolic farmhouses and luxurious getaways.

Monart Spa *** A luxurious, restorative, grown-up retreat, Monart is consistently named among the top spas in Ireland—and for good reason. It's a sumptuous, impeccably designed place, nestled beside a lake and a verdant forest. Guestrooms are surrounded by woodland, and some have little balconies overlooking the grounds. The restaurant is excellent, though expensive (€45 for three courses, and many dishes have an extra cost). The heavenly spa has a thermal suite (free to use for guests) equipped with two pools, a salt grotto, indoor and outdoor saunas, and an aroma steam room. Packages and short breaks are a good value—for example, a 3-night stay, including breakfast, dinner, and a spa treatment, for €315. To maintain the air of serenity, no children are allowed at Monart.

On L6124, The Still, Enniscorthy. www.monart.ie. \bigcirc 053/923-8999. 70 units. \notin 99– \notin 175 double; \notin 200– \notin 300 suite. Parking (free). Rates include breakfast. Dinner, bed and breakfast, and spa treatment packages available. Amenities: 2 restaurants; bar; room service; afternoon tea; cafe; spa; pool. About 5.2km (3¹/₃ miles) west of Enniscorthy.

Riverbank House Hotel ** This cozy mid-size hotel just outside the town center in Wexford has lovely views of the River Slaney. Rooms overlooking the river have suitably huge picture windows. Beds are comfortable and very large; some are four-poster. Family rooms cost just \in 30 more than doubles (though they are not that much bigger, with one double and one single bed). The bar and restaurant are pleasant spaces, filled with natural light. The casual pub-style food is good too—unfussy, international dishes of the something-for-everyone variety—and in good weather you can dine on the terrace overlooking the river. The genuinely cheerful staff helps things run smoothly. All in all, this is a thoroughly decent, near-budget option about a 10-minute walk from central Wexford.

The Bridge. www.riverbankhousehotel.com. **© 053/912-3611.** 23 units. €80–€140 double. Parking (free). Breakfast not included in lower rates. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; room service; Wi-Fi (free).

Where to Dine in County Wexford

The Yard ** BRASSERIE There are two sides to this place; drop in at lunchtime for a restorative, hearty but informal meal (beer-battered cod and chips, perhaps, or a tasty burger), or come in the evening for a more elaborate, brasserie-style menu, full of traditional Irish flavors. Specials could include lamb cutlets with blue cheese croquettes, or Kilmore scallops with samphire and bacon. Come on Thursday or Friday night for the great value set menu—four courses for just €27. Open Thursday to Saturday only, the Little Yard is an alternative dining space, part bar, part tapas restaurant. It's also open Sunday nights on holiday weekends.

3 Lower Georges St. www.theyard.ie. **© 053/914-4083.** Main courses €17–€30. Mon–Sat noon–10pm.

COUNTY KILKENNY

Like so many Irish towns, Kilkenny City stands on the site of an old monastery from which it takes its name. A priory was founded here in the 6th century by St. Canice; in Gaelic, *Cill Choinnigh* means "Canice's Church." In medieval times, it was a prosperous walled city. Much of its medieval architecture has been skillfully preserved, including long sections of the medieval wall. Farther afield from the county seat, the gentle countryside is full of captivating old ruins, from the majestic Kells Priory to the haunting remains of Jerpoint Abbey.

Visitor Information

The **Kilkenny Tourist Office** is at Shee Alms House, Rose Inn Street, Kilkenny (www.kilkennytourism.ie; © 056/775-1500). It's open May to September, Monday to Saturday 9am to 6pm, Sunday 10:30am to 4pm; October to April, Monday to Saturday 9:15am to 5pm.



Colorful shop fronts in affluent Kilkenny City.

Exploring Kilkenny City

Black Abbey \star CHURCH Nobody is sure why this Dominican church, founded in 1225, is named Black Abbey. It may be because the Dominicans wore black capes over their white habits, or perhaps because the Black Plague claimed the lives of eight priests in 1348. The Black Abbey's darkest days came in 1650, when Oliver Cromwell used it as a courthouse before destroying it; by the time he left, all that remained were the walls. The abbey was rebuilt and opened in 1816 as a church; a new nave was completed in 1866, and the entire building was fully restored in 1979. Among the elements remaining from the original abbey are an alabaster sculpture of the Holy Trinity that dates from 1400, and a pre-Reformation statue of St. Dominic carved in Irish oak, which is believed to be the oldest such piece in the world. The huge Rosary Window, a stained-glass work of nearly 45 sq. m (484 sq. ft.) representing the 15 mysteries of the rosary, was created in 1892 by Mayer of Munich.

Abbey St. (off Parliament St.). www.blackabbey.ie. 🖉 056/772-1279. Free admission; donations welcome. Apr-Sept Mon-Sat 7:30am-7pm, Sun 9am-7pm. Oct-Mar Mon-Sat 7:30am-5:30pm. No visits during worship.

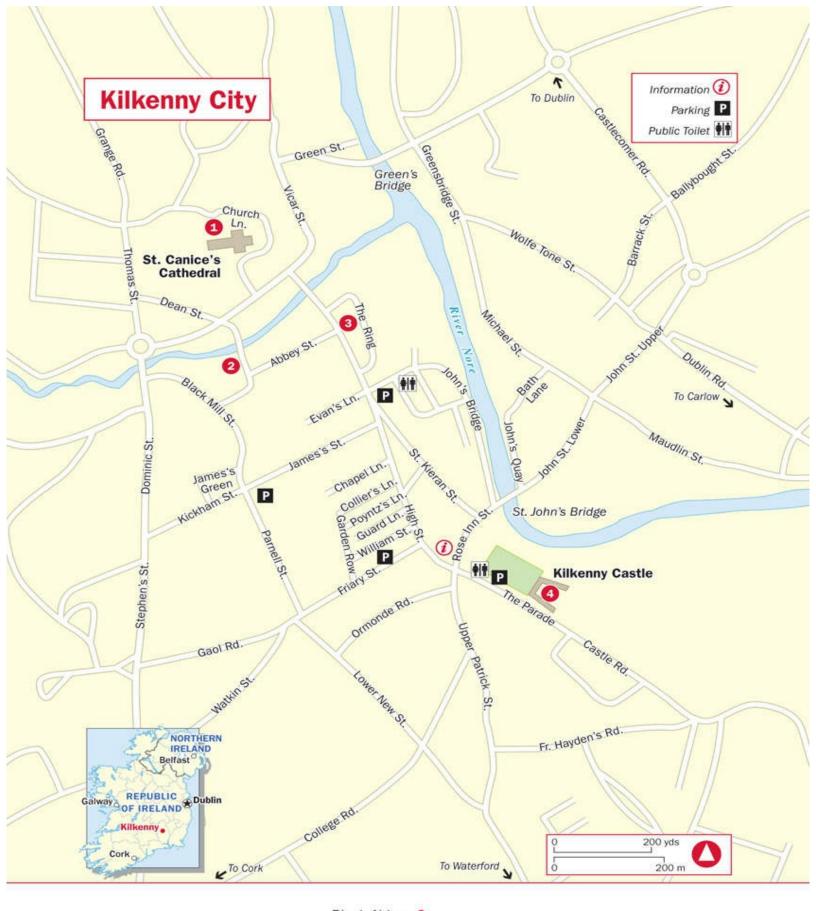
Kilkenny Castle *** CASTLE Standing majestically beside the River Nore on the south side of Kilkenny City, this landmark medieval castle was built in the 12th century and remodeled in Victorian times. From its sturdy corner towers to its battlements, Kilkenny Castle retains the imposing lines of an authentic fortress and sets the tone for the city. The exquisitely restored interior includes a library,

drawing room, and bedrooms, all decorated in 1830s style. The former servants' quarters are now an art gallery. The 20-hectare (49-acre) grounds include a riverside walk, extensive gardens, and a well-equipped children's playground. Entry is prefaced by an informative video on the rise, demise, and restoration of the structure. This is a very busy site, so arrive early (or quite late) to avoid waiting.

The Parade. www.kilkennycastle.ie. \bigcirc 056/770-4100. Admission \notin 7 adults; \notin 5 seniors; \notin 3 students and children 6 and over; \notin 17 families. Apr–May, Sept 9:30am–5:30pm; June–Aug 9am–5:30pm; Oct–Feb 9:30am–4:30pm; Mar 9:30am–5pm. Guided tours only Nov–Jan. Last admission 30 min. before closing (45 min. Nov–Jan).



Kilkenny Castle and the River Nore.



Black Abbey 2 Kilkenny Castle 4 St. Canice's Cathedral 1 St. Francis Abbey Brewery 3 **Kilkenny Walking Tours **** TOURS Local historian Pat Tynan leads you through the streets and lanes of medieval Kilkenny on this lively walking tour, providing historical facts and anecdotes along the way. Tall-sounding (true) tales are really Pat's strong point; he's a mine of trivia, much of it rather sensational (his own website sells the tour with the memorable enticement of "black death, whippings, burnings, crime, jails, theft and prostitutes." How's *that* for a pitch?). Tours depart daily from the tourist office, Rose Inn Street.

C/o Kilkenny Tourist Office, Rose Inn St. www.kilkennywalkingtours.ie. **© 087/265-1745.** Tickets €7 adults; €6.50 seniors and students. Mid-Mar to Oct Mon–Sat 10:30am, 12:15, 3pm; Sun 11:15am, 12:30pm.

St. Canice's Cathedral ****** CATHEDRAL The church that gave Kilkenny its name stands at the northern end of the city. It was built in the 12th century, but was restored after the English invasion led by Oliver Cromwell in the mid-17th century. It is noteworthy for the rich interior timber and stone carvings, its colorful glasswork, and the structure itself. On the grounds, amid the tombstones in the churchyard, looms a massive round tower, believed to be a relic of the ancient church (although its original conical top has been replaced by a slightly domed roof). If you want to climb to the top of the tower, it will cost you a couple of euro and burn more calories than you can count. The steps up to the cathedral were constructed in 1614, and the carvings on the wall at the top of the stairs date from medieval times.

The Close, Coach Rd. www.stcanicescathedral.com. \bigcirc 056/776-4971. Cathedral: \notin 4 adults; \notin 3 seniors, students and children; \notin 12 families. Round Tower: \notin 3 adults; \notin 2.50 seniors, students and children; \notin 12 families. Combined ticket: \notin 6 adults; \notin 5.50 seniors, students and children; \notin 15 families. Apr, May and Sept Mon–Sat 10am–1pm and 2–5pm, Sun 9:30am–4:30pm. Jun–Aug Mon–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun 1–6pm. Oct–Mar Mon–Sat 10am–1pm and 2–4pm, Sun 2–4pm. Round Tower: Mon–Sat noon–4pm; Sun 3–4pm. No children under 12 allowed to climb the round tower.

St. Francis Abbey Brewery \star FACTORY TOUR Established in 1710 by John Smithwick, the brewery occupies a site that once belonged to the 12th-century Abbey of St. Francis. A popular local beer called Smithwick's is produced here, as are Budweiser and Land Kilkenny Irish beer. In 2014, the old Victorian brewery building was repurposed as the **Smithwick's Experience**, a shiny new visitor center which acts as the starting-off point for an informative tour of the grounds. The tour is as much about the history of brewing as an appreciation of the famous product itself. A highlight—if you can call it that—is a stop by the ruined 12th-century abbey, still located on the brewery grounds. They would qualify as picturesque if they weren't sandwiched between some industrial warehouses and a large parking lot.

Parliament St. www.smithwicks.ie. \bigcirc 056/779-6498. Admission \in 12 adults, \in 9.50 seniors and students 18 and over, \in 7 students 17 and under, \in 4 children., No high heels or open-toe sandals. Daily 10am–6pm (last tour 5pm).

Farther Afield in County Kilkenny

Duiske Abbey \star CHURCH A fine example of an early Cistercian abbey, Duiske Abbey was founded in 1204. Despite being officially suppressed in 1536, its monks continued to occupy the site for many years. In 1774, the tower of the abbey church collapsed. In 1813, the roof was replaced and religious services returned to the church, but the abbey didn't approach its former glory until the 1970s, when a group of locals mounted a reconstruction effort. Now, with its fine lancet windows and a large effigy of a Norman knight, the abbey is the pride of Graiguenamanagh. The adjacent visitor center has an exhibit of Christian art and artifacts.

Upper Main St., Graiguenamanagh. © 059/972-4238. Free admission; donations welcome. Daily 10am–5pm.

Dunmore Cave ★ UNDERGROUND CAVERNS This gloomy series of chambers, formed over millions of years, contains some fine calcite formations. The caves have been known to humans for at

least a millennium; they are first recorded in written records from the 9th and 10th centuries. These records, known as the *Triads of Ireland*, indicate that a bloody Viking massacre took place here in the year A.D. 928. No conclusive proof has ever been found, but evidence unearthed by archaeologists in more recent years at least confirms that Vikings used the caves. Exhibits at the visitor center tell the story. Access to the cave is by guided tour only. Dunmore is about 11km (7 miles) from Kilkenny City. Off Castlecomer Rd. (N78), Ballyfoyle. © 056/776-7726. Admission \notin 4 adults; \notin 3 seniors; \notin 2 students and children; \notin 10 families. Mid-Mar to mid-June, mid-Sept to Oct daily 9:30am–5pm (last tour 4pm); mid-June to mid-Sept daily 9:30am–6:30pm (last tour 5pm); Nov to mid-Mar Wed–Sun and holidays 9:30am–5pm (last tour 3pm). Tours may end early in winter depending on sunset.

Jerpoint Abbey ** CHURCH About 18km (11 miles) southeast of Kilkenny, this outstanding Cistercian monastery dates from the 12th century. Preserved in a peaceful country setting, the abbey's highlights include a sculptured cloister arcade, unique stone carvings on medieval tombs, and Romanesque architecture in the north nave. The staff is quite friendly and knowledgeable about the local area. Ask for details of where to find the mysterious ruins of the **Church of the Long Man**, about 16km (10 miles) away. If you're lucky, they'll be able to direct you—it's nigh on impossible to find otherwise, and a local secret you may find yourself sworn to keep. *Tip:* If you're here in spring or autumn, plan your visit toward the end of the day. Wandering around these ancient places as the setting sun blushes the walls in peach and gold is an unforgettable experience.

On N8, 2.5km (1¹/₂ miles) southwest of Thomastown. www.heritageireland.ie. \bigcirc 056/772-4623. Admission \notin 4 adults; \notin 3 seniors; \notin 2 students and children; \notin 10 families. Early Mar–Sept 9am–5:30pm; Oct daily 9am–5pm; Nov–early Dec daily 9:30–4pm. Closed early Dec–early Mar (except to pre-booked tours).

Jerpoint Glass Studio \star CRAFT STUDIO Here you can witness the creation of Jerpoint glass, which you've probably been admiring in shops all across Ireland. The lines of the glasses, goblets, and pitchers are simple and fluid, highlighted with swirls of color. Watch the glass being blown and then blow your budget next door at the shop.

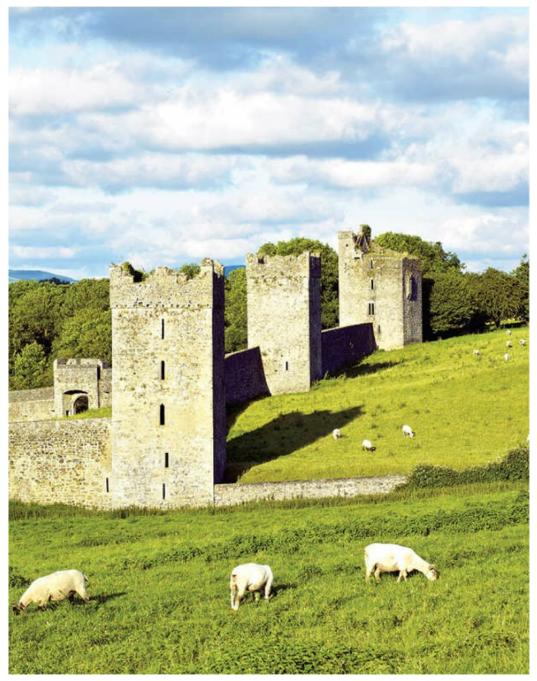
Stoneyford. www.jerpointglass.com. © 056/772-4350. Shop and gallery: Mar–Oct Mon–Sat 10am–6pm; Sun and public holidays noon– 5pm. Nov–Feb Mon–Sat 10am–5:30pm; Sun and public holidays noon–5pm. Glassblowing demonstrations: Mon–Thurs 10am–4pm; Fri 10am–1pm. No demonstrations on public holidays.

Kells Priory ****** RELIGIOUS RUINS With its encompassing fortification walls and towers, Kells is a glorious ruined monastery enfolded into the sloping south bank of the King's River. In 1193, Baron Geoffrey FitzRobert founded the priory and established a Norman-style town beside it. The current ruins date from the 13th to 15th centuries. The priory's wall has been carefully restored, and it connects seven towers, the remains of an abbey, and foundations of chapels and houses. You can tell by the thick walls that this monastery was well fortified, and those walls were built for a reason—it was frequently attacked. In the 13th century, it was the subject of two major battles and burned to the ground. The famous **Book of Kells** (see p. 96) is named after this abbey. Historians do not know where the book was produced, but it was stored here for many centuries, surviving attack and privation before it was finally moved to Dublin for safe keeping in the 1650s. The priory is less than a half-mile from the village of Kells, so if you have some time to spare, cross the footbridge behind it, which takes you on a beautiful stroll across the river and intersects a riverside walk leading to a picturesque old mill.

Kells. © 056/775-1500. Free admission. Take N76 south from Kilkenny, follow signs for R699/Callan and stay on R699 until you see signs for Kells.



Jerpoint Abbey.



The thick fortifications of Kells Priory have survived since the 13th century.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

FISHING The River Nore, southeast of Kilkenny, is known for salmon and trout. For advice, permits, and supplies, visit the Town and County Sports Shop, 82 High St., Kilkenny (© 056/772-1517).

GOLF Mount Juliet Golf and Country Club, Thomastown (www.mountjuliet.ie; \bigcirc 056/777-3071), is an excellent course 16km (10 miles) south of Kilkenny City. The 18-hole, par-72 championship course, designed by Jack Nicklaus, charges greens fees of around €60 to €120, but they change almost hourly at certain times of the week—calling to book a time is always best. Alternatively, try the 18-hole championship course at the Kilkenny Golf Club, Glendine, County Kilkenny (www.kilkennygolfclub.com; \bigcirc 056/776-5400), an inland par-71 layout, just 1.6km (1 mile) from the city. Greens fees are around €30 to €50.

Where to Stay in County Kilkenny

Lawcus Farm Guesthouse ******* Make no mistake: You're staying on a real farm at this wonderful

guesthouse ("helping us on the farm at feeding time is greatly appreciated" says the website). The early-19th-century farmhouse has been beautifully renovated. Guestrooms are cozy and decent-sized, with plenty of natural light. Some have original fireplaces; one has exposed gray-stone walls and an antique-style brass bed. Hosts Mark and Anne-Marie take real pride in welcoming guests—and how could they not, in such a pastoral setting? You're right next to a river, where you can go wild water swimming, or even try your hand at fishing for trout. Home-cooked breakfasts are delicious, but you have to fend for yourself at dinner. Luckily, Mark and Anne-Marie can recommend a string of nearby places. The only snag in this rural idyll? Lawcus Farm doesn't accept credit cards or checks, so make sure you're able to pay in cash.

Stoneyford. www.lawcusfarmguesthouse.com. **Ø 086/603-1667.** 5 units. €100 double. Parking (free). Rates include breakfast. Discounts for stays of 2 or more nights. Children under 5 free (1 per party). Amenities: Wi-Fi (free). From the R713, after passing Stoneyford sign, take turning to the right of the small bridge and follow signs to B&B.

Pembroke Hotel $\star\star$ Just a few streets away from Kilkenny Castle (from the upper floors, you can see the castle's turrets poking up over rooftops), this is a comfortable, cosmopolitan hotel in the center of Kilkenny City. Bedrooms are modern and comfortable, with plenty of room, although not a great deal of character. The in-house **Statham's Restaurant** serves good, modern Irish cuisine, and certain nights in the summer feature barbecue. The sophisticated bar is a lively spot for a cocktail or glass of wine. Guests get free use of a local gym and pool, a 10-minute walk away.

Patrick St. www.kilkennypembrokehotel.com. \bigcirc 056/778-3500. 74 units. \in 120– \in 172 double. Parking (free). Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; gym and pool (10-min. walk); Wi-Fi (free).

Rosquil House ** Comfortable and friendly, this modest little B&B is a great value for money. Your hosts, Rhoda and Phil, greet guests with genuine warmth and enthusiasm, making you feel immediately at home. The house was purposely built as a B&B, so the bedrooms are spacious and well proportioned. One room is fully accessible for those with mobility problems. Public areas, including a large guest lounge, are tastefully decorated in color schemes of chocolate and cream, with polished wood floors. The breakfasts cooked by Phil are delicious. The only downside is that you're a little far from the action, but central Kilkenny is only about a 15-minute walk away.

Castlecomer Rd. www.rosquilhouse.com. \bigcirc 056/772-1419. 7 units. \bigcirc 70– \bigcirc 90 double. Parking at nearby lots (no discount) \bigcirc 3.50– \bigcirc 5 overnight; \bigcirc 5– \bigcirc 16 24 hr. Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Where to Dine in County Kilkenny

Campagne $\star\star\star$ BISTRO The chef at this outstanding French-Irish restaurant, about a 10-minute walk from Kilkenny Castle, used to run the kitchen at Dublin's superlative **Chapter One** $\star\star\star$ (see p. 153). The dining room is sleek and atmospherically lit, with colorful modern art on the walls. The menu is short but subtly inventive: duck with salt baked beetroot and blackberry jus, or perhaps turbot served with a seaweed butter sauce. For dessert, try the chocolate fondant with peanut butter ice cream. The only downside is that this place is quite pricey, but plenty of locals will tell you it's their go-to for a special dinner. The extensive wine list is well chosen, with particularly strong French options.

5 The Arches, Gashouse Lane. www.campagne.ie. **© 056/777-2858.** Main courses €29–€31. Tues–Thurs 6–10pm; Fri–Sat 12:30–2:30pm, 6–10pm; Sun 12:30–2:30pm. Closed Sun for dinner except on public holiday weekends. Closed Tues nights following Monday public holidays.

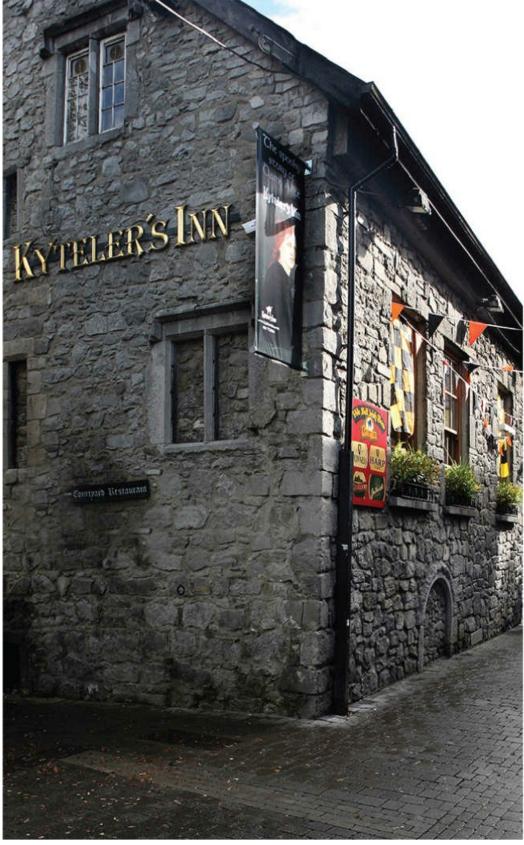
Gourmet Store \star DELI/CAFE Very good for a quick lunch on the go, this little cafe in the center of Kilkenny is popular with local workers who come for tasty sandwiches and bagels. There's also a great stock of deli goods, so you can put together your own picnic hamper, or the folks behind the

counter can even do it for you—perfect for when you need to snatch a quick bite on the road. A lot of the off-the-shelf products are local and small-brand, including jams, chutneys, and other upscale nibbles, so stock up on gifts and edible souvenirs to take home.

56 High St. www.thegourmetstorekilkenny.com. **Ø 056**/777-1727. All items €4–€10. Mon–Sat 8am–6pm.

Kyteler's Inn \star PUB In business for over six centuries, this atmospheric old inn serves decent pub food—sandwiches, Irish stew, burgers, fish and chips—but it's the vibe you really come for. With all the exposed flagstones and cozy nooks, it's hard to think of a more satisfyingly Irish-looking pub. The place is named after former resident Alice Kyteler, who died in 1324. She poisoned at least three of her husbands, ran the Inn as a den of debauchery, and was sentenced to be burned as a witch. She escaped, but nobody saw or heard from her again. Unless, that is, you believe some of the more colorful tales about this place after dark . . .

Kieran St. www.kytelersinn.com. **Ø 056/772-1064.** Main courses €7.50–€24. Daily noon–around midnight (food served until about 10pm).

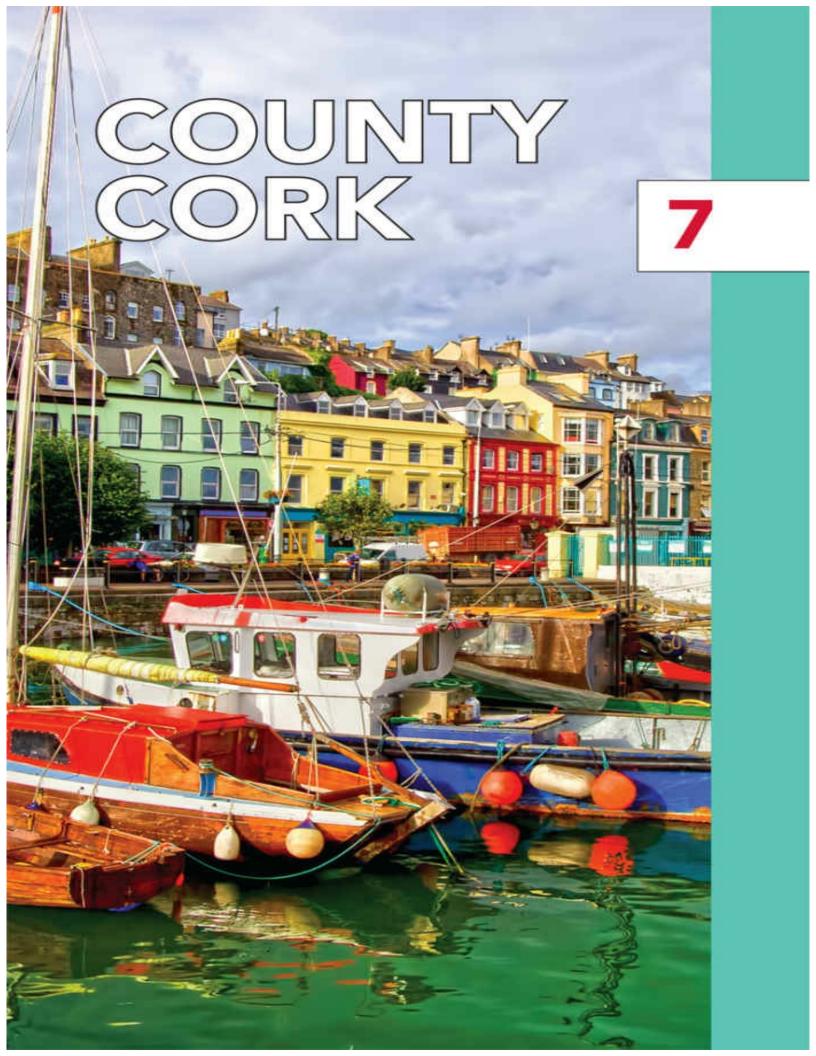


Historic Kyteler's Inn in Kilkenny City.

Rinuccini *** ITALIAN This extremely popular restaurant, opposite Kilkenny Castle (see p. 234), packs in diners for its delicious Italian food with an Irish accent. The basement-level dining room gets very busy, but the food more than makes up for it. Fresh spaghettini may be served with Kilmore Quay prawns, basil, and chili; or perhaps a simple fettuccine is in order, topped with the house Bolognese sauce and fresh cream. Desserts are equally good—try the homemade chocolate mousse or the tasty cheese plate, filled with specialty selections imported from Italy and sprinkled with black truffle. It's a bit of a splurge, but worth it. Due to Rinuccini's popularity with locals, you should book

reservations if you're coming on a weekend.

1 The Parade. www.rinuccini.com. **Ø** 056/776-1575. Main courses €17–€29. Mon–Fri noon–3pm, 5–10pm; Sat noon–3:30pm, 5–10pm; Sun noon–3:30pm, 5–9:30pm.



Cobh town harbor in Cork County.

T he largest of Ireland's counties, Cork is also one of its most diverse. It encompasses a lively (if sometimes gritty) capital city, quiet country villages, rocky hills, picturesque beaches, and long stretches of flat, green farmland. Here, modern tourism (this is where you find Blarney Castle, after all) meets workaday Irish life, and somehow they manage to coexist gracefully. St. Fin Barre founded Cork in the 6th century, when he built a monastery on a swampy estuary of the River Lee, giving the place the rather generic Gaelic name of *Corcaigh*—which, unromantically, means "marsh." Range beyond Cork City to visit the pretty harbor town of Kinsale (increasingly a gourmet destination), the storied seaport of Cobh in East Cork, or the barren beauty of Cape Clear Island in craggy West Cork.

ESSENTIALS

Arriving

BYBUS From Dublin Airport, AirCoach (www.aircoach.ie; \bigcirc 01/844-7118) runs a regular, non-stop service to the center of Cork City. One-way tickets are $\in 17$ adults, $\in 10$ children; round-trip tickets are $\in 27$ adults, $\in 20$ children. The journey time is $3\frac{3}{4}$ hours. In Cork City, **Bus Éireann** (www.buseireann.ie; \bigcirc 021/450-8188) runs from the Parnell Place Bus Station to all parts of the Republic. Bus 249 connects Cork with Kinsale. Buses also arrive on Pier Road.

BY TRAIN Iarnród Éireann/Irish Rail (www.irishrail.ie; © 185/036-6222) travels to Cork City from Dublin and other parts of Ireland. Trains arrive at Kent Station, Lower Glanmire Road, in eastern Cork City (© 021/455-7277). Kinsale does not have a train station.

BY FERRY Ferry routes into Cork from Britain include service from Swansea on Fastnet Line (www.fastnetline.com; © 021/487-8892); and from Roscoff, France, on Brittany Ferries (www.brittany-ferries.com; © 021/427-7801). Boats dock at Cork's Ringaskiddy Ferryport.

BY CAR Cork is reachable on the N8 from Dublin, N25 from Waterford, and N22 from Killarney. To hire a car in Cork try Enterprise Rent-A-Car, Kinsale Road (© 021/497-5133) or Hertz at Cork Airport (021/496-5849).

BY PLANE Cork Airport, Kinsale Road (www.cork-airport.com; © 021/413131), is served by Aer Lingus and Ryanair.

Visitor Information

The Cork Discover Ireland Centre is at the appropriately named Tourist House at 42 Grand Parade, Cork (www.corkcity.ie; © 021/425-5100). The Kinsale Tourist Office is on Pier Rd., Kinsale (www.kinsale.ie; © 021/477-2234). The Cobh Tourist Office is in the Sirius Arts Centre, the Old Yacht Club Building, Lower Road., Cobh (© 024/481-3301). Seasonal tourist offices operate at the Jameson Centre, Midleton (© 021/461-3702), and Market Square, Youghal (© 024/20170).

[FastFACTS] COUNTY CORK

ATMs/Banks In Cork City try Ulster Bank (88 Patrick St.; @ 021/427-0618). In Kinsale stop by the Bank of Ireland, Emmett

Place (@ 021/477-2521).

Dentists For dental emergencies, your hotel will usually contact a dentist for you; otherwise, in Cork contact Smiles Town Dental, 112 Oliver Plunkett St., Cork (© 021/427-4706); in Kinsale, Catherine McCarthy, Market Sq. (© 021/477-4133).

Doctors For medical emergencies dial **Ø** 999. For non-emergencies, your hotel should call you a doctor. Otherwise, a good option in Cork is the **Patrick Street Medical Centre**, 9 Patrick St., Cork (**Ø** 021/427-8699); and in Kinsale, **The Medical Centre**, Emmet Place (**Ø** 021/477-2253).

Emergencies For police, fire, or other emergencies, dial @ 999.

Internet Access Cork City Library at 57 Grand Parade (© 021/492-4900) has internet terminals that non-members can use for €1 per half hour.

Pharmacies In Cork, there's Murphy's Pharmacy, 48 North Main St. (© 021/427-4121) or Marian Pharmacy on Friar's Walk (© 021/496-3821). In Kinsale try John Collins, Market Place (© 021/477-2077).

Post Office In Cork, the main post office is on Oliver Plunkett St. (© 021/485-1032). In Kinsale it's at 10 Pearse St. (© 021/477-2246).

Taxis The main taxi ranks in Cork are along St. Patrick's Street, along the South Mall, and outside major hotels. You can also contact ABC Cabs (© 021/496-1961), or Cork Taxi Co-Op (© 021/427-2222). In Kinsale, try Kinsale Cabs (© 021/477-2642), or Cab 3000 (© 021/477-3000). In Cobh, a good bet is Island Taxis (© 021/481-1111).

CORK CITY

Cork City might as well be called Dublin South. It's far smaller than the capital, with 125,000 residents, but it's a busy, attractive, cultured place. Cork City is also home to a major university, which keeps the population young, the creative class dynamic, the pubs interesting, and the number of affordable restaurants plentiful. Yes, Cork has severe traffic congestion and can feel gritty and crowded, but for its fans, these flaws merely underscore the sense that it's a real, working city. For visitors, the offerings within the county's eponymous first city are wonderfully varied. You can fight the crowds at **Blarney Castle**, explore an extraordinary collection of works by Irish artists at the **Crawford Art Gallery**, and climb to the top of the 300-year-old tower at **St. Anne's Church** to take in the sweeping views and ring the **Shandon Bells**. Because of the limited parking, Cork is best seen on foot; there's also a good local bus service. A signposted Tourist Trail can guide you to the major sights.

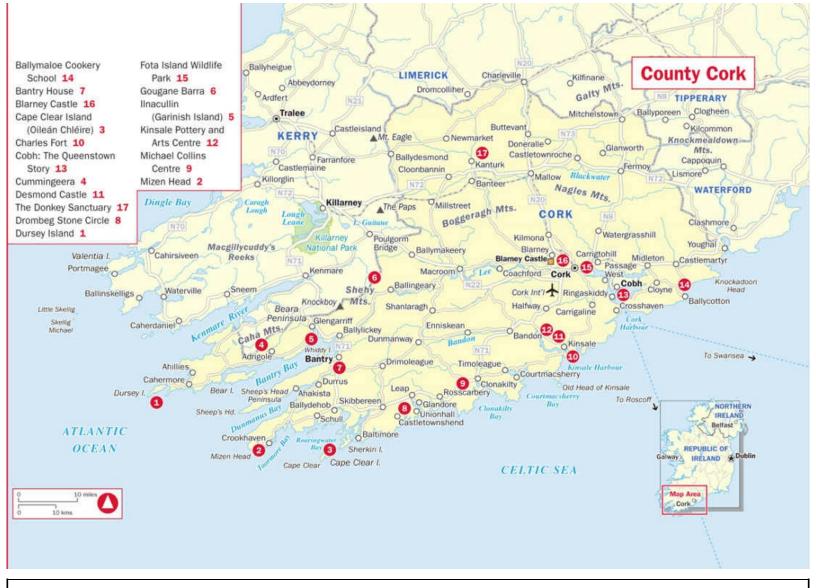
City Layout

Cork's center is on an island between two branches of the River Lee. The city is divided into three sections:

FLAT OF THE CITY The city's downtown core is bounded by channels of the River Lee, and its main thoroughfare is **St. Patrick Street**, a graceful avenue lined with shops. A favorite meeting place here is by the statue of 19th-century priest Father Theobald Matthew, a crusader against drink who is fondly called the "Apostle of Temperance." The statue stands at the point where St. Patrick Street reaches St. Patrick's Bridge.



St. Patrick's Quay on the north channel of River Lee in Cork City.



THE GIFT OF gab (OR IS IT JUST BLARNEY?)

Can being held upside down and backward from the top of a tall castle to kiss a rock really bring you the ability to talk up a storm? Well, Blarney Castle's association with the gift of gab does go back a long way. The popular version has it that Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603) invented the notion in a fit of exasperation at then–Lord Blarney's tendency to prattle on at great length without actually ever agreeing to anything she wanted. The custom of actually kissing the stone, though, is less than a century old. Nobody knows quite when, how, or why it started, but around here they've got a thousand possible tales, some involving witches and others the crusaders. But don't believe them—it's all a bunch of . . .

Nearby, the **South Mall** is a wide, tree-lined street with attractive Georgian architecture and a row of banks, insurance companies, and legal offices, while the **Grand Parade** is a spacious thoroughfare that blends 18th-century bow-fronted houses with the remains of the old city walls. It has lots of offices and shops as well as the **Bishop Lucey Park**.

NORTH BANK St. Patrick's Bridge leads over the river to the north side of the city, a hilly, terraced area where St. Patrick Street becomes **St. Patrick's Hill.** And is it ever a hill, with an incline so steep that it's virtually San Franciscan. If you climb the stepped sidewalks of St. Patrick's Hill, you will be rewarded with a sweeping view of the Cork skyline.

East of St. Patrick's Hill, **MacCurtain Street** is a commercial thoroughfare that runs east, leading to Summerhill Road and up into the Cork hills to the residential districts of St. Luke's and Montenotte. West of St. Patrick's Hill is one of the city's oldest neighborhoods, **St. Ann's Shandon Church,** and

the city's original Butter Market building.

SOUTH BANK The South Bank of the River Lee encompasses the grounds of **St. Fin Barre's Cathedral**, the site of St. Fin Barre's 6th-century monastery, and also includes 17th-century city walls, the remains of Elizabeth Fort, and the City Hall (built in 1936).

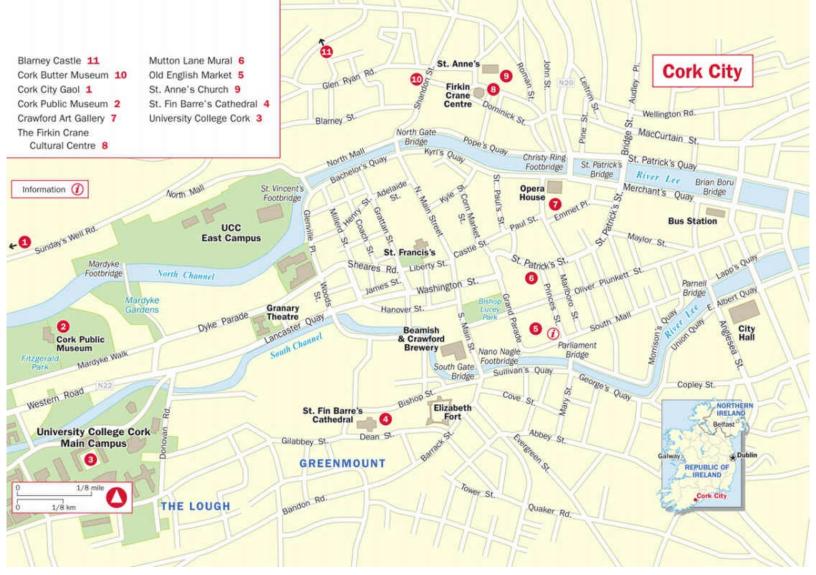
Exploring Cork City

Blarney Castle \star CASTLE Though a runaway favorite for the hotly-contested title of "cheesiest tourist attraction in Ireland," Blarney Castle is an imposing edifice. Constructed in the late 15th century, it was once much bigger, although a massive square tower is all that remains today. The famous "Blarney Stone" is wedged underneath the battlements, far enough to make it uncomfortable to reach, but not so far that countless tourists don't bend over backward, hang upside down in a parapet, and kiss it in hopes of achieving lifelong loquaciousness. It's customary to tip the attendant who holds your legs (you might want to do it *before* he hangs you over the edge). If you need a break from the masses, the gardens are pretty and much less crowded. Also check out the dungeons penetrating the rock at the base of the castle. Blarney Castle is 8km (5 miles) outside the city. You can easily get here by bus, and the number 215 stops about twice an hour (once per hour on Sundays). Ask the driver to let you off at the stop nearest the castle.

Blarney, Co. Cork. www.blarneycastle.ie. \bigcirc 021/438-5252. Admission \in 13 adults; \in 11 seniors and students; \in 5 children 8–16; \in 32 families. May, Sept Mon–Sat 9am–6:30pm; Sun 9am–5:30pm. June–Aug Mon–Sat 9am–7pm; Sun 9am–5:30pm. Oct–Apr Mon–Sat 9am–5:30pm (or dusk if earlier); Sun 9am–dusk. 8km (5 miles) from Cork City on R617.



Blarney Castle.



Cork Butter Museum \star MUSEUM With a name like that, you'd expect to see it on a list of "the world's oddest museums," but the quirky little Cork Butter Museum is more than just a celebration of tasty Irish dairy produce. From 1770 until the 1920s, Cork was the largest exporter of butter in the world, peaking at half a million casks annually by the turn of the 20th century. The museum chronicles that industrial past, using butter as a springboard to explore wider stories about Irish farming, society, and industry, from the middle ages onward. It's an oddity, for sure, but surprisingly enlightening.

John Redmond St. www.corkbutter.museum. \bigcirc 021/430-0600. Admission \notin 4 adults; \notin 3 seniors and students; \notin 1.50 children 17 and under; free for children 11 and under. Mar–June, Sept–Oct daily 10am–5pm; July–Aug daily 10am–6pm; Nov–Feb Sat–Sun 10am–3:30pm.

Cork City Gaol \star HERITAGE SITE Like something out of a Victorian novel, this early-19thcentury jail is an austere and highly atmospheric building. It opened in 1824 as a women's prison. Famous inmates included the extraordinary Constance Markievicz (1868–1927), the first woman elected to the British parliament. She was sentenced to execution after the 1916 Easter Rising, in which she took part, though her sentence was eventually commuted. After the Irish War of Independence, she became the first female cabinet minister anywhere in the world. Earlier in its history, the jail was the last place in Ireland many convicts were held before being shipped off to Australia. This colorful history is well presented, with the (perhaps inevitable) aid of costumed mannequins in key positions. Somewhat incongruously, in 1927, after the building ceased to be used as a prison, it became the site of Ireland's first radio station. A small museum tells this story, complete with a restored studio from the period. Special evening tours (€10 per person) take place a couple of times per month, though space is limited and you have to book at least a week in advance check the website for upcoming dates.

Convent Avenue, Sunday's Well. www.corkcitygaol.com. \bigcirc 021/430-5022. Admission €8 adults; €7 seniors and students; €5 children; €25 families. Radio Museum €2. Mar–Oct daily 9:30am–5pm; Nov–Feb daily 10am–4pm.

Cork City Tours TOURS Riding around on open-top buses, you can hop on and off to explore the sights of Ireland's second city. They run all day in a loop from March through October (as frequently as every half-hour in July and Aug). When you see something you want to explore, just get off and rejoin the tour later; or you can ride the entire loop, a good way to get oriented to the city. Tour highlights include the Cork City Gaol, St. Ann's Church, and U.C.C. (University College, Cork). You can buy your ticket on the bus if you get on at any of these stops, or buy a ticket and board the bus at the tourist office. The tourist office provides a leaflet listing the pick-up points, or check them out online at www.corkcitytour.com/timetables.

Various stops around Cork City. www.corkcitytour.com. \bigcirc 021/430-9090. Tickets \notin 15 adults; \notin 13 seniors and students; \notin 5.50 children 5–17; children 4 and under free; \notin 36 families (up to 4 children). Mar–Oct daily, with hours and number of tours reflecting seasonal demand (usually 9:30am–4:30pm).

MILKING IT: AN unlikely debut

A neat story about the birth of radio broadcasting in Ireland is told at the Radio Museum, in **Cork City Gaol** \star (see p. 251). Meticulous planning went into the launch of Station 2RN, in 1926, right down to a permanent armed guard to make sure nothing went wrong. However, the first Irish radio star turned out to be an unlikely participant. In order to test the signal, very early one morning, a technician pointed a microphone out of the window—just as a local horse and cart happened to be passing by. Thus, the first sound broadcast in Ireland was an unwitting milkman, quietly making his rounds.

Cork Public Museum \star MUSEUM This simple, rather endearing civic museum is a good place to get an overview of the city's history. Displays include a few objects from Cork's ancient past—including an Iron Age helmet and some of the oldest tools ever discovered in Ireland—but it's strongest when it comes to the traditional crafts made in the city during the 19th and 20th centuries, including silverware and intricate lace from the Victorian period. There are also very good collections relating to the lives of local revolutionaries, including Michael Collins (see p. 282). The museum is located on the west side of Cork, in the middle of Fitzgerald Park—parallel to the Western Road, where many of the city's B&Bs are located (see "Where to Stay" on p. 260). It's about a 10 minute walk from the city center.

Fitzgerald Park. www.corkcity.ie. **© 021/427-0679.** Free admission. Apr–Sept Mon–Fri 11am–1pm, 2:15–5pm; Sat 11am–1pm, 2:15–4pm; Sun 3–5pm. Oct–Mar Mon–Fri 11am–1pm, 2:15–5pm, Sat 11am–1pm, 2:15–4pm.

Crawford Art Gallery *** ART MUSEUM One of the best art galleries in Ireland, the Crawford has impressive collections of sculpture and painting. The Irish School is particularly well represented with works from John Butts (1728–65), including his fine 1755 panorama of Cork City, and Dublin-born Harry Clarke (1889–1931), one of the most celebrated illustrators of the early 20th century, who also produced some extraordinary, early Deco–influenced stained glass. There's a strong collection of works by female Irish artists from the mid-19th century onward; check out the extraordinary abstract work of Mainie Jellett (1897–1944) and the Cubist painter Norah McGuinness (1901–80). The gallery also has a program of temporary exhibitions. The **Crawford Gallery Café **** (see p. 261) is a good spot for a light lunch.

Emmet Place. www.crawfordartgallery.ie. © 021/480-5042. Free admission. Mon–Wed, Fri–Sat 10am–5pm; Thurs 10am–8pm. 2nd floor closes 4:45pm daily. Closed public holidays.

The Firkin Crane Cultural Centre ** PERFORMANCE HALL Named after two Danish words for measurements of butter, the Firkin Crane is one of Ireland's major centers for contemporary dance. It hosts touring companies in addition to showcasing new talent. Many performances are free. The only downside is that performances are infrequent—usually just a handful per month—and the most headline-grabbing tend to be during the Guinness Jazz Festival (see box below).

John Redmond St., Shandon. www.firkincrane.ie. © 021/450-7487. Ticket prices and performance times vary by event.

Mutton Lane Mural ★ PUBLIC ART This riotously colorful mural along the walls of Mutton Lane, down one side of the Mutton Lane Inn, is intended to represent the essence of Cork. It depicts musicians performing the traditional "Pana Shuffle," and all of the characters featured are real local people. It is a vivid evocation of peace and community spirit, beloved locally—so much so, claim the owners of the pub, that it has never been vandalized by graffiti (impossible to prove, of course). The mural was painted by local artist Anthony Ruby in 2004. Its historical provenance can, in part, be dated by the following message, which is hidden within the colorful scene: "dedicated to everyone except George Bush."

Mutton Lane, off St. Patrick St.

Old English Market ** MARKET HALL The name of this bustling food market harks back to the days of English rule—it was first granted a charter in 1610 during the reign of King James I. The current market building dates from 1788, although it was redesigned after being gutted by fire in the 1980s. Inside is a cornucopia of fresh produce, including super-traditional Cork delicacies—some of them tempting, others less palatable to outsiders. (Tripe, anyone? How about pig's trotters?) Happily, more modern refreshments and takeaway snacks are readily available.

Grand Parade; enter from Patrick St., Grand Parade, Oliver Plunkett St., or Princes St. www.englishmarket.ie. 🖉 085/763-2259. Free admission; individual food stall prices vary. Mon–Sat 8am–6pm.

THE GUINNESS CORK jazz festival

Held every year since 1978, this is Ireland's biggest and most prestigious jazz festival. Big names such as Ella Fitzgerald, Oscar Peterson, and Stephane Grappelli have played here over the years, with more than 1,000 performers from all over the world taking part annually. It's held at various citywide venues in late October. Visit **www.guinnessjazzfestival.com** for details. Tickets go on sale in early September; prices vary and some events are free.

St. Anne's Church \star CHURCH Cork's most recognizable landmark, also known as Shandon Church, is famous for its giant pepper pot steeple and eight melodious bells. No matter where you stand in the downtown area, you can see the stone tower crowned with a gilt ball and a unique fish weather vane. The clock, added in 1847, made it the first four-faced clock tower in the world (beating London's Big Ben by just a few years). Until fairly recently, due to a quirk of clockworks, it was known as "the four-faced liar" because each side showed a different time—except on the hour when they all somehow managed to synchronize. Disappointingly, perhaps, that charming quirk has now been repaired. Climb the 1722 belfry for a chance to ring the famous Shandon Bells. If you continue on the somewhat precarious climb past the bells, you'll be rewarded with spectacular views over the surrounding countryside.

Church St., Shandon. www.shandonbells.ie. **© 021/450-5906.** Free admission. Clock tower €5 adults; €4 seniors and students; €2.50 children; €12 families. Mar–May, Oct Mon–Sat 10am–4pm; Sun 11:30am–4pm. June–Aug Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 11:30am–4:30pm. Nov–Feb Mon–Sat 11am–3pm; Sun 11:30am–3pm. Last entry to tower 20 min. before closing.

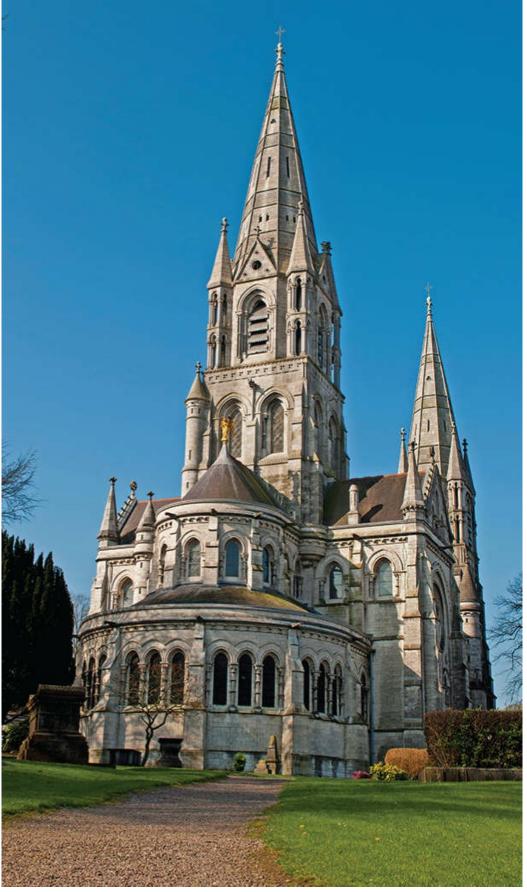


The red sandstone and limestone clock tower of St. Anne's distinguishes Cork's skyline.

St. Fin Barre's Cathedral \star CATHEDRAL With its three soaring spires dominating the Cork skyline, this Church of Ireland cathedral sits on the very spot St. Fin Barre chose in A.D. 600 for his church and school. A much smaller medieval tower was demolished to make way for the current building, which dates from the early 1860s—there's nothing left of the earlier original, although a few pieces of decorative stonework were salvaged and can be viewed inside. The architect, William Burges (1827–81), won a competition staged to create a new Anglican cathedral in the city; his design embraced the French Gothic style that was popular at the time. The interior is highly ornamented with some stunning mosaic work. The bells were inherited from a 1735 church that also previously stood on this site. The Cathedral hosts occasional exhibitions; check the website for

listings of what's on.

Bishop St. www.cathedral.cork.anglican.org. **© 021/496-3387.** Admission €5 adults; €4 seniors; €3 students and children. Apr–Nov Mon–Sat 9:30am–5:30pm, Sun 12:30–5pm. Dec–Mar Mon–Sat 9:30am–5:30pm. Closed certain bank holidays; call to check.



St. Fin Barre's Cathedral in Cork.

University College Cork ** UNIVERSITY Part of Ireland's national university, with about 7,000 students, this center of learning is housed in a pretty quadrangle of Gothic Revival–style buildings.

Colorful gardens and wooded grounds grace the campus. An audio tour of the grounds takes in the Crawford Observatory, the Harry Clarke stained-glass windows in Honan Chapel, a landscaped garden, and the Stone Corridor, a collection of stones inscribed with the ancient Irish *ogham* written language. Also on the campus, the innovative Lewis Glucksman Gallery (www.glucksman.org; ©

021/490-1844) has an excellent program of exhibitions. Expect to see cutting-edge photography, painting, sculpture, and a few items from the university's ever-expanding permanent collection. A good cafe and shop are also on site. Admission to the Glucksman is free, though a donation of \in 5 per person is requested.

Visitor Centre: North Wing, Main Quad, Western Rd. www.ucc.ie/en/visitors/centre. **© 021/490-1876.** Self-guided tours €10. Visitor Centre: Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, Sat noon–5pm. Glucksman Gallery: Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 2–5pm (closed Mon).

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

SPECTATOR SPORTS

GAELIC GAMES Hurling and Gaelic football are both played on summer Sunday afternoons at Cork's **Pairc Ui Chaoimh Stadium,** Marina Walk (© 021/496-3311). Check the local newspapers for details or log on to the Gaelic Athletics Association's site at www.gaa.ie.

GREYHOUND RACING Go to the dogs, as they say in Cork, only now in distinctly 21st-century style, at the **Cork Greyhound Stadium**, Curraheen Park, Cork (\bigcirc 061/448080), on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Gates open 6:30pm, first race usually starts around 7:40pm. Tickets are \in 10 adults, \in 5 seniors and students, \in 4 children age 13 to 17, \in 1 children age 12 and under, \in 20 families (up to three children). No Thursday races in winter.

HORSE RACING The nearest racetrack is **Cork Racecourse**, Killarney Road, Mallow (www.corkracecourse.ie; \bigcirc 022/50207), approximately 32km (20 miles) north of Cork. Races are scheduled year-round, but particularly in mid-May, July, August, early October, and November. Admission is around $\in 15$ adults, $\in 10$ seniors and students, and free for children 13 and under (must be with an adult).

OUTDOOR PURSUITS

CYCLING Although walking is probably the ideal way to get around Cork, you can rent a bike at **Cyclescene**, 396 Blarney St. (www.cyclescene.ie; © 021/430-1183) for $\in 15$ to $\notin 20$ per day or $\notin 80$ per week, plus a refundable deposit of $\notin 100$. Open Monday to Friday 9am to 5:30pm and Saturday 9am to 5pm.

FISHING The River Lee, which runs through Cork, the nearby Blackwater River, and many area lakes present fine opportunities. Salmon licenses, lake fishing permits, tackle, and equipment can be obtained from T. W. Murray, 87 St. Patrick St. (© 021/427-1089).

GOLF Local clubs that welcome visitors are the Cork Golf Club, Little Island (www.corkgolfclub.ie; \bigcirc 021/435-3451), 8km (5 miles) east of Cork, with greens fees of about €60 to €70, and a special seniors rate of €20; and Douglas Golf Club, Maryboro Hill, Douglas (www.douglasgolfclub.ie; \bigcirc 021/489-5297), 4.8km (3 miles) south of Cork, with greens fees of around €50 to €60.

WALKING The **Old Railway Line** is a dismantled train route running from Cork to the old maritime town of Passage West. It is from here in 1837 that Captain Roberts set out and crossed the Atlantic in the first passenger steamship, the SS *Sirius*. Following along the rails, a scenic walk affords the visitor excellent views of the inner harbor.

Shopping

St. Patrick Street is the main shopping thoroughfare, and many stores are scattered throughout the city on side streets and in lanes. In general, shops are open Monday to Saturday 9:30am to 6pm, unless indicated otherwise. In the summer, many shops remain open until 9:30pm on Thursday and Friday, and some are open on Sunday.

Winthrop Arcade, off Winthrop Street, is the best of a handful of covered shopping arcades in Cork City. The main full-size shopping mall is Merchant's Quay Shopping Centre, Merchant's Quay and St. Patrick Street (www.merchantsquaycork.com; © 021/427-5466). On the far eastern edge of the city, just inside the N40 motorway, the modern shopping mall Mahon Point (Mahon Link Rd.; www.mahonpointsc.ie; © 021/497-2800) has plenty of restaurants and a 13-screen cinema; it also hosts a farmers' market every Thursday from 10am to 3pm.

Cork's best department store is **Brown Thomas**, 18 St. Patrick St. (www.brownthomas.ie; © 021/480-5555). Its three floors are filled with the same kind of upscale items found in its famous sister shop in Dublin (see p. 161).

CORK: THE rebel CITY

Travel in County Cork today, and all that appears in front of you are rolling green hills and bucolic farmscapes. But this county was once at the heart of the battle for Ireland's soul.

For centuries, the county had a reputation for defiance and revolt. Once the seat of power in South Munster, it changed hands many times as the English and Irish battled for control. Devastated by the Great Famine, Cork became a center of the 19th-century Fenian movement, when the label "Rebel Cork" was first widely used.

It certainly lived up to the name during Ireland's 20th-century battle for independence. It was a battle of wills, and Cork refused to give in.

The British troops occupying Cork—a paramilitary force nicknamed the "Black and Tans" for the color of their uniforms—were among the most repressive in country. The struggle came to a head in 1920 when Thomas MacCurtain, mayor of Cork City, was killed by the Black and Tans. His successor, Terence MacSwiney, was arrested, and later died in a London prison after a hunger strike lasting 75 days.

On December 11th of that year, after an attack by the IRA, the British forces set fire to Cork city center, apparently as payback. The library, the City Hall, and almost all the buildings on St. Patrick Street were burned to the ground. More than 300 buildings were destroyed in the ensuing conflagration—virtually the entire city was smoldering rubble. As the fires blazed, two men suspected to be members of the IRA were shot as they slept, also allegedly by the occupying military troops.

The atrocity left a bitter legacy, ensuring that the battle would wage on in Cork, even as peace talks took hold elsewhere in Ireland. It ensured that Cork would resist any peace agreements to the end, even a treaty negotiated by Cork native son Michael Collins (see p. 282). And it ensured that Cork natives would embrace their identity as Rebel Cork forevermore.

BOOKS

Vibes and Scribes \star This cheery secondhand bookstore stocks titles in a huge array of genres, as well as gifts and crafty knick-knacks. A second branch, selling stationery and art and craft supplies, is at 3 Bridge Street (© 021/450-5370). 21 Lavitt's Quay. www.vibesandscribes.ie. © 021/427-9535.

CRAFTS, DESIGN & HOUSEWARES

Meadows & Byrne $\star\star$ The Cork branch of this very popular Irish lifestyle chain sells housewares, furniture, and various other decor items, from crystal and kitchenware to bed and bath products. There's another branch at the Mahon Point shopping mall (© 021/435-9169). 22 Academy St. www.meadowsandbyrne.com. © 021/427-2324.

Shandon Craft Centre \star In the same building as the Cork Butter Museum \star (see p. 250), this center provides a space for various local craftspeople to sell their wares. Part of the attraction is never knowing quite what you're going to find. Occasionally in summer you'll come across free concerts here. At the Cork Butter Museum, John Redmond St. © 021/450-3936.

FASHION & CLOTHING

Blarney Woollen Mills \star On the grounds of **Blarney Castle** \star (see p. 248), this is the flagship outlet of an Irish chain that specializes in traditional Irish gear—Aran sweaters, cashmere and other knitwear, tweeds, country clothing, capes, and accessories. They also stock a large range of Irish crafts, such as Waterford crystal and Celtic-style jewelry. It's open until 6pm daily. On the grounds of Blarney Castle, Blarney. www.blarney.ie. © 021/451-6111.

Brocade and Lime *** This wonderful vintage-style clothing store sells retro fashions from the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. It's all the work of a talented coterie of Irish designers, including Orla Kiely, who specializes in swinging '60s prints; Alicia Estrada, whose brilliantly named Stop Staring label specializes in clothes inspired 1940s film noir; and What Katie Did, a super-cool brand of 1950s-influenced lingerie, favored by celebrities including Kate Moss, Lana Del Ray, and Christina Hendricks. 4 Cornmarket St. www.brocadeandlime.ie. © 021/427-8882.

Monreal ** Designer handbags, belts, and other designer accessories are on sale at this boutique in the Winthrop Arcade. They also have a gorgeous stock of shoes, including some rather cool lace-up Wellington boots—a handy way of staying stylish, whatever the Irish weather throws at you. Winthrop Arcade, off Winthrop St. www.monreal.ie. © 021/480-6746.

Cork City After Dark

PUBS

An Spailpin Fánac $\star\star$ One of Cork's oldest pubs (it opened in 1779), this is a wonderful spot to hang out with a pint and while away an hour or two. It's also one of the best pubs in the city for live music (see box on facing page). 28–29 S. Main St. © 021/427-7949.

The Idle Hour \star This is the sort of place you go if you want some good, lively craic, loud music, and a young crowd. It's an extremely popular pub, especially during sports matches, which are shown here on huge TVs. Albert Quay. © 021/496-5704.

a tuneful pint: CORK'S MOST MUSICAL PUBS

Cork has a deserved reputation as home to some of Ireland's best pubs for live, traditional music. It's virtually a rite of passage to catch a session while enjoying a pint or two (and it's stout in these parts, by the way—Murphy's or Beamish, not Guinness—if you really want to fit in). You can just follow your ears to find the best places, but here are a few of the most respected to get you started. **An Bodhran** (the name refers to a type of drum made from goatskin) at 42 Oliver Plunkett St. (**O 021/427-4544**) has live sessions nightly, as does the cozy **An Spailpín Fánach** (which means "The Wandering Migrant Worker") at 27 South Main St. (**O 021/427-7949**). Sin é (literally, "That's It"), 8 Coburg St. (**O 021/450-2266**) has been one of Cork's top live music pubs for decades. They have sessions most nights, but those on Tuesdays, Fridays, and Sundays tend to be particularly good. There's trad every Thursday night at the atmospheric **Long Valley** (**O 021/427-2144**)—but if you've had your fill of the pennywhistle by this point, come on Monday nights to catch their lively program of spoken word events; see www.obheal.ie for more details.

John Henchy & Sons $\star\star$ Full of appealing Victorian features, this fantastic pub looks as if it has hardly changed since it first opened in 1884. It's got a private area ("snug") that was originally built

to allow ladies to visit the pub without fear of impropriety. 40 St. Luke's. @ 021/450-7833.

The Long Valley $\star\star$ A cheerful, gregarious air pervades at this long-standing favorite of the Cork pub scene. The crowd is a good mix of stalwart locals and hip young things. They also have a good program of live music and spoken word. 10 Winthrop St. © 021/427-2144.

CLUBS: COMEDY, DANCE & MUSIC

Bowery ** This is one of the coolest nightspots in Cork. Downstairs are two sophisticated bars, the Bowery and the Berwick Room, which cultivate a decadent vibe with just a hint of the bordello. Go upstairs, however, and you have DJs spinning the latest cuts and eclectic sets in the Stage Room, as well as the Rooftop Bar, overlooking the nearby park. It's open Friday and Sunday from 10:30pm until 2am, and Sunday from 9pm until 1am. 21 Tuckey St. www.bowery.ie. **© 021/425-1438.** Cover €10 and up.

Havana Browns \star This busy nightclub attracts the kind of young party crowd who are drawn to a bit of glamour like moths to a flame. After negotiating your way past the notoriously surly bouncers, relax in one of the three bars or work your moves on the dance floor, with its high tech LED illuminations. The club is open every night 11pm until 2am. Hanover St. www.havanabrowns.ie. © 021/465-8100. Cover €10 and up.

THE PERFORMING ARTS

Cork Opera House \star Near the river on Emmet Place, the Cork Opera House is the region's preeminent venue when it comes to opera and other live concerts (classical, trad, folk, rock, country, and more), plus dance, standup, and more. Emmet Place. www.corkoperahouse.ie. © 021/427-0022. Tickets €18–€50.

The Firkin Crane Cultural Centre $\star\star$ Although actual performances here are frustratingly infrequent, this is one of Ireland's premier locations for contemporary dance. For a full review, see p. 253. John Redmond St. www.firkincrane.ie. © 021/450-7487. Tickets $\in 10-\in 25$.

Where to Stay in Cork City

Cork City is filled with B&Bs and small hotels, particularly along Western Road. They vary in quality, but among them are some interesting, decently priced options.

Garnish House ** One of several B&Bs and hotels in this neighborhood, Garnish House is a sweet and friendly place to stay. You're hardly through the door before being offered an afternoon tea, complete with delicious homemade scones. Guestrooms are pleasant with well-sized beds, and some rooms even have Jacuzzi baths. Breakfasts are outstanding; in addition to the usual hearty "full Irish" options, you could have French toast, pancakes, lentil ragout, stuffed tomatoes, salmon and dill tarts, scrambled eggs with avocado—more choices than plenty of restaurants around here would offer at dinner. There are self-catering options available for those who want a little extra freedom, including a one-bedroom apartment and a full townhouse directly across the street.

1 St. Mary's Villas, Western Rd. www.garnish.ie. **Ø 021/427-5111.** 14 units. €71–€101 double. €92-€112 suite. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. **Amenities:** Wi-Fi (free).

Lancaster Lodge \star Another small hotel on Western Road, Lancaster Lodge is modern, well run, and a good value for your money. The purple color scheme in some of the public areas might be a bit garish for some, but guestrooms are big, with contemporary furnishings. Suites, which aren't a great deal more than the standard doubles, come with Jacuzzi baths. Breakfast is better than you might expect from a budget hotel, and although they don't serve dinner, central Cork is only a short walk away.

Lancaster Quay, Western Rd. www.lancasterlodge.com. Ø 021/425-1125. 48 units. €83-€133 double. €153 suite. Free parking.

Breakfast not included in lower rates. Amenities: Room service; Wi-Fi (free).

River Lee Hotel ** A 5-minute walk from the city center, this shiny, modern hotel overlooks the River Lee. Guestrooms won't win many design awards, but they're pleasant enough, with huge windows that make the best of city views. Executive rooms have fancy extras such as Nespresso coffee machines and access to a private lounge with panoramic views of the city. The **Vanilla Browns** spa is an excellent value—a half-hour massage costs €45 and all but a handful of treatments are under €100. They also have a (nearly) Olympic-size swimming pool. The breakfast buffet (€14) has more than just the usual options.

Western Rd. www.doylecollection.com/hotels/the-river-lee-hotel. \bigcirc 021/425-2700. 182 units. \bigcirc 126– \bigcirc 183 double. Free parking (underground lot). Breakfast not included in lower rates. Dinner, bed and breakfast packages available. Amenities: Restaurant; room service; spa; swimming pool; Wi-Fi (free).

Where to Dine in Cork City

Cork's reputation as a kind of cultural "Dublin south" is burnished by its restaurant scene, smattered with trendy eateries. (Nearby Kinsale, however, is where the county really goes to let its collective belt out—see p. 268.)

Cafe Paradiso *** VEGETARIAN An inventive, classy vegetarian restaurant, Cafe Paradiso does such magnificent things without meat that even passionate carnivores will find plenty to love. Start with honey-glazed eggplant with crispy fried shallots; or leek, pear and fennel soup; before moving on to pistachio and feta cheese couscous cake; or chili-glazed tofu with gingered adzuki beans. Desserts are heavenly; if it's on the menu, try the rich chocolate mousse made with olive oil (trust us, it works). The excellent wine list is reasonably priced. If you can't quite run to dinner here, come before 7pm for the early bird menu. For those who prefer to roll straight from table to bed, they also have guestrooms for $\in 100$ per night (dinner, bed and breakfast packages are available.

16 Lancaster Quay. www.cafeparadiso.ie. **Ø 021/427-7939.** Fixed-price menus: 2 courses €33, 3 courses €36–€40. Mon–Fri 5:30–10pm; Sat noon–2:30pm, 5:30–10pm. No children after 7pm.

Crawford Gallery Café $\star\star$ CAFE A big step up from the average cafe tacked onto an art gallery, the Crawford is as much a great little bistro as it is a convenient spot for a coffee or light nibble. It's open for breakfast, which certainly provides some excellent options if you can't face another hotel morning meal. You'll find spiced scones, American-style pancakes, and delicious eggs Florentine with organic spinach on the menu. Lunchtime is when this place gets busiest, though, and the line-up changes regularly with plenty of daily specials like chorizo bean cassoulet or smoked salmon salad with horseradish dressing.

At the Crawford Gallery, Emmet Place. www.crawfordartgallery.ie. \bigcirc 021/427-4415. Breakfast: $\notin 3-\notin 11$; lunch: $\notin 11-\notin 15$. Mon–Sat 8:30am–4pm.

Brewing Up Loyalty

Ireland is known for its love of Guinness, but in Cork you're more likely to find locals drinking the two locally brewed stouts—Murphy's or Beamish. There is a definite sense of civic loyalty when it comes to drinking stout in this town. In fact, walk into any pub and order a "home and away" and you'll be presented with a pint of Murphy's and one of Guinness.

Electric $\star\star$ SEAFOOD/MODERN IRISH With a dining room overlooking the river and the city skyline beyond, it's easy to get swept up in the romantic atmosphere of this trendy but unpretentious restaurant. The menu isn't large, but it's well done, focusing on upscale comfort food; roast chicken

with honey roast vegetables and champ mash (made with potato and spring onion), chicken and chorizo stew with sourdough, and a juicy house burger topped with Irish blue cheese. In addition to the main restaurant is the **Fish Bar** (evenings only), where you can eat super-fresh seafood while perched on bar stools overlooking the river. Despite its popularity, you can usually get a table at Electric if you arrive early—a full fifth are held back every night. The Fish Bar takes reservations for two sittings only, at 7 and 9pm.

41 South Mall. www.electriccork.com/restaurant. **© 021/422-2990.** Main courses €15–€27. Main restaurant Wed–Sat noon–10pm; Sun–Tues noon–9pm. Fish Bar Thurs–Sat 5–10pm; Sun–Wed 5–9pm. No children in the Fish Bar.

Market Lane ****** IRISH This friendly, informal restaurant serves Irish-inflected bistro food. It's a let-your-hair-down kind of place, and the menu consists mostly of traditional, unpretentious cooking with just a few more adventurous touches. Prawn, salmon and mussel gratin might be served with tarragon cream, or meatballs in a baguette with fat chips on the side. The early bird menu is outstanding value at just \in 23 for three courses (daily until 7pm, except Fri and Sat).

5–6 Oliver Plunkett St., Cork, Co. Cork. www.marketlane.ie. \bigcirc 021/427-4710. Main courses $\in 12-\in 18$. Mon–Thurs noon–10pm; Fri–Sat noon–10:30pm; Sun 1–9pm (10pm on public holidays).

Orso *** IRISH/MEDITERRANEAN This place is like a ray of warm Mediterranean sunshine. Traditional flavors of southern Europe are mixed with Irish influences, and the result is nothing short of delightful. It's open all day, so you can pop in for a breakfast of banana flatbread with cinnamon and lime zest; or feta cheese, spinach, and raisin pie. The lunch menu is long and varied, but it's really at dinnertime when the excellent cooking comes into its own. Plates include cayenne-spiced chicken and pineapple brochette, and smoked mackerel potato cake with mango dressing. Nearly everything on the wine list is available by the glass, and the small cocktail menu is intriguing—try the delicious house Bellini.

8 Pembroke St. www.orso.ie. **© 021/243-8000.** Main courses €8–€20. Mon 8:30am–6pm; Tues–Thurs 8:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 8:30am–10:30pm; Sun (Dec only) 1–10pm. Closed Sun, Jan–Nov.

KINSALE

Only 29km (18 miles) south of Cork City, **Kinsale** is a charming fishing village sitting on a picturesque harbor, surrounded by green hills. Considered the gateway to the western Cork seacoast, this artsy town of 3,000 residents enchants with its narrow, winding streets, well-kept 18th-century houses, imaginatively painted shop fronts, window boxes overflowing with colorful flowers, and harbor full of sailboats. Kinsale has a more eventful history than you might think, however. In 1601, it was the scene of a major sea battle, between Protestant England and Catholic Spain—one in which Irish rebels played a covert part. You can learn all about this fascinating conflict on one of local man Don Herlihy's absorbing "Historic Strolls" (see p. 264).

Exploring Kinsale

Charles Fort \star HISTORIC SITE Southeast of Kinsale, at the head of the harbor, this coastal landmark dating from the late 17th century was named after Charles II, who was king of England and Ireland at the time it was built. A classic star-shaped fort, it was constructed after the Battle of Kinsale (1601) to replace medieval Ringcurran Castle, which was reduced to rubble in that battle by the English army. The building was strengthened throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, and the fort remained in use as a military garrison right up until the British left in 1921. It suffered extensive damage during the civil war, and has only recently been restored. Across the river, the smaller **James**

Fort dates back to the reign of King James I (1603–25). It was later captured by the forces of the (Protestant) King William I during his war with the deposed (Catholic) James II in 1690—part of the same conflict that is still commemorated today by the Protestant "Orange marches" in Northern Ireland.

Summercove. www.heritageireland.ie. \bigcirc 021/477-2263. Admission \notin 4 adults; \notin 3 seniors; \notin 2 students and children; \notin 10 families. Mid-Mar–Oct daily 10am–6pm; Nov–mid-Mar daily 10am–5pm.



The harbor of Kinsale.

Desmond Castle \star MUSEUM This small, squat stone fortress doesn't really look like a castle, in part because it sits incongruously half way up a residential street. Built around 1500 as the customs house for Kinsale Harbour, in the late 17th century it was turned into a prison—at which time its history took several dark detours, including a fire that gutted the building in 1747, roasting alive the 54 French soldiers who were imprisoned within. Later, during the potato famine, it was used as a workhouse. An unusual but interesting little museum is inside, detailing the story of the Irish exiles who helped transform the global wine trade from the 17th century onward.

Cork St. www.heritageireland.ie. \bigcirc 021/477-4855. Admission \notin 4 adults; \notin 3 seniors; \notin 2 students and children; \notin 10 families. Apr-mid-Sept daily 10am-6pm. Closed late Sept-Mar.

Kinsale Historic Stroll $\star \star \star$ TOURS One of the most pleasant ways to spend an hour in these parts is to take local resident Don Herlihy's excellent walking tour—or "Historic Stroll," as he prefers to

call it—of Kinsale town. Don and his fellow guide, Barry Moloney, have been leading visitors around the main sights since the mid-1990s, and their local knowledge is second to none. Highlights include the 12th-century St. Multose Church; a walk past Desmond Castle (see above); and the harbor, where the 17th-century Battle of Kinsale is recounted with an enthusiasm only found in people who really love their subject. Don asserts that the battle was perhaps the most significant turning point in Irish history, and when you hear his argument firsthand, you're inclined to agree. The tour starts outside the tourist office at 11:15am every day. On weekdays from May to September, there's also an earlier tour at 9:15am. You pay at the end or, in their words, "drop out for free if you're not delighted." That probably doesn't happen very often. If you pre-book, you're given a free historic chart designed by Don.

Departs from Kinsale Tourist Office, Pier Road. www.historicstrollkinsale.com. **© 021/477-2873** or 087/250-0731. Admission €6 adults; €1 children. Mid-Mar to Apr, Oct daily 11:15am; May–Sept Mon–Sat 9:15, 11:15am, Sun; Sun 11:15am. Nov to mid-Mar prebooking only.

Kinsale Pottery and Arts Centre * ART STUDIO This excellent ceramics workshop outside of Kinsale sells beautiful, original items of pottery from delicate tea sets and tableware to ornamental masks. The shop is full of surprises, and prices aren't too steep for the quality of what's on offer. A two-floor gallery always has some interesting pieces on display. If you're looking for an alternative way to spend a day or more, the workshop also runs pottery courses where you can learn the basics of the craft and go home with your own creations at the end. Prices start at \notin 75 for a 6½ hour courses, including all materials.

Ballinacurra. www.kinsaleceramics.com. \bigcirc 021/477-7758. Free admission. Daily 10am–6pm. From Kinsale: from Pearse St., turn left at the junction with the Blue Haven hotel on your right, then follow signs to Bandon and Innishannon. Take this road up the big hill, past Woodlands B&B and the Kinsale GAA sports ground. Look for signs to Kinsale Pottery after about $\frac{1}{3}$ km ($\frac{1}{3}$ miles) on the left.



James Fort was built by the English shortly after the Battle of Kinsale.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

CYCLING Kinsale Harbour is perfectly designed for biking. To rent a bike, drop by Mylie Murphy's Shop, 8 Pearse St. (© 021/477-2703). Rates are around €25 per day.

FISHING Kinsale is one of the southern Irish coast's sea angling centers. There are numerous shipwrecks in the area for wreck fishing (not the least of them the *Lusitania*, near the Old Head of Kinsale). Try **Kinsale Angling** (1 Rampart Lane, The Ramparts; www.kinsale-angling.com; **© 021/477-4946** or 085/863-1000) for charter boats. They also run whale- and dolphin-watching trips. The similarly named **Angling Kinsale**, Crohane (www.anglingkinsale.com; **© 021/477-8054** or 086/103-6905), arranges sea fishing from Kinsale Harbor, as well as dolphin- and whale-watching expeditions. Prices vary widely, so call or e-mail for more information.

THE scilly WALK

Effectively a miniscule suburb across the harbor from Kinsale, the village of Scilly—yes, pronounced "silly"—clings to a strong sense of its own identity. Its unusual name is thought to hark back to fishermen from the Scilly Isles (off the coast of Cornwall, England) who settled here during the 17th century.

To explore the area, follow the signposted pedestrian path that runs along the sea from Scilly to Charles Fort. (You can pick up maps of the full route at the Kinsale tourism office.) Take the right-hand road around the village, skirting along the coast, and join the marked pedestrian trail by the waterside. Along here are lovely views across the harbor to Kinsale and the stout remains of **James Fort** (see p. 264).

You'll pass another tiny hamlet on the outskirts of Kinsale, **Summer Cove**, which is as sweet a place as its halcyon name suggests. Black-and-white toy-town houses, with splashes of green and red, face the harbor as gulls circle overhead and the waves froth and bubble along the harbor walls.

A short walk uphill from Summer Cove lies **Charles Fort** (see p. 263), built to defend the port from foreign invaders. Local lore has it that until the 19th century, access to this stretch of water was controlled by a massive chain floating on timber kegs between the two shores that could be drawn tight at a moment's notice.

The Scilly Walk ends here, but if you continue to walk south along the sea, you'll find another path that follows the headland to the tip of **Frower Point**, which affords great views across the harbor to the Old Head of Kinsale. The total distance from Kinsale to Frower Point is 8km (5 miles) each way, and every part of it is quite rewarding.

GOLF Embraced by the sea on three sides, the nothing-short-of-spectacular Old Head Golf Links (www.oldhead.com; © 021/477-8444) is Tiger Woods's favorite Irish course. Named one of *Golf Magazine*'s "Top 100 Courses in the World" in the 2000s, it is hauntingly beautiful, rain or shine. The course retains a resident environmentalist to ensure that crucial wildlife habitats are not disturbed. But golfing here costs big money: Greens fees in summer are a whopping €230 for one 18-hole round, and €325 for 36 holes. If you really want to experience it but can't quite swing the price, come after 3pm, when rates go down to €180 for 18 holes (€135 in the off season). Caddy fees run €35 for a junior caddy or €45 for a senior caddy, and golf carts can be rented for €60.

If that's still too rich for your blood, there's a fine par-72 championship course at the Fota Island Golf Club, Carrigtwohill (www.fotaisland.ie; \bigcirc 021/488-3700), with greens fees of \notin 60 to \notin 90. Even less expensive is the Kinsale Golf Club, Kinsale (www.kinsalegolf.ie; \bigcirc 021/477-4722), which has two courses, about 5km (3 miles) north of town. The 18-hole, par-71 course has greens fees of \notin 25 to \notin 40.

SAILING There's excellent sailing out from Kinsale Head. Sovereign Sailing (www.sovereignsailing.com; © 021/477-4145) offers a full range of yacht-sailing options for all ages and levels of experience. Between March and November, full-day or half-day sails from Kinsale leave every day. Rates vary widely based on the kind of sailing you try. They also offer yacht racing packages, but these don't come cheap.

WATERSPORTS The **Oysterhaven Activity Centre** (www.oysterhaven.com; **© 021/477-0738**), 8km (5 miles) from Kinsale, rents windsurf gear, dinghies, and kayaks. The cost ranges from around \in 20 to \in 40 for windsurfing kit, \in 12 to \in 20 for kayaks and \in 30 to \in 45 for dinghies. They also run windsurfing lessons costing \in 50 for a 2¹/₂ hour taster session, to \in 95 for a full day. They get pretty busy during summer, so try to book ahead as much as possible.

WHALE WATCHING Whale watching is a popular activity in summer, and one of the best companies is Whale of a Time (www.whaleofatime.ie; @ 086/328-3250), which uses rigid inflatable boats to cause less disruption to the creatures of the deep. Prices are \in 35 for a 90-minute "family trip," or \in 70

for a 4-hour "enthusiasts trip." Kinsale Angling and Angling Kinsale (see "Fishing," above) also offer dolphin, whale, and seal watching trips.

Where to Stay in Kinsale

Actons Hotel \star Built in the mid-19th century, this pleasant, well-run property looking out over Kinsale Harbour has been a hotel since the 1940s, though a recent renovation has smoothed out a few wrinkles. Guestrooms aren't huge, but they're nicely designed, with very large beds and lovely harbor views. In a town where it's easy to find accommodations with character but not with modern conveniences, you'll welcome the few extras such as an elevator (you'd be surprised how rare that is around here) and a swimming pool. The hotel's two restaurants are good, but you've also got Kinsale and its wonderful restaurants on your doorstep.

Pier Rd. www.actonshotelkinsale.com. **Ø 021/477-9900.** 74 units. €120–€180 double. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. Dinner, bed and breakfast packages available. Amenities: 2 restaurants; bar; room service; gym; pool; accessible rooms; Wi-Fi (free).

Blue Haven Hotel ** There's something wonderfully old-school about this chic townhouse hotel in the middle of Kinsale. The rooms are traditionally decorated with antique-style furniture and heritage print wallpaper. The friendly staff runs things very professionally, and the in-house seafood restaurant, the Fishmarket, is popular. Frequent special offers can bring the hotel price down considerably. For example, midweek dinner, bed-and-breakfast deals for under \in 100 are common, and there are enticing package deals for golfers, including access to one of the best courses in Ireland. The only snag is that you can get street noise here, so ask for an upper floor room if you're a light sleeper.

3-4 Pearse St. www.bluehavenkinsale.com. \bigcirc 021/477-2209. 17 units. \in 115– \in 140 double. \in 150– \in 180 suite. Parking at nearby lots (no discount) around \in 1.40 per hour. Rates include breakfast. Dinner, bed and breakfast packages and 2-night midweek and weekend deals available. Amenities: 2 restaurants; bar; room service; Wi-Fi (free).

Desmond House $\star\star$ This lovely, historic B&B is one of the best places to stay in Kinsale. Desmond House was built in the mid-18th century, and, according to host Michael McLaughlin, is one of the oldest and best-preserved Georgian buildings in town. Michael is a genuine and charming man; his policy of charging American visitors according to whichever exchange rate works out best with the euro—on the day you booked or the day you check out—is a particularly considerate gesture. Guestrooms are generous with big, comfortable beds, and the modern bathrooms are furnished with whirlpool tubs. Many of the ingredients for the delicious breakfasts come straight from the **Old English Market** $\star\star$ in Cork (see p. 253).

42 Cork St. www.desmondhousekinsale.com. \bigcirc 021/477-3575. 4 units. \in 140 double. Parking at nearby lots (no discount) around \in 1.40 per hour. Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Pier House ** There's something wonderfully bright and cheerful about this sweet place in Kinsale. Hosts Pat and Anne have done a beautiful job in converting the 19th-century townhouse into a B&B, with chic color schemes and subtle splashes of modern art. A few of the bedrooms have little balconies, and guests are welcome to bring wine back with them if they want to spend a leisurely hour admiring the views of the harbor or garden. Breakfasts are delicious and plentiful. You'll have to fend for yourself at dinner, but this is hardly a chore in foodie-friendly Kinsale.

Pier Road. www.pierhousekinsale.com. \bigcirc 021/477-4169. 10 units. \in 100– \in 140 double. Parking for bikes and motorbikes only; car parking at nearby lots around \in 1.40 per hour. Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Where to Dine in Kinsale

Bastion ****** IRISH/INTERNATIONAL This funky, creative restaurant opened in 2014 and fast

became a hit with local diners. The menu is divided between a full a la carte selection and small plates, served tapas style (try the amazing homemade hummus if it's on offer). Irish flavors mingle with touches of the Mediterranean—you may start with some chargrilled scallops, before moving on to a main of chicken stuffed with Parmesan and chorizo, or a plate of beetroot and salmon cannelloni. Of course, this being Kinsale, the seafood is particularly good. The exquisitely presented desserts are a treat—try the caramel mousse with toffee apple.

Corner of Main St. and Market St. **© 021/470-9696.** Main courses €12–€24. Mon–Fri 5–10pm; Sat–Sun noon–2pm and 5–10pm. Call to check times in winter.

Crackpots *** SEAFOOD/MODERN IRISH A happy marriage of designer pottery shop and outstandingly good restaurant, Crackpots specializes in fresh, delicious seafood. The ingredients are all locally sourced, so exactly what appears on the menu depends on what's freshest—grilled langoustine with spinach and lime pesto; fried king prawns with garlic and chorizo; or maybe some Oyster Haven scallops with an herb crust and citrus-infused crème fraiche. The menu always includes a few non-seafood items like roast duck, lamb, or a simple steak served in a sauce of brandy and pepper sauce, plus a vegetarian option or two. Every Friday night, you can dine to the sound of a local pianist. The dining room is decorated with some interesting art (most of which is for sale), or you can sit in a heated garden terrace out back if the weather's fine.

3 Cork St., Kinsale, Co. Cork. www.crackpots.ie. **© 021/477-2847.** Main courses €10–€29. Mon–Sat 6–9pm; Sun 12:30–3pm.

Finn's Table *** MODERN IRISH The menu here is ambitious without being overly complicated, and with plenty of space to let the ingredients breathe. As you'd expect from Kinsale, the seafood on the menu comes directly from the harbor, so you never know exactly what will end up in the kitchen. However, on a typical night you could have some tender squid fried with salt and pepper, monkfish and scallops served with Parmesan cream, or lemon sole with glazed asparagus and a carrot and lime beurre blanc. Although the standout dishes tend to be seafood, there's plenty more to choose from, and the meats are all sourced from the owner's parents, who run a butcher shop in nearby Mitchelstown. 6 Main St., Kinsale, Co. Cork. www.finnstable.com. **© 021/470-9636.** Main courses €20–€35. Wed–Mon 5:30–10pm.

Fishy Fishy *** SEAFOOD Widely respected, hugely popular, and yet brilliantly simple, the Fishy Fishy is one of the best restaurants in Kinsale. The owners also have a gourmet store and fish and chip shop on Guardwell Street, but this is their flagship. The skillfully prepared, fresh seafood comes from a small number of trusted suppliers. And we do mean local. Shane catches the cod and turbot, Maurice provides the crab, Christy, David, and Jimmy catch the prawns—you get the idea. Exactly what's cooking that day depends on the catch, but you can expect to find the signature Fishy Fishy pie of salmon and shellfish in a creamy sauce with a breadcrumb topping. Reservations are only taken for dinner, so this place gets packed during lunchtime.

Crowleys Quay. www.fishyfishy.ie. **© 021/470-0415.** Main courses €16–€25. Mar–Oct daily noon–9pm; Nov–Feb Sun–Wed noon–4pm, Thurs–Sat noon–9pm.

THE GREAT GOURMET GATHERING: kinsale food festival

Food lovers from all over Ireland—and even farther afield—descend on Kinsale for a weekend each October when the **Kinsale Gourmet Festival** takes over town. The event's calendar changes every year, but always includes plenty of cooking demonstrations and other lively activities. Restaurants join in the fun by hosting parties, special tastings, "meet the chef" events, and other culinary happenings. Many of them are free, although some of the bigger events and banquets charge about \notin 20 to \notin 100 per ticket. It's magnificent, Bacchanalian fun. Learn more and book tickets at www.kinsalerestaurants.com. **Janey Mac **** CAFE There's a nice little story behind the name of this artisan bakery and cafe. "Janey Mac" isn't a person, but a phrase invented by the residents of Kinsale in the 1950s as an alternative expletive to the blasphemous (and therefore, in those days, verboten) "Jesus Christ." Since then, this building has housed several businesses of wildly disparate kinds, but most of them have kept the same name. The homemade cakes, scones, brownies, and other baked treats here are delicious, and they serve great sandwiches at lunchtime too. The little dining room is decorated in a shabby-chic style, scattered with cushions and other appealing touches. Look out for the wry "thought for the day," scrawled on a blackboard at the back.

38 Main St. www.janeymackinsale.com. **© 086/817-2108.** Lunch items €5–€9. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm.

Max's ******* MODERN IRISH A husband-and-wife team has run Max's since the '90s, and they're still effortlessly adept at making diners feel welcome. The menu changes seasonally, but the main flavors are all local—meat from Kilbrittan, a little village down the coast, and shellfish that were caught close enough that they could have been carried to the door. There's also a full vegetarian menu and plenty of kids' options. The early bird menu (a thoroughly reasonable €30 for three courses) is served until 7:30pm and 7pm on Saturdays.

48 Main St. www.maxs.ie. **© 021/477-2443.** Main courses €23–€28. Apr to mid-Dec daily 6–10pm.

Poet's Corner Café ** CAFE If Janey Mac and this place were to meet and slug it out over which is the best cafe in Kinsale . . . Well, they'd probably give up and just have a lovely slice of cake instead, to be honest. Drop in for a freshly baked scone, a cup of herbal tea (the choice is huge), or a cup of coffee and a toasted sandwich. As the name suggests, this place styles itself as a "reading café"; not only can you buy books here, but bring them two books in good condition and they'll let you swap it for another one from their second-hand collection. The "Irish Corner" is filled with interesting books and other information about the area.

44 Main St. www.poetscornerkinsale.com. **© 086/227-7276.** Lunch items €5–€7. Daily 9:30am–6pm.



Café and reading room at Poet's Corner.

The Spaniard $\star\star$ BISTRO The portrait on the sign of this atmospheric old inn shows Don Juan de Aguila, the Spanish commander who led a force of 4,000 men, assisted by local Irish revolutionaries, against the English at the Battle of Kinsale in 1601. The English won, but Don Juan became a hero in local folklore. The present inn dates from around 50 years after the battle, and it's still a satisfying place with an old-world look. They serve excellent, homey pub food in the restaurant, but the bar menu is just as good, and cheaper too. An eclectic program of live music features everything from straight-up Irish folk to Russian Gypsy bands.

Junction of Scilly and Lower Road. www.thespaniard.ie. **Ø 021/477-2436.** Main courses €18–€27. Mon–Fri 12:30–3pm, 6–9pm; Sat 12:30–3pm, 6–10pm; Sun 12:30–3pm, 6:30–10pm.

EAST CORK

Lying 24km (15 miles) east of Cork City, the historic harbor town of **Cobh** (pronounced *cove*, meaning "haven" in Irish), was once Ireland's chief port of emigration, with three or four transatlantic liners calling each week. For thousands of Irish emigrants, particularly during the Famine years and in the early part of the 20th century, Cobh was the last bit of Ireland they ever saw. Farther east, near the

Waterford border, **Youghal** (pronounced *Yawl*) is a major beach resort and fishing port. Youghal is loosely associated with Sir Walter Raleigh, who was once the mayor and is said to have planted Ireland's first potatoes here. From a tourist's-eye view, present-day Youghal is a moderately attractive, congested town with a grand stretch of beach just beyond the center.

ARRIVING

If you're driving from Cork City, take the main Waterford road (N25) east. Exit at R624 for Fota and Cobh, or R632 for Shanagarry and Ballycotton. Midleton and Youghal have their own signposted exits. If you're coming from West Cork and want to bypass Cork City (a good idea during rush hour), take the car ferry operated by **Cross River Ferries Ltd.,** Atlantic Quay, Cobh (www.scottcobh.ie; © 021/420-2900). It links Carrigaloe, near Cobh, with Glenbrook, south of Cork City. Cars cost a few euro each way and the journey lasts under 5 minutes.

Irish Rail (www.irishrail.ie; © 021/455-7277) operates daily train service between Cork City and Cobh via Fota Island. The journey takes about half an hour. Bus Éireann (www.buseireann.ie; © 021/450-8188) also provides daily service from Cork City to Cobh and other points in East Cork.

Exploring East Cork

Ballymaloe Cookery School *** GOURMET SITE Professional and amateur cooks flock here from all over the world to sit near the whisk of Darina Allen. It all started with Darina's mother-inlaw, Myrtle, whose evangelization of Ireland's bounty of fresh produce at **Ballymaloe House ***** restaurant (see facing page) elevated Irish "country house" cooking to gourmet status. The Allen family's success led to the founding of this cooking school, the most famous in Ireland, which offers dozens of courses ranging in length from a half-day to 12 weeks. Half-day courses include "canapés, finger food and tasty bites," "afternoon tea and cakes," "irresistible breakfasts." Prices start at about \in 75. The extensive **gardens** on the grounds are open to visitors all year. Admission to the gardens is \in 6. The **Ballymaloe Shop**, open 10am to 5pm daily, sells kitchen produce (including Ballymaloe's own delicious brand of relish) and crafty knick-knacks. And the aptly-named **Café at the End of the Shop** sells light lunches, afternoon tea, and lip-smackingly good cakes.

Shanagarry, Midleton. www.cookingisfun.ie. **© 021/464-6785.** Half-day courses from €70–€135. Open year-round; schedule varies.



Students cooking up a storm at Ballymaloe Cookery School, run by Ireland's most famous chef, Darina Allen.

Fota Island & Wildlife Park ** NATURE SITE If only all zoos were like the Fota Wildlife Park. Most of the animals at this thoughtfully designed park are free to roam without any apparent barriers, mingling with each other and human visitors. Many of the park's residents—including kangaroos, macaws, and lemurs—have the run of 16 hectares (40 acres) of grassland; only the more dangerous animals, such as cheetahs and gibbons, are behind conventional fencing. Besides close contact with a menagerie of exotic creatures, kids can be entertained by a small amusement park, tour train, picnic area, and gift shop. The Savannah Café (one of two in the park) has a view of the meerkat exhibition, so you may find yourself being watched by curious eyes while eating your lunch.

Fota Island, Carrigtwohill. www.fotawildlife.ie. \bigcirc 021/481-2678. Admission \in 15 adults; \in 10 seniors and disabled; \in 9.50 children 15 and under; \in 46– \in 58 families. Mon–Sat 10am–4:30pm; Sun 10:30am–4:30pm. Last entry 1 hr. before closing.

Where to Stay in East Cork

Ballymaloe House ******* Most famous for being Ireland's best-known cookery school—you can

take wonderful day and half-day courses here (see above)—Ballymaloe is also an inviting countryside hotel. Comfortable guestrooms are furnished in traditional country-house decor, with floral-print wallpaper, antique-style furniture, and original art on the walls. The house itself is an attractive fusion of Georgian farmhouse and medieval castle, surrounded by beautiful grounds. If you want a bit more privacy, you can choose from several self-catering options, including cottages, a faux castle tower (complete with balcony on the battlements), and several cabin-style chalets. Unsurprisingly, the kitchen is the real draw here—the restaurant produces fantastic gourmet dinners nightly. These are lavish, five-course affairs, with seasonal menus (€70 per person); Sunday features a slightly simpler buffet spread—just as well if you've already had the €45 Sunday lunch. The wine list is extensive, and unusually high tech—ask to be given the iPad version to try out video information pages alongside the largely French selection.

Shanagarry, Midleton. www.ballymaloe.ie. \bigcirc 800/323-5463 in the U.S., or 021/465-2531. 33 units. \in 120– \in 140 double. Rates include full breakfast. Dinner, bed and breakfast packages available. Amenities: Restaurant; room service.

Bayview Hotel ** This hotel must have one of the best views of any in Ireland: miles of coastline dotted with islands, and boats bobbing gently in the harbor. Guestrooms are basic but pleasant, with modern furnishings. Each has a view of the sea. The restaurant serves good modern Irish cuisine, using plenty of local produce, including fish direct from the pier and meat from local and regional farms. However, prices are high ($\in 25$ - $\in 28$ for a main course), and there aren't a lot of alternatives around here. Guests have free use of a swanky new spa and health club at the sister Garryvoe Hotel, about 5 minutes' drive down the coast. Check the website for good deals and special offers, including dinner, bed-and-breakfast packages and senior discounts. The Bayview is closed from November to early April.

Ballycotton. www.thebayviewhotel.com. \bigcirc 021/464-6746. 35 units. \notin 85– \notin 165 double; \notin 155– \notin 205 suite. Rates include full breakfast. Dinner, bed and breakfast packages available. Closed Nov–early Apr. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; use of nearby health club; Wi-Fi (free).

Where to Dine in East Cork

See also "Where to Stay in East Cork" above.

Gilbert's \star IRISH A lively and laid-back little bistro, Gilbert's serves a fine menu of bistro classics, complimented by a few distinctly regional flavors. If you're feeling adventurous (it's an acquired taste), you could opt for a starter of Clonakilty black pudding with Charleville goats' cheese; then maybe a puff-pastry pie made with beef and Murphy's stout, or the catch of the day (all supplied by a small firm about 20 miles away in Midleton). There's always a vegetarian special on the menu too.

11 Pearse St., Cobh. **© 021/481-1300.** Main courses €16–€28. Wed–Thurs 10am–8:30pm; Fri–Sat 10am–9:30pm. Closed Sun–Tues.

Trade Winds \star INTERNATIONAL This popular spot overlooks the harbor in Cobh, just a 5minute walk from **Cobh: The Queenstown Story** (see facing page). The seafood is particularly good here—monkfish in garlic sauce, scallops flavored with honey—or you could opt for one of the extremely generous steaks, served with a rich pepper sauce. At any time you can choose from the full, bistro-style main menu, or opt for a lighter (and cheaper) bar snack. Some evenings include live music.

16 Casement Sq. Cobh. **Ø 021/481-3754.** Main courses €10–€28. Daily noon–9pm.

point of departure: A DAY IN COBH

If you're a foreigner with an Irish surname, this bustling seaside town could be more important to you than you realize. Cobh (pronounced *cove*, meaning "haven") used to be called Queenstown, and it was once Ireland's chief port of emigration. During the early 20th century, several transatlantic liners departed from here every week. It was also the last port of call for the RMS *Titanic* before it sank in April 1912. That story is expertly told at **Cobh: the Queenstown Story** (Deepwater Quay; www.cobhheritage.com; © 021/481-3591). Part of the Cobh Heritage Centre, the exhibition is open mid-March to October, from

9:30am to 6pm; and the rest of the year, from 9:30am to 5pm. It opens 11am on Sunday and public holidays, year-round, and last admission is always an hour before closing. Admission costs \notin 9.50 adults, \notin 7.50 seniors and students, \notin 5 children, and \notin 25 families.

Defining the Cobh skyline, **St. Colman's Cathedral** (www.cobhcathedral.ie; \bigcirc **021/481-3222**) is an excellent example of neo-Gothic church architecture. Started in 1868, the cathedral was the country's most expensive religious building of its time. The largest of its 47 bells weighs $3\frac{1}{2}$ tons, and the organ has nearly 2,500 pipes. The interior is vast and ornate, including a beautiful nave and precipitously high chancel arch. It is also a popular venue for concerts and recitals.

A short walk from St. Colman's Cathedral, the *Lusitania* Memorial (Casement Sq.) commemorates the British passenger liner sunk by a German U-boat on May 7, 1915, killing 1,198 passengers, including several victims buried in Cobh cemetery.

And if you want to discover more about Cobh's role in the *Titanic* story, an hour-long **walking tour** takes in a variety of related sites, putting it all into the context of the town's maritime history. In truth this is more of a general historical tour of the town with just a couple of actual *Titanic* connections, but it's informative nonetheless. The tour departs from the Commodore Hotel, 4 Westbourne Place, at 11am and 2pm daily. (The tour doesn't run from Oct to Mar if there are no pre-bookings.) It costs \notin 9.50 adults, \notin 4.75 children. For bookings call \bigcirc 021/481-5211, or visit www.titanic.ie.

WEST CORK

Some say West Cork is like County Kerry without the crowds. Like Kerry, it's got a photo-friendly craggy topography and jagged coastline; and also as in Kerry, it's impossible to make good time on the roads here. They tend to be narrow and sinuous, twisting along rivers, through valleys, around mountains, and through lovely small towns. Those willing to slow down and go with the flow are amply rewarded. You'll probably come across at least one puzzling rural intersection that's completely lacking in signage, and have to slow down for at least one herd of sheep slowly ambling down a country lane. In places, the public route that hugs the coast narrows to just one lane and delivers heart-stopping views. Over time, you may even come to think of the roads here as one of West Cork's great pleasures.

Some of the most beautiful coastal scenery (and severe weather) is on the islands. Cape Clear \star , home to a bird-watching observatory, is also a well-known Gaeltacht: Schoolchildren and adults alike come here to work on their Gaelic skills each summer. Dursey Island, off the tip of the Beara Peninsula, is accessible by cable car. Garinish Island in Glengarriff is the site of Ilnacullin, an elaborate Italianate garden.

Arriving

N71 is the main road into West Cork from north and south; from Cork and points east, N22 also leads to West Cork. **Bus Éireann** (www.buseireann.ie; © 021/450-8188) provides daily bus service to and from the principal towns in West Cork.

Exploring West Cork

Bantry House ** HISTORIC HOUSE Built around 1750 for the earls of Bantry, this Georgian house holds furniture and objects d'art from all over Europe, including Aubusson and Gobelin tapestries said to have been made for Marie Antoinette. The gardens, with original statuary, are

beautifully kept—climb the steps behind the building for a panoramic view of the house, gardens, and Bantry Bay. There is also an informative exhibition on the ill-fated Spanish Armada, which, led by the Irish rebel Wolfe Tone, attempted to invade the country near Bantry House in 1769. Fully guided tours happen once a week, at 2pm on Tuesday; otherwise, you're free to wander around yourself. And if you really love it here, you can spend the night (rooms $\in 170-\notin 200$).

Bantry. www.bantryhouse.com. \bigcirc 027/50047. Admission $\in 11$ adults; $\in 8$ seniors and students; $\in 3$ children 6–16; children 5 and under free; $\in 26$ families. Gardens only $\in 5$. Mid-Apr to Oct, Tues–Sun 10am–5pm. Closed Mon and Nov to mid-Apr.

Cape Clear Island (Oileán Chléire) ** HERITAGE/NATURE SITE The southernmost inhabited point in Ireland, 13km (8 miles) off the mainland, Cape Clear Island has a permanent population of just a hundred residents. It is a bleak place with a rock-bound coastline and no trees to break the rush of sea wind, but it's also starkly beautiful. In early summer, wildflowers brighten the landscape, and in October, passerine migrants, some on their way from North America and Siberia, fill the air. Seabirds are abundant during the nesting season, especially from July to September. You can get to the island by ferry and explore it all at your own pace; alternatively, **Fastnet Tours** (www.fastnettour.com; © 028/39159) runs a twice-weekly tour. After visiting the island's tiny heritage center, you're taken out for a boat ride around **Fastnet Rock**, a craggy outcrop in the Atlantic. Home to nothing but a weather-beaten lighthouse, Fastnet was traditionally known as "Teardrop Island," not for its shape, but because it was the last piece of Ireland that emigrants saw on their way to America. The tours, which only go ahead in good weather, leave from the pier in Baltimore on Wednesdays and Saturdays at 11am. You can only book online; otherwise you have to show up and hope there's space. Tours cost €32 per person; if you book in advance, you get a 10% discount.

Cape Clear Island. www.oilean-chleire.ie. \bigcirc Ferry: 028/39159 or 41923. Return ferry: $\in 16$ adults; $\in 8$ children; $\in 40$ families. Generally 4 times daily in summer, twice daily in winter. Call for daily schedule; may change according to weather.

THE sheep's head LOOP

A jagged strip of land reaching out into the Atlantic on the western side of County Cork, the Sheep's Head Peninsula is well worth a visit. It's a place of wild, rocky scenery, ice-blue lakes, and spectacular coastal views. It is also an isolated place; you're likely to find yourself alone for large stretches of time, with the expansive sea views all to yourself. Which, in bustling modern Ireland, is enough to make it worth the trip.

To see it the easy way, drive the **Sheep's Head Loop**, which begins just outside Bantry along the tiny road to Kilcrohane. It takes you through the little coastal village of **Ahakista**, where you can stop to explore a Bronze Age stone circle, and on to tiny **Durrus**, home to the rocky ruins of the Cool na Long Castle. The main draw here, though, is the natural beauty. The north side of the peninsula is all sheer cliffs and stark, rocky scenery, unmarred by modern development (the sunsets on this side are unbelievable), while the more lush south-side road runs right alongside the wondrous Dunmanus Bay.

To explore the peninsula in more depth, however, you could walk the **Sheep's Head Way**, voted "Best Walk in Ireland" by *Country Walking* magazine a few years ago. The windy, coastal walk is certainly ambitious, as it makes an 89km (55-mile) loop around the peninsula. Most walkers choose to explore only the tip, from the point where the road ends down to the stumpy 1960s-era lighthouse, which keeps oil tankers from running aground.

If you try the longer walk, be aware that the route is rough in places—particularly on the north side, which many walkers choose to skip for that reason. The south side of the peninsula is greener and the path well-travelled.

The *Guide to the Sheep's Head Way* by Stephen Bosch (2003), available in local stores and tourist offices, combines history, poetry, and topography in a fantastic introduction to the region. A more recent book on the subject is *Walking the Sheep's Head Way* by Amanda Clarke (2014), a lavishly illustrated guide that breaks the walk into all its various stages.

base of a cliff in a wild, remote valley. The walk to the village gives you a taste for the rough beauty of this mountainous area, and a sense of the extent to which people in pre-Famine Ireland would go to find a patch of arable land. To get to the start of the walk, take R571 heading east from the village of Derreen. From this road, take the turning for Glanmore Lake, signposted on the left after approximately 1km ($\frac{2}{3}$ mile). Then turn right at the road posted for "stone circle." Continue 2km ($\frac{1}{4}$ miles) to the point at which the road becomes dirt, and park on the roadside. From here, there is no trail—just walk up the valley to its terminus, about 2km ($\frac{1}{4}$ miles) away, where the ruins of a village hug the cliff's base. Where the valley is blocked by a headland, take the route around to the left, which is less steep. Return the way you came; the whole walk—4km ($\frac{2}{2}$ miles)—is of moderate difficulty.

Near Lauragh.

The Donkey Sanctuary \star ANIMAL SANCTUARY A real heartbreaker, this one: a charity that rescues abandoned and abused donkeys and nurses them back to health. A few of the beasts of burden here have been voluntarily relinquished by owners who are no longer able to care for them, but the majority have sadder histories. The donkeys live out their days at this quiet and bucolic place, where they receive medical aid and plenty of TLC. Visitors can meet the gentle patients and learn their stories. The emphasis is on happy endings. Seeing these animals given a new lease on life can be a touching and even quite profound experience for kids.

Liscarroll, nr. Mallow. www.thedonkeysanctuary.ie. © 022/48398. Free admission. Mon–Fri 9am–4:30pm; Sat, Sun, and public holidays 10am–5pm.

Drombeg Stone Circle ** ANCIENT SITE This ring of 13 standing stones is the finest example of a megalithic stone circle in County Cork. The circle dates from 153 _{B.C.}, and little is known about its ritual purpose. However, the remains of two huts and a cooking area, just to the west of the circle, give some clue; it is thought that heated stones were placed in a water trough (which can be seen adjacent to the huts), and the hot water was used for cooking. This section has been dated to sometime between A.D. 368 and 608. While you're out this way, consider stopping at the charming little village of **Ballydehob (Béal Átha Dá Chab)**. An artsy place with an ancient stone bridge and some brightly painted houses, it's one big photo opportunity. Ballydehob is also signposted from R597 between Rosscarbery and Glandore.

Off R597 between Rosscarbery and Glandore. No phone. Free admission (open site). The turning for Drombeg Stone Circle is signposted just after the sign for Drombeg (if approaching from the direction of Rosscarbery); if approaching from Glandore it's about 0.5 km ($\frac{1}{3}$ miles) after the whitewashed church in Drombeg village.

Dursey Island ** HERITAGE/NATURE SITE This is a real adventure—a barren promontory extending into the sea at the tip of the Beara Peninsula. It offers no amenities for tourists, but the adventurous will be rewarded with beautiful seaside walks, a 200-year-old signal tower, and a memorable passage from the mainland via cable car. To get there, take R571 past Cahermore to its terminus. As you sway wildly in the wooden cable car, you'll wonder whether or not to be reassured that someone saw fit to place the text of Psalm 91 inside ("If you say 'the Lord is my refuge,' and you make the most high your dwelling, no harm will overtake you."). You may even be sharing your car with sheep or cows, as it's also used to transport livestock to and from the island. At this point you might wonder whether a ferry would have been a wiser option. It wouldn't. Apparently the channel between the island and mainland is just too treacherous to permit regular crossing by boat. Cables run all year, Monday to Saturday, from 9 to 10:30am, 2:30 to 4:30pm and 7 to 7:30pm, and Sunday from 9 to 10am and 1 to 2pm, and 7 to 7:30pm. The 7 to 7:30pm crossing is for return journeys only.

Summertime has extended hours; from June to September they sometimes run continuously all day. However, because the island has no shops, pubs, restaurants, or lodging of any kind, it's very important to check return times with the operator before you go. You should also bring food and water. For up-to-date information on any changes to the schedule, call the Skibbereen Tourist Office at © 028/21766.

Dursey Island. www.durseyisland.ie. No phone. Cable car round-trip €8 adults; €4 children. About 21km (14 miles) west of Castletown-Bearhaven (follow R572).

Gougane Barra ** HERITAGE/NATURE SITE One of Ireland's most beautiful spots, Gougane Barra (which means "St. Fin Barre's Cleft") is the name of both a tiny old settlement and a forest park a little northeast of the Pass of Keimaneigh, 24km (15 miles) northeast of Bantry, and well signposted off R584, about halfway between Macroom and Glengarriff. Its most beautiful feature is a still, dark, romantic lake, which is the source of the River Lee. This is where St. Fin Barre founded a monastery, supposedly on the small island connected by a causeway to the mainland. Though nothing remains of the saint's 6th-century community, the setting is idyllic, with rhododendrons spilling into the still waters where swans glide by. The island now holds an elfin chapel and eight small circular cells dating from the early 1700s, as well as a modern chapel. Signposted walks and drives lead through the wooded hills, although you have to pay a small admission charge per car to enter the park. 7km (4¹/₂ miles) west of Ballingeary (signposted off R584).

Inacullin (Garinish Island) ** GARDEN Officially known as Ilnacullin, but usually referred to as Garinish (or "Garnish"), this little island is a beautiful and tranquil place. It used to be little more than a barren outcrop, whose only distinguishing feature was a Martello tower left over from the Napoleonic Wars of the early 19th century. Then, in 1919, the English landscaper Harold Peto was commissioned to create an elaborately planned Italianate garden, with classical pavilions and myriad unusual plants and flowers. The island's unusually mild microclimate allows a number of subtropical plant species to thrive here; George Bernard Shaw is said to have written *St. Joan* under the shade of its palm trees. The island can be reached for a round-trip fee of \in 10 per person (\in 5 children age 6–15) on a covered ferry operated by **Blue Pool Ferry**, the Blue Pool, Glengarriff (www.bluepoolferry.com; © 027/63333), or **Harbour Queen Ferries**, the Harbour, Glengarriff (www.harbourqueenferry.com; © 027/63116). Boats run back and forth about every 20 minutes. *Note:* The Harbour Queen doesn't take credit cards. The nearest ATMs are in Bantry.

Glengarriff. www.garnishisland.com. **© 027/63040.** Admission (gardens) €4 adults; €3 seniors; €2 students and children; €10 families. Apr Mon–Sat 10am–5:30pm; Sun 1–6pm. May, Sept Mon–Sat 10am–6pm; Sun noon–6pm. June Mon–Sat 10am–6pm; Sun 11am–6pm. July–Aug Mon–Sat 9:30am–6pm; Sun 11am–6pm. Oct Mon–Sat 10am–4pm; Sun 1–5pm. Last landing 1 hr. before closing. No landings Nov–Mar.

Mizen Head *** VIEWS At Mizen Head, the very extreme southwest tip of Ireland, the land falls precipitously into the Atlantic breakers in a procession of spectacular 210m (689-ft.) sea cliffs. You can cross a suspension bridge to an old signal station, now a visitor center, and stand on a rock promontory at the southernmost point of the mainland. The sea view is spectacular, and it's worth a trip regardless of the weather. On wild days, tremendous Atlantic waves assault the cliffs, while on clear days, dolphins leap from the waves and seals bask on the rocks. A huge renovation in the early 2010s added new bridges, viewing platforms, and a simulated ship's bridge. On the way out to Mizen Head, you'll pass Barleycove Beach, a gorgeous stretch of sand and rock.

Mizen Head. www.mizenhead.ie. \bigcirc 028/35115 or 35225. Admission \in 6 adults; \in 4.50 seniors and students; \in 3.50 children 5–11; children 4 and under free; \in 18 families. Mid-Mar to May, Sept–Oct daily 10:30am–5pm; June–Aug daily 10am–6pm; Nov to mid-Mar Sat–Sun 11am–4pm. From Cork take N71 to Ballydehob, then R592 and R591 to Golleen and follow signs to Mizen Head.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

BEACHES Barleycove Beach is a vast expanse of pristine sand with a fine view out toward the Mizen Head cliffs; despite the trailer park and holiday homes on the far side of the dunes, large parts of the beach never seem to get crowded. Take R591 to Goleen, and follow signs for Mizen Head. A public parking lot is at the Barleycove Hotel.

Inchydoney Beach, on Clonakilty Bay, is famous for both its gorgeous beach and the luxe Inchydoney Lodge & Spa $\star \star \star$ (see p. 284).

BIRD-WATCHING Cape Clear Island is the prime birding spot in West Cork, and one of the best places in Europe to watch seabirds (see p. 276). The best time for seabirds is July to September, and October is the busiest month for migratory passerines (and for bird-watchers, who flock to the island). A bird observatory is at the North Harbour, with a warden in residence from March to Mary O'Driscoll, who Ciarán and operate B&B the island November. a on (www.capeclearisland.eu; @ 028/39153 or 087/268-0760), also run boat trips for bird-watchers and have a keen eye for vagrants and rarities.

CYCLING The **Mizen Head, Sheep's Head,** and **Beara peninsulas** offer fine roads for cycling, with great scenery and few cars. The Beara Peninsula is the most spectacular; the other two are less likely to be crowded with tourists during peak season. The loop around Mizen Head, starting in Skibbereen, is a good 2- to 3-day trip, and a loop around the Beara Peninsula from Bantry, Glengarriff, or Kenmare takes at least 3 days at a casual pace.

In Skibbereen, 18- and 21-speed bicycles can be rented from **Roycroft Cycles**, Heron Court, Town Car Park (www.westcorkcycles.ie; @ 028/21235); expect to pay around $\in 15$ to $\in 20$ per day, $\in 70$ to $\in 80$ per week, depending on the season and the type of bike.

DIVING The **Baltimore Diving Centre** in Baltimore (www.baltimorediving.com; © 028/20300) provides equipment and boats to certified divers for exploring the many shipwrecks, reefs, and caves off Cork's western coast. The cost starts at around €30 per dive if you bring your own gear, or €50 with hired equipment (plus around €25 for a guide). Various 2-hour to 15-day certified PADI courses are available for all levels of experience.

FISHING The West Cork coast is known for its many shipwrecks, making this one of the best places in Ireland for wreck fishing. **Courtmacsherry Sea Angling Centre,** Woodpoint House, Courtmacsherry (www.courtmacsherryangling.ie; **© 023/46427**), offers packages that include bedand-breakfast in an idyllic 18th-century stone farmhouse, plus a day's sea angling aboard an Aquastar fishing boat. A day's fishing costs around \in 70 per person (\in 80 if you want to go out to a wreck). They also run dolphin and whale watching excursions for \in 35 per person, or \in 100 per hour for groups of up to 12.

KAYAKING With hundreds of islands, inviting inlets, and sea caves, the coast of West Cork is a sea kayaker's paradise. Lough Ine offers warm, still waters for beginners, a tidal rapid for the intrepid, and access to a nearby headland riddled with caves. In Skibbereen, Atlantic Sea Kayaking (www.atlanticseakayaking.com; © 028/21058) specializes in guided trips around Galley Head in Clonakilty and Mizen Head.

SAILING Sail Cork (East Hill, Cobh; www.sailcork.com; © 021/4811237) runs courses on just about every aspect of sailing, yachting, and power boating, for all levels and ages.

local hero: MICHAEL COLLINS

Among the heroes of Ireland's struggle for independence, Michael Collins seems to be Cork's favorite native son. Affectionately referred to as "the Big Fella," Collins was the commander in chief of the army of the Irish Free State, which finally won the Republic's independence from Britain in 1921.

Collins was born in 1890 and, along with seven brothers and sisters, he was raised on a farm in Sam's Cross, just outside the little town of **Clonakilty.** He emigrated to England at 15, like many other young Irish men seeking work in London. In his 20s, he joined the Irish revolutionary group, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (I.R.B.) and first came to fame in 1916 as one of the planners and leaders of the Easter Rising (see p. 35). Although it aroused passions among the population, the Rising was in fact a military disaster, and Collins—young but clever—railed against its amateurism. He was furious about the seizure of prominent buildings—such as Dublin's General Post Office (see p. 111)—that were impossible to defend, impossible to escape from, and difficult to get supplies into.

After the battle, Collins was arrested and sent to an internment camp in Britain, along with hundreds of other rebels. There his stature within the I.R.B. grew, and by the time he was released, he had become one of the leaders of the Republican movement. In 1918, he was elected a member of the British Parliament, but like many other Irish members, he refused to go to London, instead announcing that he would sit only in an Irish parliament in Dublin. Most of the rebel Irish MPs (including Eamon de Valera) were arrested by British troops for their actions, but Collins avoided arrest, and later helped de Valera escape from prison. Over the subsequent years, de Valera and Collins worked together to create an Irish state.

After lengthy political wrangling and much bloodshed (Collins orchestrated an assassination that essentially wiped out the British secret service in Ireland), Collins was sent by de Valera in 1921 to negotiate a treaty with the British government. In the meeting, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George agreed to allow Ireland to become a free republic, as long as that republic did not include the largely Protestant counties of Ulster, which would stay part of the United Kingdom. Knowing he could not get more at the time and determined to end the violence, Collins reluctantly agreed to sign the treaty, hoping to renegotiate later. After signing the document Collins said, "I have just signed my death warrant."

As he'd expected, the plan tore the new Republic apart, dividing the group now known as the IRA into two factions—those who wanted to continue fighting for all of Ireland, and those who favored the treaty. Fighting soon broke out in Dublin, and the civil war was underway.

Collins had learned many lessons from the Easter debacle, and now his strategy was completely different. His soldiers operated as "flying columns," waging a guerrilla war against the enemy—suddenly attacking, and then just as suddenly withdrawing, thus minimizing their losses and leaving the opposition baffled.

The battles stretched on for 10 months. In August 1922, Collins, weary of the war, was on a peace mission in his home county. Stopping at a pub near his mother's birthplace, he and his escort were on the road near Béal na Bláth when Collins was shot and killed. Precisely who killed him—his own men or the opposition—was never known. On his rapid rise to the top, he'd made too many enemies. He was 31 years old.

The **Michael Collins Centre** (www.michaelcollinscentre.com; **O** 023/884-6107), located on the farm where he grew up, is a good place to learn more about the man. In addition to an hour-long tour, featuring a film and a visit to the actual ambush site, the center runs in-depth guided trips around the local area. (These last $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours and are probably for Collins devotees only.) The center is signposted off N71, 5.6km ($3\frac{1}{2}$ miles) west of Clonakilty. It's open mid-June to mid-September, Mondays to Fridays from 10:30am to 5pm, and Saturdays from 11am to 2pm. Admission is free.

WALKING Besides the walks around **Cummingeera** (p. 277) and **Gougane Barra** (p. 279) described above, a spectacular coastal walk begins along the banks of **Lough Ine**, one of the largest saltwater lakes in Europe. Connected to the sea by a narrow tidal creek, the lake lies cupped in a lush valley of exceptional beauty. To get there, follow signs for Lough Ine along R595 between Skibbereen and Baltimore; a parking lot is at the northwest corner of the lake. The wide trail proceeds gradually upward from the parking lot through the woods on the west slope of the valley, with several viewpoints toward the lake and the sea beyond. Once you reach the hilltop, you'll see a sweeping view of the coast from Mizen Head to Galley Head. Walking time to the top and back is about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

An easy seaside walk on the Beara Peninsula begins at Dunboy Castle, just over a mile west of

Castletownbere on R572. This ruined 19th-century manor house overlooks the bay; just down the road are the sparse ruins of a medieval fortress. Beyond, the trail (a section of the O'Sullivan Beara trail) continues to the tip of Fair Head through rhododendrons, with fine views across to Bere Island. A walk from the gatehouse parking lot to the tip of Fair Head and back takes about 2 hours.

WINDSURFING Weeklong courses and equipment rental are available at the **Oysterhaven Activity Centre** (see p. 267) near Kinsale. Beginners can get started at a sheltered beach in Courtmacsherry and another nearby beach is good for wave jumping.

Where to Stay in West Cork

Glebe Country House $\star\star$ A short drive west of Kinsale, this place was built as a rectory in the late 17th century. Bedrooms are comfortable and traditionally furnished, with views of the idyllic gardens. The owners are real foodies: The breakfast menu is longer and more imaginative than most places this size (try the cheesy French toast), and the five-course dinners, made with plenty of local produce, are delicious. They're also thoroughly reasonable, at €35 per head, although you must book by noon. If you're after a bit more seclusion, two self-catering cottages are on the grounds.

Balinadee (off Balinadee center), Bandon. www.glebecountryhouse.ie. \bigcirc 021/477-8294. 9 units. \bigcirc 70– \bigcirc 80 double. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. \bigcirc 400– \bigcirc 570 per week self-catering apts. Amenities: Restaurant; Wi-Fi (free).

Inchydoney $\star\star\star$ So close to the beach you could almost dive into the Atlantic from the balcony, this famously luxurious spa hotel is one of the best in the region. The spa specializes in Thalasso treatments, using seawater, although the full list of what's on offer is enough to make you feel more relaxed just by reading it. Guestrooms are sophisticated and modern, with huge windows that open out onto amazing views of the sea (of course). The Gulfstream Restaurant serves French- and Mediterranean-influenced cooking, with fresh seafood being a particular specialty. There's also a pub and bistro if you're after something simpler. Unlike some high-end spas, Inchydoney is a great option for families, with its dedicated Children's Lounge daycare; the hotel can also arrange family-friendly activities such as kayaking, whale watching, and cycle hire.

Clonakilty. www.inchydoneyisland.com. \bigcirc 023/883-3143. 67 units. $\in 160-\in 280$ double; $\in 380$ suite. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. Dinner, bed and breakfast packages available. Amenities: 2 restaurants; bar; room service; spa; pool; Wi-Fi (free).

Longueville House Hotel ** The bright pink frontage of this grand but delightfully relaxed country house, built in 1720, is your first indication that this isn't a place to stand on ceremony, and your hosts the O'Callaghans soon make you feel right at home. William O'Callaghan trained with the renowned French chef Raymond Blanc, and he puts the skills he learned from such a master to wonderful use in the kitchens here (see **The President's Restaurant *****, facing page). They also do a proper afternoon tea and Sunday lunch. Spacious bedrooms reflect the heritage of the building, with appealingly traditional style and antique furniture. The hotel and restaurant are closed on Monday and Tuesday, April to October, and from Sunday night to Thursday, November to March.

Mallow. www.longuevillehouse.ie. \bigcirc 022/47156. 22 units. \in 190 double; \in 230 suite. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. Dinner, bed and breakfast packages available. Amenities: Restaurant; room service; Internet available in business center.

Where to Dine in West Cork

Blair's Cove ** IRISH This has to have one of the most picturesque dining rooms in Ireland—a former barn, which may or may not have originated as an 18th-century watchtower. The menu isn't cutting edge, but that's kind of the point. Instead what you get (after a charmingly retro buffet of starters) are traditional Irish flavors elegantly updated, such as grilled lamb with *caponata* (eggplant stew) and arugula pesto, tuna steak with beets, or a bouillabaisse made from local seafood. Desserts

are rich. If you want to make even more of a night of it, they also offer B&B lodging for €190 to €260 per night.

Barley Cove Rd., Durrus. www.blairscove.ie. **© 027/61127.** Fixed-price menus: Two courses €46; Three courses €58. Mid-Mar to Oct Tues–Sun 6:30–10pm. Closed Nov to mid-Mar.

Good Things Café ** MODERN IRISH It's not hard to see why this restaurant gets things so right: a simple menu of delicious, healthful meals, using plenty of local produce. The house special "Growers' Pie" is a vegetarian cornucopia, made with red peppers, zucchini, eggplant, and mozzarella from Toonsbridge, near Macroom; meanwhile carnivores can devour a plate of monkfish with fennel, turmeric, and basil; or lamb served with Turkish *hosaf* (stewed fruit compote). They also run their own cookery school; 1-day courses start at about $\in 140$.

Ahakista Rd., Durrus. www.thegoodthingscafe.com. \bigcirc 027/61426. Main courses \bigcirc 16– \bigcirc 26. Thurs–Mon noon–2pm, 6:30–9pm. Hours can vary in winter; call to check times.

The Heron's Cove $\star\star$ SEAFOOD It's all about the bounty of the sea at this laid-back restaurant about 15km (9 miles) from **Mizen Head** $\star\star\star$ (see p. 280). All the seafood is caught on the West Cork coastline; expect Bantry Bay salmon, tempura monkfish, or perhaps the "collops 'n' scallops"— a local variation on surf 'n' turf, made with Goleen lamb chops and Dunmanus Bay scallops. You can sit outside on a terrace overlooking the harbor if the weather's good. They also offer B&B lodging in pleasant guestrooms with views of the harbor for €80 to €90 per night, or €105 to €120 per night for a family room.

Harbour Rd., Goleen. www.heronscove.com. \bigcirc 021/427-7939. Main courses \notin 17– \notin 28. Mar–Oct daily 7–9:30pm. Hours can vary in winter; call to check times.

Mary Anne's ★ SEAFOOD/PUB FOOD The handsome exterior of this friendly pub in Castletownshend, near Skibbereen, is a photo op waiting to happen, with its ochre paint and neat black windows. Inside it all feels as satisfyingly publike as you'd expect—and the food is excellent too. This being the West Cork coast, Mary Anne's specializes in super-fresh local seafood—you might start with a crab salad, then follow it with a steaming fish pie, or perhaps some simple (but delicious) fish and chips. They also have steaks and other meaty options. You can eat in a little courtyard terrace if you're blessed with sunshine.

Castletownshend, Skibbereen. \bigcirc 028/36146. Main courses $\in 15 - \in 26$. Daily 12:30–2:30pm, 6–9pm. Closed public holidays and Mon Nov–Mar. Hours can vary in winter; call to check times.

The President's Restaurant *** FRENCH/IRISH The restaurant of the excellent **Longueville House Hotel **** (see facing page) is one of the finest in the region. Chef William O'Callaghan—who, along with his wife, Aisling, also runs the hotel—trained under French chef Raymond Blanc at Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, one of the most famous restaurants in England. Local ingredients (many from their own farm and kitchen garden) feature heavily in the Irish-French menus, including Blackwater River salmon, Longueville lamb, and even honey from their own hive. They also serve lunch on Sundays, and a lighter menu in the evening (except on holiday weekends, when Sunday night dinner is the full whack). Just make sure you book ahead, at least 24 hours in advance for all sittings. The hotel and restaurant are closed on Monday and Tuesday, April to October, and from Sunday night to Thursday, November to March.

Mallow. www.longuevillehouse.ie. **Ø 022/47156.** Set menu €55; tasting menu €70. Reservations essential. Wed–Thurs 6:30–8:30pm; Fri–Sat 6:30–9pm; Sun 12:30–2:15pm, 8–8:30pm.

COUNTY KERRY

10

新聞書店





Killarney National Park anchors the Ring of Kerry.

W ith its softly rolling green fields, sweeping seascapes, and vibrant little towns, it's easy to see why so many visitors make a beeline for County Kerry. Charming villages like colorful Kenmare and bustling historic towns like Killarney seem as familiar as the Irish folk songs written about them. Craggy mountain ranges punctuated by peaceful green valleys are just what you hope for when you come to Ireland. Unfortunately, this idyllic beauty cuts both ways: This is extremely well-trodden territory and up to a couple of million tourists flock here every year. With that in mind, the height of summer can be the worst time of all to visit—ideally, you want to hit these hills in the late spring or fall. But there's an antidote for even the busiest times: Should you find that the crowded roads on the **Ring of Kerry** are getting to you, simply turn off onto a small country lane, and within seconds you'll find yourself virtually alone in the peaceful Irish countryside.

ESSENTIALS

Arriving

BY BUS Bus Éireann (www.buseireann.ie; © 064/663-0011) operates regularly scheduled service into Killarney and Dingle from all parts of Ireland.

BY TRAIN Trains from Dublin, Cork, and Galway arrive daily at the Killarney Railway Station (www.irishrail.ie; © 064/663-1067), Railway Road, off East Avenue Road. Kenmare and Dingle do not have train stations.

BY CAR Unless you join an organized tour (see facing page), a car is the only feasible way to get around the Ring of Kerry. Getting to Killarney from Cork is easy—just head northeast out of Cork City on N22; the distance is about 85km (53 miles). To get to Killarney from Dublin, take M7 southwest to Limerick and then N21; the journey is about 310km (193 miles). Kenmare and Killarney are connected by the main N71 Ring of Kerry Road; they're only 33km (20¹/₂ miles) apart, but allow plenty of time due to the winding nature of the road (and, in summer, tour-bus traffic). To hire a car in Killarney, try **Budget** at the International Hotel on Kenmare Place (www.budget.ie; © 064/663-4341) or Enterprise on Upper Park Road (www.enterprise.ie; © 066/711-9304).

BY PLANE Aer Lingus (www.aerlingus.com; © 081/836-5000) has two flights per day from Dublin into the miniscule Kerry County Airport in Farandole (www.kerryairport.ie; © 066/976-4644), about 16km (10 miles) north of Killarney. Flights from London's Lupton and Stanstead Airports are operated by Ryanair (www.ryanair.com; © 0871/246-0000 in the U.K. or 1520/444-004).

Visitor Information

The Killarney Tourist Office is at the Discover Ireland Centre, Beech Road, Killarney (www.killarney.ie; © 064/663-1633). The Kenmare Tourist Office is at the Kenmare Heritage Centre, Market Square, Kenmare (www.kenmare.ie; © 064/664-1233). The Tralee Tourist Office is at the Ashe Memorial Hall on Denny Street, Tralee (© 066/712-1288). And the Dingle Tourist Office is on the Quay, Dingle (www.dingle-peninsula.ie; © 066/915-1188). All stay open year-round.

Organized Tours

If you're not confident in hiring a car and driving yourself around the Ring of Kerry, a plethora of companies will take you to see the major sights on organized bus tours. Most depart from **Killarney**, the most popular base for exploring the Ring (see p. 292). Prices vary enormously according to what you choose, but expect to pay somewhere in the region of $\in 20$ to $\in 40$ per person.

Two recommended operators are **Corcoran's Chauffeur Tours**, 8 College St. (www.corcorantours.com; © 064/663-6666); and Doro's Tours, 22 Main St. (www.derostours.com; © 064/663-1251 or 663-1567). Both run full-day tours of the Ring of Kerry, tours to Dingle and the Slea Head Peninsula, and a variety of tours centered around Killarney National Park. The downside, of course, is that you won't possibly have enough time to see everything properly.

[FastFACTS] COUNTY KERRY

ATMs/Banks In Killarney, a branch of Allied Irish Banks (AIB) is at 25 Main St. (© 064/663-1047). In Kenmare try Bank of Ireland in The Square (© 064/664-1255). On Main Street in Dingle is a Bank of Ireland (© 066/915-1100) and an AIB (© 066/915-1400).

Dentists For dental emergencies, your hotel should contact a dentist for you; otherwise, in Killarney contact Fuller Dental Care, St. Anne's Rd., Killarney (© 064/663-2955); in Kenmare, try Kenmare Family Dental, Coffey's Row (© 064/664-1650); in Dingle, call the Dingle Dental Practise, Main St. Upper (© 066/915-1527).

Doctors For medical emergencies, dial **©** 999. For non-emergencies, your hotel should call you a doctor. Otherwise in Killarney there's the Killarney Medical Centre at 47 New St. (**©** 064/662-0628); in Kenmare, the Medical Centre on Railway Rd. (**©** 064/664-1333); and in Dingle, the Dingle Medical Centre on the Mall (**©** 066/915-2225).

Emergencies For police, fire, or other emergencies, dial @ 999.

Internet Access O'Sheas on Main St., Kenmare (© 064/664-0808) has a small Internet cafe; in Dingle try The Old Forge Internet Café on Holyground (© 066/915-0523).

Pharmacies In Killarney, there's O'Sullivan's Pharmacy, 81 New St. (© 064/663-5886); in Kenmare, look for Brosnan on Henry St. (© 064/664-1318); in Dingle, try O'Keefe on Strand St. (© 066/915-1310).

Post Office In Killarney, the main post office is on New St. (© 064/663-1461); in Kenmare it's on Henry St. (© 064/664-1490); and in Dingle it's on Main St. (© 066/915-1661).

Taxis In Killarney, taxis line up at the rank on College Square (© 064/663-1331). You can also phone Killarney Cabs (© 064/663-7444), or Kerry Autocabs (© 087/296-3636). In Kenmare, try Kenmare Coach and Cab (© 087/248-0800). In Tralee contact Tralee Radio Taxis (© 066/712-5451). And in Dingle, phone Dingle Peninsula Cabs (© 087/250-4767). This company also does an airport pickup service that (unusually) doesn't charge extra for waiting time if your flight is late.

THE IVERAGH PENINISULA & THE RING OF KERRY

Millions of tourists who come to County Kerry each year are dependent upon the turn of a bus driver's wheel for their tour of the Iveragh Peninsula—which means they see nothing save for the famed two-lane road known as the Ring of Kerry. There's certainly plenty to see there, but it's worth mentioning that the 178km (110-mile) road traces only the edges. In total, the peninsula is nearly 1,813 sq. km (700 sq. miles) of wild splendor, which you'll only see if you get off the tourist strip. Admittedly, almost everyone who gets this far feels compelled to "do" the Ring of Kerry, so once it's done, why not take an unplanned turn, get a little lost, and let serendipity lead you to the county's unspoiled heart?

The **Ring of Kerry** is both the actual name of the road—or, if you want to be pedantic, a section of the N70, N71, and N72 highways—and the collective name given to the many attractions in the area. Nearly all of County Kerry's most popular sights are either on or within a short distance of the Ring. Its largest hub, **Killarney**, is best known for its glorious surroundings, in particular the spectacular landscapes of **Killarney National Park**, which includes the **Killarney Lakes** and the scenic **Gap of Dunloe**. Most people traveling the route start and finish at Killarney, but the town of **Kenmare** makes for a more charming (and certainly quieter) base.



Ballinskelligs 13 Blueberry Hill Farm 16 Blennerville Windmill 4 Carrigafoyle Castle 1 Crag Cave 2 Derrynane House National Historical Park 14 Dingle Oceanworld Aquarium 8 Dunbeg Fort 10 Eask Tower 9 Fungie the Dingle Dolphin Cruise 8 Gallarus Oratory 6 Gap of Dunloe 17 Ionad An Bhlascaoid Mhoir/The Blasket Centre 11 Irish Famine Cottage 7 Kenmare Druid Circle 21 Kenmare Farmer's Market 21 Kerry County Museum 3 Knockreer Estate 18 Muckross House, Gardens, and Farms 19 Seafari Eco-nature Cruises 20 The Seanchaí Writers' Museum 5 The Skellig Experience 12 Staigue Fort 15

Killarney

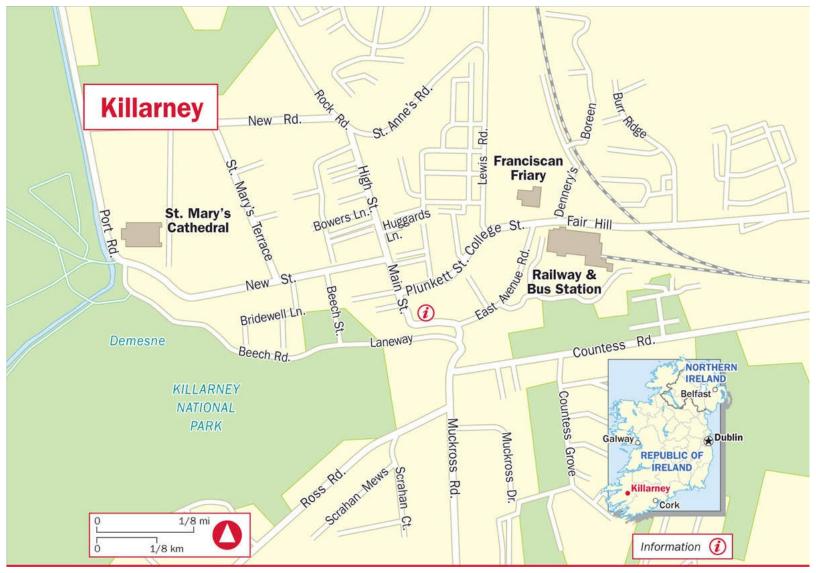
Although it's colorful and bustling, Killarney town is a victim of its own success. Tourism is more inyour-face here than perhaps anywhere else in Kerry, with generic, leprechaun-laden souvenir shops and overpriced restaurants on every corner. Killarney's sidewalks are spacious enough in the winter, but in the summertime, they're absolutely packed, as the streets become one giant tour-bus traffic jam and horse-and-buggy drivers risk life and limb to push their way through.

The locals are well practiced at dispensing a professional brand of Irish charm, even as they hike up the hotel and restaurant prices to capitalize on the hordes descending from the buses. (Speaking of hotels, it's often claimed that there are more here than anywhere in Ireland, aside from Dublin though we doubt anyone's really counted.) It's a bit much for some people, and hardly the bucolic, gentle Ireland that many are looking for. Luckily, it's easy enough to resist Killarney's gravitational pull and spend your time exploring the quieter countryside around it. You can always sneak into town from time to time for dinner or a night out in the pub.

Killarney's popularity has little to do with the town itself; the attraction is the valley in which it nestles—a verdant landscape of lakes and mountains so spectacular that author and playwright Brendan Behan once said, "Even an ad man would be ashamed to eulogize it." Escaping the crowded streets to explore the quiet rural splendor of the 65-sq.-km (25-sq.-mile) Killarney National Park could hardly be easier. The main visitor center is just 7km (4½ miles) south of the city, or you could merely walk to the cathedral and keep going—it backs onto the Knockreer Estate \star (see p. 294), which is itself a section of the park.

TOWN LAYOUT

Killarney may be the most important town in the region, but banish from your mind any visions of wide boulevards and sprawling, populous suburbs—the full-time population is only about 13,000. This is partly why Killarney can feel so overcrowded: It was simply never built to hold visitors in such numbers, and new developments around the margins have been strictly limited. The town is laid out around one central thoroughfare, Main Street, which changes its name to High Street at midpoint. The principal offshoots of Main Street are New Street and Plunkett Street, which becomes College Street. The Deenagh River edges the western side of town and East Avenue Road edges the eastern side.



The busiest section of town is at the southern tip of Main Street, where it meets East Avenue Road. Here the road curves and heads southward out to the Muckross road and the entrance to Killarney National Park.

Killarney town is so compact that there is no local bus service; the best way to get around is on foot. For a quick and easy tour, follow the signposted Tourist Trail for the highlights of the main streets. It takes less than 2 hours to complete. Pick up a booklet outlining the sights along the trail at the tourist office.

EXPLORING KILLARNEY & KILLARNEY NATIONAL PARK

Gap of Dunloe ** VIEWS A narrow pass between the Purple Mountains and MacGillycuddy's Reeks, the winding Gap of Dunloe rises through mountains and wetlands on the western side of Killarney National Park. The route through the gap passes craggy hills, meandering streams, and deep gullies, and it ends in the park at the Upper Lake. Some of the roads can be difficult around here, so many people choose to explore by bicycle (try Killarney Rent-a-Bike, Lower New Street; www.killarneyrentabike.com; @ 064/663-1282) or by "jarvey" (see p. 295). These can be booked at the National Park Visitor Centre at Muckross House $\star\star$ (see p. 295) or from Killarney Jaunting Cars, Muckross Close (www.killarnevjauntingcars.ie; © 064/663-3358).

Signposted from N72 (Ring of Kerry Rd.), Killarney, Co. Kerry.



Gap of Dunloe reflected in Auger Lake, Killarney.

Innisfallen ****** HERITAGE/NATURE SITE Shrouded in forest, this small island appears to float peacefully on the Lower Lake. Behind the trees is what's left of a 7th-century monastery that flourished for 1,000 years. It's thought that Brian Boru, the great Irish chieftain, and St. Brendan the Navigator received their education here. From 950 to 1320, the "Annals of Innisfallen," a chronicle of early Irish history, was written at the monastery. You can reach Innisfallen by rowboat, available for rental at Ross Castle ***** (see p. 297).

Lower Lake, opposite Ross Castle, Ross Rd. (signposted from N71, Ring of Kerry Rd.), Killarney, Co. Kerry.

Killarney Lakes Cruise \star BOAT TOURS From the harbor at **Ross Castle** \star (see p. 297), the *MV Pride of the Lake* takes you on an hour-long waterborne cruise. The covered boat ride is a little on the touristy side—and very popular, so you might want to make reservations—but the views of the park from the lake are gorgeous. You can also take a tour that combines a lake cruise with a "jaunting car" ride around the park. *Tip:* You can get to the pier by Ross Castle on a free shuttle bus from Killarney town center. It leaves Scotts Street (by the junction with East Avenue Road) a quarter of an hour before each sailing. Lake cruises are strictly limited to 80 people, so you may want to book ahead at busy times—but make sure you're able to bring a printout of the confirmation or they won't let you board.

The Pier, Ross Castle, Ross Rd., off N71 (Ring of Kerry Rd.). www.killarneylaketours.ie. **© 064/662-7737.** Tickets €10; children 2 and under free. Apr and Oct 2:30pm; May–Sept sailings 12:30 and 2:30pm. Times may change according to weather.

Knockreer Estate \star GARDENS The grand old house that once stood here burned down in the early 20th century; what you see today is a modern building of the same name on the same site, which serves as the park's education center. Still, the estate's lovely old gardens still exist, with 200-year-

old trees setting off sweet wildflowers and azaleas to fragrant effect. A signposted walk takes you past beautiful views of the Lower Lake and the valley; a pathway leads down to the River Deenagh. Main access to Knockreer is through Deenagh Lodge Gate, opposite the cathedral. Main entrance near St. Mary's Cathedral on Cathedral Place, off New St. Free admission.

killarney NATIONAL PARK

A huge, rambling wilderness with breathtaking scenery just steps from the hubbub of Killarney, this national park is an essential stop along the Ring of Kerry. Cars are banned from most of the trails that traverse the park, so hike or hire a **"jarvey,"** or "jaunting car"—an old-fashioned horse-and-buggy available at not-too-steep prices. The drivers congregate behind the visitor center at Muckross House.

Within the park's limits are two estates, **Muckross** and **Knockreer** (see facing page). The main visitor center for the park is in **Muckross House** (**© 064/663-1440**) and is clearly signposted. Drop by here to pick up maps before you get started. The visitor center is open daily from 9am to 5:30pm; hours may vary in winter.

Three lakes dot the park. The largest, the **Lower Lake**, is sometimes called Lough Leane or Lough Lein, translated as "the lake of learning." It's more than $6 \text{km} (3^3/4 \text{ miles})$ long and holds 30 small islands that seem to rise from the mist. The most celebrated of Killarney's islands, the lovely **Innisfallen** $\star \star$ (see facing page), can be found on Lower Lake. Nearby are the **Middle Lake** or Muckross Lake, and the smallest of the three, the **Upper Lake**.

Here are three walks you could take to explore the best of Killarney Park:

July–Aug daily 9am–7pm. Last admission 1 hr. before closing.

Blue Pool Nature Trail: Starting behind the Muckross Park Hotel, this trail winds for a relaxing 2.3km (1.5 miles) through coniferous woodland beside a small lake. The trail is named for the lake's unusually deep blue-green color, a result of copper deposits in the soil.

Cloghereen Nature Trail: Incorporated into a small section of the Blue Pool trail (see above), this walk is fully accessible to blind visitors. A guide rope leads you along the route, lined by plants identifiable by scent and touch. An audio guide is available from the Muckross House visitor center for a small deposit.

Mossy Woods Nature Trail: One of the park's gentler trails, this route starts from Muckross Lake and runs just under 2km (1.2 miles). The moss-covered trees and rocks it passes are a major habitat for bird life. You'll also see several strawberry trees *(Arbutus)*, something of a botanical mystery, along the route. They're commonplace around these parts but found almost nowhere else in Northern Europe. The route offers some incredible views of the Torc Mountains and MacGillycuddy's Reeks.

Muckross House & Gardens $\star\star$ HISTORIC HOUSE This elegant, Neo-Gothic Victorian house at the entrance to Killarney National Park was built in 1843. Guided tours offer an enlightening glimpse at how both masters and servants of the house once lived—the grand, *Downton Abbey*—like formal dining room contrasts starkly with the Victorian kitchens and servants' quarters below stairs. The landscaped gardens are beautiful and a riot of color in high summer. The pleasant cafe, overlooking some manicured flowerbeds, is a lovely spot to linger. A traditional weavers' and craft shop is also on the grounds along with the ruin of the 15th-century **Muckross Abbey**, founded about 1448 and burned by Cromwell's troops in 1652, near the house. The abbey's central feature is a vaulted cloister around a courtyard that contains a huge yew tree, thought to be as old as the abbey itself. William Makepeace Thackeray once called it "the prettiest little bijou of a ruined abbey ever seen." On N71 (Ring of Kerry Rd.), 6km (3³/₄ miles) south of Killarney. www.muckross-house.ie. **@ 064/667-0144.** Admission 69 adults; 67.50 seniors, students and children 15 and over; 66 children 14 and under; 628–632 familiess. Joint ticket with Muckross Traditional Farms:

€15 adults; €13 seniors, students and children 15 and over; €11 children 14 and under; €45–€50 families. Sept–June daily 9am–5:30pm;



Muckross House and gardens in National Park Killarney.

Muckross Traditional Farms $\star\star$ HERITAGE SITE Not far from the Muckross House estate, these farms are designed to demonstrate a real feel for traditional life as it was in previous centuries in County Kerry. It's cleverly done—the farmhouses and barns are so authentically detailed that you feel as if you've dropped in on the real deal. Work really does go on here: Farmhands work the fields while the blacksmith, carpenter, and wheelwright ply their trades. Women draw water from the wells and cook meals in historically accurate kitchens. There's also a petting zoo, where kids can get to handle some of the animals. A coach constantly circles the grounds, ferrying those with mobility problems between the different areas of the farm. *Note:* A combination ticket allows you to visit Muckross House and Gardens for a small extra fee.

Kenmare Rd. (N71). www.muckross-house.ie. \bigcirc 064/663-0804. Admission \notin 9 adults; \notin 7.50 seniors, students and children 15 and over; \notin 6 children 14 and under; \notin 28– \notin 32 familiess. Joint ticket with Muckross House: \notin 15 adults; \notin 13 seniors, students and children 15 and over; \notin 11 children 14 and under; \notin 45– \notin 50 families. Mar–Apr, Oct weekends and public holidays 1–6pm; May, Sept daily 1–6pm; June–Aug daily 10am–6pm. Last admission 1 hr. before closing. Closed Nov–Apr.



Ross Castle \star CASTLE Just outside Killarney Town, this 15th-century fortress still guards the edge of the Lower Lake. Built by the O'Donoghue chieftains, the castle was the last stronghold in Munster to surrender to Cromwell's forces in 1652. But it could not withstand time as well as the English army, and all that remains today is a tower house surrounded by a fortified *bawn* (walled garden) with rounded turrets. The tower has been furnished in the style of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Although you can wander the grounds at will, you can only see inside the castle on a guided tour. The tours tend to be a bit tedious, as the guides seem to scrounge around a bit for facts interesting enough to justify the ticket price. In good weather, the best way to reach it is via a lakeside walk (it's 3km/2 miles from Killarney to the castle). From the castle, you can take boat tours of the lake (see p. 294).

Ross Rd., signposted from N71 (Ring of Kerry Rd.). www.heritageireland.ie. \bigcirc 064/663-5851. Admission \notin 4 adults; \notin 3 seniors; \notin 2 students and children; \notin 10 families. Mid-Mar to Oct daily 9:30am-5:45pm. Last admission 45 min. before closing. No photography.

St. Mary's Cathedral \star CATHEDRAL If you think this limestone cathedral looks more Castle Dracula than parish church, it may be because New Street was once the home of Bram Stoker. He spent summers in Killarney while he was a student at Trinity College Dublin. Officially known as the

Catholic Church of St. Mary of the Assumption, it's designed in the Gothic Revival style and laid out in the shape of a cross. Construction began in 1842, was interrupted by the Famine, and finally concluded in 1855 (although the towering spire wasn't added until 1912).

Cathedral Place, off New St. C 064/663-1014. Free admission. Daily 10:30am-6pm.

SPORTS & OUTDOOR PURSUITS

Spectator Sports

GAELIC GAMES The people of Killarney are passionately devoted to the national sports of hurling and Gaelic football, and games are played almost every Sunday afternoon during the summer at **Fitzgerald Stadium,** Lewis Road (www.gaa.ie; © 064/663-1700). For complete details, consult the local *Kerryman* newspaper or the Killarney Tourist Office.

HORSE RACING Killarney has two annual horse racing meets, in early May and mid-July. Each event lasts for 3 or 4 days and draws large crowds. For more information, contact the **Killarney Racecourse**, Fossa (www.killarneyraces.ie; © 064/663-1125), or the tourist office.

What's in a Name: MacGillycuddy's Reeks

This marvelously named mountain range just west of Killarney is a magnificent sight to behold. Formed of red sandstone, the mountains were gradually shaved down by glaciers until the peaks reached the gentle shape they hold today. The name, however, sounds anything but dignified. It may help to know that the mountains were named after an ancient and noble clan that once predominated in this area, the Mac Gilla Machudas, and the word "reek" has nothing to do with a stinky smell—it's an old Irish term for a peaked hill.

Outdoor Pursuits

CYCLING Killarney National Park, with its lakeside and forest pathways, trails, and roads, is a paradise for bikers. If you haven't brought your own wheels, you can rent whatever you need here, from 21-speed touring bikes to mountain bikes to tandems. Rental charges average around $\in 20$ to $\in 25$ per day, $\in 80$ to $\notin 90$ per week. Bicycles can be rented from **O'Sullivan's Cycles**, Beech Road (www.killarneyrentabike.com; **O 064/663-1282**) or Lyne's Rent-a-Bike, Muckross Road (www.rentabikekillarney.com; **O 087/122-1277**).

One great ride beginning in Killarney takes you through the Gap of Dunloe along a dirt forest road, where you'll see some of the best mountain scenery in the area. It can be made into a 56km (35-mile) loop if you return on N71. Ask at the bike rental store or the tourism office for more information.

FISHING Fishing for salmon and brown trout in Killarney's unpolluted lakes and rivers is a popular pastime. Brown trout fishing is free on the lakes, but a permit is necessary for the rivers Flesk and Laune. Salmon fishing anywhere requires a permit.

Permits, tackle, bait, rod rental, and other fishing gear can be obtained from **O'Neill's**, 6 Plunkett St. (@ 064/663-1970). The shop also arranges rentals of boats and *ghillies* (fishing guides) for around \notin 50 to \notin 100 per day on the Killarney Lakes, leaving from Ross Castle.

GOLF Visitors are always welcome at the twin 18-hole championship courses of the Killarney Golf & Fishing Club, Killorglin Road, Fossa (www.killarney-golf.com; © 064/663-1034), 5km (3 miles) west of the town center. Widely praised as one of the most scenic golf settings in the world, these courses, known as Killeen and Mahony's Point, have gorgeous lake and mountain settings. Greens fees are \in 45 to \in 100, depending on the course and the time of day.

HORSEBACK RIDING Many trails in the Killarney area are suitable for horseback riding. Hiring a

horse costs about €35 per hour at **Killarney Riding Stables**, N72, Ballydowney (www.killarney-trail-riding.com; © 064/663-1686). Lessons and weeklong trail rides can also be arranged.

Other trails within the park include the **Old Boat House Nature Trail**, which begins at the 19thcentury boathouse below Muckross Gardens and leads $.8 \text{km} (\frac{1}{2} \text{ mile})$ around a small peninsula by Muckross Lake. **Arthur Young's Walk** (4.8 km/3 miles) starts on the road to Dinis, traverses natural yew woods, then follows a 200-year-old road on the Muckross Peninsula. Audio guides for all the trails can be obtained from Muckross House for a small deposit.

If you prefer a little guidance, you could choose a guided walking tour of some length (from 1 day to a weekend to a full week). A number of walks and walking holidays of varying lengths are offered by **SouthWestWalks Ireland** (www.southwestwalksireland.com; **© 066/718-6181**). Or you can arrange in advance to meet up with the Wayfarers, an international organization of passionate pedestrians based in the U.S., which schedules 5-week-long footloose circuits of the Ring of Kerry each spring, summer, and fall. To receive a schedule, contact the Wayfarers, 174 Bellevue Ave., Newport, RI 02840 (www.thewayfarers.com; **© 800/249-4620**).

For long-distance walkers, the 202km (125-mile) **Kerry Way** is a signposted walking route that extends from Killarney around the Ring of Kerry (see p. 319).

WHERE TO STAY IN KILLARNEY

As the main tourist hub of County Kerry, it should come as no surprise that Killarney offers by far the greatest choice of accommodations.

Aghadoe Heights ******* This seductive retreat just north of Killarney is worth the splurge; luxurious and welcoming, it's one of the best spas in Ireland. The large guest rooms are decorated in soothing tones of white, gray, and oatmeal. Beds are extremely comfortable and bathrooms impeccably modern. It's worth spending a little extra to get a room at the front to appreciate the stunning views of the Lower Lake in Killarney National Park. There is a huge list of treatments in the opulent, futuristic spa (they even have a "precious stone chamber" for some of the more exotic-sounding options), and the thermal suite is full of high-tech touches such as showers infused with refreshing essential oils. On site are two excellent restaurants and a bar overlooking the lake.

Aghadoe. www.aghadoeheights.com. \bigcirc 064/663-1766. 74 units. \in 230– \in 300 double; \in 300– \in 550 suite. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. Spa and dinner, bed and breakfast packages available. Amenities: 2 restaurants; bar; pool; spa; room service; Wi-Fi (free). Head north out of Killarney on N22; Aghadoe Heights is signposted about 2.7km (1 mile) after the second of the two roundabouts on the north side of the town center (just after the turning for Birch Hill).

Cahernane House $\star\star$ A neo-Gothic mansion on the outskirts of Killarney National Park, Cahernane has been exquisitely transformed into a luxury retreat. The decor is authentically grandiose. The public areas have the feel of an old gentlemen's club filled with antique furniture, stag heads on the wall, and roaring fires in the open grates. Guest rooms are more modern, though no less elegant, and some bathrooms come with deep claw-foot tubs. Many of the rooms have private patios. The house has two restaurants—the excellent, formal **Herbert Room**, and the more relaxed **Cellar Bar**, where you can take lighter meals among the beautifully lit arches of the old wine cellar. Fields and farmland surround the hotel, and the misty mountains of the park linger in the distance. Dinner, bed and breakfast packages start at around \in 115 per person.

Muckross Rd. www.cahernane.com. \bigcirc 064/663-1895. 38 units. \in 140– \in 185 double; \in 260– \in 280 suite. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; Wi-Fi (free).

Earls Court House ** Just outside the center of Killarney, on a quiet street with views of the

mountains, Earls Court House is a pleasingly old-fashioned kind of B&B. Guest rooms are simple but elegant, featuring polished wood furniture and buttermilk-colored walls. A few have canopy or four-poster beds. Flatscreen TVs mounted to the walls add a modern touch. You can take afternoon tea in one of the two guest lounges (included in the price of your room), and light suppers are served until early evening. The excellent, varied breakfasts include fresh, home-baked bread and pastries. Check the website for special offers; one or two deals are on offer per season.

Woodlawn Rd. www.killarney-earlscourt.ie. **② 064/663-4009.** 24 units. €120–€130 double. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. 2-night minimum on some summer weekends. **Amenities:** Library; Wi-Fi (free).

Friars Glen $\star\star\star$ Nestled in the cleft of a lush and verdant glen inside Killarney National Park, this delightful B&B could hardly be friendlier or better run. Hosts John and Mary (and their two dogs) welcome guests like old friends; they really enjoy what they do and take pride in helping visitors plan their explorations of the park and the Ring of Kerry. They will even organize tours on your behalf and can provide babysitting in the evenings with a bit of notice. The building itself looks like an old farmhouse, but it is actually contemporary and very well designed, with plenty of authentic materials and exposed stone. Guest rooms are cozy and simple, complete with wood furniture and decent-sized bathrooms. Ask for a room with a view; the vistas across the surrounding glen are inspiring. Breakfast is served until a very civilized 10am. Dinner isn't offered, but the place is only a short drive from Killarney.

Mangerton Rd., Muckross. www.friarsglen.ie. \bigcirc 064/663-7500. 10 units. \notin 100– \notin 110 double. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free). From N71, turn west just south of the Muckross Park Hotel. The turning for Friar's Glen is on the right immediately after the Muckross Garden Centre.

Larkinley Lodge $\star\star$ A great option just a few blocks from the center of Killarney, Larkinley Lodge is a stylish, modern B&B in a beautifully converted townhouse. Toni and Danny Sheehan are gregarious hosts, with an eye for detail. Guest rooms are just the right mix of traditional and modern, with minimal clutter and muted color schemes. Don't miss the home-baked scones at breakfast. The location is only about a 10-minute walk into central Killarney, not far from great pubs and restaurants. However, it's in a quiet neighborhood, so you can easily escape the evening street noise that can sometimes be a problem in this lively town.

ENJOYING spa life, IRISH STYLE

Times may be harder than they have been in recent years, economically speaking, but Ireland still has more than its share of top-rated spas—and some of the top spas cluster around Kenmare and Killarney. In this region, the best spas use the exquisite natural settings to spectacular effect, and borrow their treatments from the Irish countryside. Everything from Irish spring water to Irish peat mud and Irish river stones can be used to coax forth beauty from tired, work-dulled skin and hair. None of these spas are cheap, but they're a wonderful way to treat yourself on the road.

All guests at the **Aghadoe Heights Hotel & Spa** $\star \star \star$ (see p. 300) outside Killarney are welcome to spend an hour in its exquisite thermal suite for the fairly small fee of $\in 25$. With a wide array of steam rooms, saunas, tropical showers, cooling rooms, and hot tubs, it offers a luxuriant 60 minutes. Once you're fully relaxed, you might sample one of the spa's numerous massages or facials, using Aveda products. Treatments range from about $\in 65$ to $\in 145$.

The **Easanna Spa** at the **Sheen Falls Lodge**, off N71, Kenmare (www.sheenfallslodge.ie; \bigcirc 064/664-1600) features a pool shaped like a flower—each petal forming a kind of private relaxation space. You can have a hot stone massage or facial and then float off in total relaxation. Room rates here start at around €180, although the typical price is more like €220 for a standard double. Treatments range from about €55 to €135.

The spa at the Killarney Park Hotel, off East Avenue in the center of Killarney (www.killarneyparkhotel.ie; @ 064/663-5555),

is a modern, peaceful oasis, with a soothing pool and such exotic treatments as the 3-hour Absolute Spa Ritual for \notin 270, in which you are rubbed with coconut before being wrapped in a milk-and-lavender essence and then massaged. It's purported to cure jet lag. Rooms here start at around \notin 250 (not including breakfast). Treatments range from about \notin 65 to an eye-watering \notin 380.



Old-world gentility and a 21st-century spa offer the best of both worlds to guests at the Park Hotel Kenmare.

The Sámas spa in the super-pricey Park Hotel Kenmare, Shelbourne Street, Kenmare (www.parkkenmare.com; \bigcirc 064/664-1200) has won awards for its unique design. You can soak in the warm spa pool while gazing out over the mountains nearby. Spend an hour relaxing in the thermal suite (rock sauna, ice fountain, tropical mist shower), before moving on to your facial, wrap, or massage. Unlike those above, the spa is strictly for residents only, although they sometimes make exceptions when it's not too busy. Rooms here start at about €250 during the summer months, though, so you'll have to have deep pockets to dip your toes in their waters. Treatments range from €145 up to around €280.

WHERE TO DINE IN KILLARNEY

Bricin $\star\star$ IRISH Rather incongruously located above a craft shop, this is a long-standing favorite of the Killarney dining scene. *Bricin* means "little trout" in Gaelic, and seafood is often the strong point of the traditional Irish menu. The fixed-price menus feature locally reared meat, often served with interesting sauces—rack of roast lamb with Madeira and rosemary sauce, for example, or steak with brandy, bourbon, and pepper. However, it's the house specialty for which this place is renowned: boxty, a classic pancake stuffed with several different types of filling. The dining room is an old-fashioned kind of place, complete with stained glass windows and an open fireplace. Bricin

serves a great value early bird menu (€22 for two courses) until 6:45pm.

26 High St. www.bricin.com. @ 064/663-4902. Fixed-price menus €29 and €35. Tues–Sat 6–9pm. Closed early Jan–early Mar.

Cellar One ** MODERN EUROPEAN The basement dining room here is either a wry, colorful design statement or just garishly camp. However, the food is an extremely successful mix of modern European dishes, Irish flavors, and the occasional hint of something more exotic. You might opt for some spicy chickpea cakes to start, followed by tiger prawns prepared in chili, garlic, and tequila; or maybe some crab-encrusted cod with wilted spinach in a coconut and ginger sauce. Desserts go down a more traditional route, with choices like chocolate pudding or the wonderfully named knickerbocker glory—a super-retro-style ice cream sundae served with fruit, chocolate brownies, and meringue. Service is excellent, and the atmosphere deliciously good fun.

At the Ross Hotel, Church Lane. www.theross.ie. **© 064/663-1855.** Main courses €19–€28. Daily noon–9:30pm.

COUNTY KERRY: A poet's **EYE VIEW**

Irish writer **John Millington Synge** (1871–1909), best known today as the author of *Playboy of the Western World*, was a great lover of County Kerry. His last work, published posthumously in 1912, was a book of essays entitled *In Wicklow and West Kerry*, in which he wrote lovingly about this part of the country. The following extract sums up its unique appeal perfectly:

"I walked up this morning along the slope from the east to the top of Sybil Head, where one comes out suddenly on the brow of a cliff with a straight fall of many hundreds of feet into the sea. It is a place of indescribable grandeur, where one can see Carrantuohill and the Skelligs and Loop Head and the full sweep of the Atlantic, and over all, the wonderfully tender and searching light that is seen only in Kerry. One wonders in these places why there is anyone left in Dublin, or London, or Paris, when it would be better, one would think, to live in a tent or hut with this magnificent sea and sky, and to breathe this wonderful air, which is like wine in one's teeth."

The Jarvey's Rest \star IRISH This popular pub is not nearly as old as it tries to appear, with a roomful of exposed beams and rows of tankards on the ceiling, as if any moment now a crowd of jolly drinkers may swipe them down and roar a drunken toast. But it has charm, and a recent change of owners has given the place a welcome overhaul. The menu wins no prizes for originality, but it's crowd-pleasing stuff—smoked chowder, fish and chips, tagliatelle with wild mushrooms, or a juicy burger served in a Waterford *blaa* (a kind of soft white roll). For dessert try the sticky toffee pudding (a kind of moist sponge cake) with warm butterscotch sauce. During summer there's a lively show of traditional Irish music and dancing on certain nights—call for dates.

At the Muckross Park Hotel, Muckross Rd. www.muckrosspark.com. **© 064/662-3400.** 3 course fixed-price menu €29. Mid-Mar to Oct daily 12:30pm–around midnight (food served to about 9:30pm); Nov to mid-Mar Fri–Sun 12:30pm–around 11pm (food served to 6pm)

Kate Kearney's Cottage \star INTERNATIONAL Unofficially considered the gateway to the Gap of Dunloe, this cheerful pub is hugely popular. It's a little touristy (a dead giveaway is the in-house souvenir shop), but the atmosphere is upbeat and traditional, and the stick-to-your-ribs pub food is pretty tasty. Think steaks, ribs, burgers, and bistro-style classics, all washed down with a restorative pint. The pub is named after a feisty local woman who carved out a reputation as a maker of illegal *potcheen* (moonshine) that she called Mountain Dew.

Gap of Dunloe, Beaufort, signposted from N72 (Ring of Kerry Rd.). www.katekearneyscottage.com. \bigcirc 064/664-4146. Main courses \in 13– \in 18. Daily noon–11pm (food 6:30–9:30pm).

The Laurels \star INTERNATIONAL The menu at this busy pub in the center of Killarney is populist fare. Starters include deep-fried brie with red currant sauce and chicken wings, while entrees range from a generous steak served with peppercorn sauce and rosti to an enormous seafood platter,

featuring (deep breath) monkfish, salmon, king prawns, mussels, cod, crab claws, and calamari, prepared several ways, with tasty sauces. They also serve stone-baked pizzas, made fresh to order—none of this menu business, you just choose the toppings you want there and then. The lunch menu is much simpler, serving "doorstep" (very thick cut) sandwiches, burgers, salads, and the like. In summer, the pub features lively music sessions several times a week.

Main St. www.thelaurelspub.com. \bigcirc 064/663-1149. Main courses \in 16– \in 29. Mon–Thurs 10:30am–11:30pm; Fri–Sat 10:30am–12:30am; Sun 12:30–11pm. (Food served until about 9:30pm.)

SHOPPING

Shopping hours in Killarney are usually Monday to Saturday 9am to 6pm, but from May through September or October, many stores are open every day until 9 or 10pm. Although Killarney has more souvenir and craft shops than you can shake a shillelagh at, here are a few of the best.

Bricin \star This great little craft store sells traditional ceramics, jewelry and clothes. Many of the wares on sale here were made locally. Upstairs is one of the town's best restaurants (p. 302). 26 High St. © 064/663-4902.

The Candle Shop $\star\star$ The clue's in the name here—this place sells candles of all shapes and sizes, plus handmade soaps and skincare products. A good choice if you're looking for authentic souvenirs. 22 Plunkett St. © 064/662-1636.

Christy's Irish Stores \star This enormous gift emporium on the corner of Plunkett Street has a huge array of Irish souvenir items, from fripperies and touristy tat to really quite nice knitwear, crystal, and other craft items. 10 Main St. www.christysirishstores.com. © 064/642-3311.

The Dungeon Bookshop ★ One of Killarney's most popular independent bookstores, the Dungeon stocks a good range of secondhand books. 99 College St. © 064/663-6536.

Frank Lewis Gallery ** Regularly changing exhibitions of contemporary visual arts are on display at this excellent little gallery. The emphasis is on emerging talent and the standard is high. 6 Bridewell Lane. www.franklewisgallery.com. © 064/663-4843.

Killarney Art Gallery $\star\star$ This gallery in Aghadoe, north of central Killarney, showcases work from respected Irish artists as well as new and local talent. Aghadoe. www.killarneyartgallery.com. @ 064/663-4628.

Mucros Craft Centre ****** Part of the Walled Garden, a small shopping complex on the grounds of Muckross House ****** (see p. 295), this place has a good stock of Irish crafts, pottery, clothing, cards, and quality gifts—and many items are made locally. Muckross House, Muckross Rd. www.muckross-house.ie. O 064/667-0147.

Serendipity $\star\star$ Another good place to buy local crafts, this delightful shop in central Killarney also sells artisan jewelry. 15 College St. @ 064/663-1056.

KILLARNEY AFTER DARK

The mainstay of nightlife in Killarney is the lively pub scene. The town has more than its fair share of good places to enjoy a pint and some live traditional music. Unsurprisingly for such a popular tourist town, all of these places can get pretty packed on a busy summer's night—so come early to stand a chance of getting a seat.

Killarney Grand ** This hugely popular pub—officially known as Sheehan's Bar, although the signs out front say both—is one of the best places in the region to hear traditional Irish music. Nightly lively sessions nightly start at 9pm; after 11pm it turns into a nightclub. The atmosphere gets pretty

raucous, and the crowds can really pack in here (definitely standing room only), but the music is always good. Some of the biggest names in Irish music have played here over the years, and you never know when you might catch the next big thing. A "neat" dress code is enforced at the door—you don't have to wear your best duds, but don't be too scruffy either. Main St. www.killarneygrand.com. @ 064/663-1159.

The Laurels \star Another very popular pub for live music, here the traditional music sessions take place several times a week, usually starting at around 9pm. They also serve good food, including a range of stone-baked pizzas (see p. 305). Main St. www.thelaurelspub.com. © 064/663-1149.

O'Connors $\star\star$ This is a proper, traditional-feeling pub. The program of live music is extensive, and it doesn't stop there—you might catch a play, some standup comedy, or even a spoken word event. 7 High St. © 064/663-1115.

Tatler Jack \star For Gaelic sports fans, this is the place to go in Killarney. Football and hurling matches are shown on big screen TVs and traditional music is on many nights in summer. The atmosphere is invariably raucous. Plunkett St. © 064/663-2361.

Kenmare

Though Killarney is the obvious hub of the area, if you have the freedom of a car, consider nearby Kenmare as an alternative base: It's quieter and just as convenient for exploring the Ring of Kerry. Originally called Neidin (pronounced Nay-*deen*, meaning "little nest" in Irish), Kenmare is indeed a little nest of verdant foliage and colorful buildings nestled between the River Roughty and Kenmare Bay. It's an enchanting town with flower boxes at every window, sparkling clean sidewalks, and lots of restaurants and plenty of places to stay.

EXPLORING KENMARE

Kenmare Druid Circle \star PREHISTORIC SITE On a small hill near the market square (see below), this large Bronze Age druid stone circle is magnificently intact, featuring 15 standing stones arranged around a central boulder that still bears signs (circular holes, a shallow dent at the center) of having been used in ceremonies. To find it, walk down to the market square and follow signs on the left side of the road. There's no visitor center and no admission fee; it's just sitting in a small paddock, passed by the traffic of everyday life.

Off the Square, Kenmare, Co. Kerry.

Kenmare Farmer's Market ★ MARKET If you're visiting midweek, be sure to check out this small but lively open-air market held every Wednesday in Kenmare's main square. The emphasis is on food produce from small, artisan producers from across the region and beyond. You'll also find rustic crafts. Traders can come here from quite far afield to sell their wares, although the bulk of what's on offer is locally sourced. It's a fun and lively market to browse your way through. The Square. Kenmare, Co. Kerry. Wed 10am–4pm. Some stalls may close in bad weather.

Seafari ** BOAT TOUR This is a good option for families who want to interest their kids in Kenmare Bay—aboard a 15m (49-ft.) covered boat. The 2-hour cruise covers 16km (10 miles) and features guides well versed in local history and wildlife such as dolphins, sea otters, and gray seals frolicking nearby. Boats depart from the pier next to the Kenmare suspension bridge. The family ticket includes coffee, tea, cookies, a lollipop for the kids, and a drink of rum for the grown-ups. They'll also lend you a pair of binoculars if you need one. Live entertainment sometimes follows you on board, from kid-friendly puppet shows to traditional Irish music. Reservations are recommended.

3 The Pier, Kenmare, Co. Kerry. www.seafariireland.com. \bigcirc 064/664-2059. Tour \notin 20 adults; \notin 18 students; \notin 16 teenagers; \notin 13 children 11 and under then \notin 8 per extra child; \notin 61 families. Apr–Oct, 2 sailings daily; call or check website for departure times.



Fair Day in Kenmare, County Kerry. This is a yearly event where livestock, horses, sheepdogs etc. from the locality are sold on the streets of Kenmare on August 15th.

SPORTS & OUTDOOR PURSUITS

ADVENTURE SPORTS Eclipse Ireland, Blackwater Bridge, Kenmare (www.eclipseireland.com; © 064/668-2965), offers a host of high-thrills activities and outdoor fun, including kayaking, archery, raft building, mud surfing, and trekking. It's not just high-energy activities, either; to exercise your soul as well as your body, you can opt for a session of laughter yoga. See the website for the full list.

CYCLING Bicycles can be hired from Finnegan's Corner at 37 Henry St., Kenmare (www.finneganscornerkenmare.com; © 064/664-1083) or from Eclipse Ireland, Blackwater Bridge, Kenmare (www.eclipseireland.com; © 064/668-2965). Rates are around €20 per day.

GOLF The Kenmare Golf Club, Kenmare (www.kenmaregolfclub.com; © 064/664-1291), is a parkland par-71 course where greens fees run €35 weekdays, €40 weekends.

HORSEBACK RIDING In addition to the activities listed above, Eclipse Ireland (www.eclipseireland.com; © 064/668-2965) also offers various horse-riding options. As a guide to prices, an hour's trekking costs \in 30; 2 hours \in 55.

WHERE TO STAY IN KENMARE

Sallyport House ** This peaceful 1930s mansion-turned-B&B in Kenmare is an extremely good value for the money. It's filled with interesting antiques, lending a touch of old-school luxury to its already traditional charms. (Thanks to a wealthy industrialist ancestor, there's a story behind most of them.) Guest rooms are comfortable and spacious. A few rooms have intricately carved antique fourposter beds. The house is surrounded by beautiful countryside, and some rooms look out over an idyllic lake. Breakfasts are delicious, and the service is warm and accommodating without ever being intrusive.

Shelbourne St. (just south of junction with Pier Rd.). www.sallyporthouse.com. \bigcirc 064/664-2066. 5 units. \in 110– \in 130 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Sea Shore Farm $\star\star$ A modern house overlooking Kenmare Bay and the mountains beyond, this is a special place to stay. Floor-to-ceiling windows take full advantage of the magnificent surroundings. The guest rooms are large (very large in some cases) and tastefully furnished. The guest lounge has a library of travel books, though you may find yourself too distracted by the views to concentrate. Kenmare is a short drive away or just a captivating, 15-minute walk through the countryside—the better to work off those indulgent breakfasts. Hosts Mary and Owen make everything run smoothly and are always full of helpful suggestions for things to do. They have an encyclopedic knowledge of the local area.

Sea Shore, Tubrid. www.seashorekenmare.com. 064/664-1270. 5 units. €90–€130 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Shelburne Lodge ** This cozy 18th-century house was originally the country home of William Petty, the Lord Shelburne (1737–1805), a Dublin-born landowner who was responsible for building much of the modern town of Kenmare. He later became Prime Minister of Great Britain and Ireland, and he signed the Treaty of Paris that formally ended the American War of Independence in 1783 and brought peace between Britain and the U.S. His home is in good hands nowadays, thanks to wonderful hosts Tom and Maura Foley. Rooms have an old-fashioned air with antique furniture, huge beds, and color schemes of yellow and peach. Public areas have a similar feel—the guest sitting room is so packed with handsome furniture that it's like walking through an antique shop. A lovely, manicured lawn is out back, and the center of Kenmare is only a short walk away.

WHERE TO DINE IN KENMARE

The Boathouse Bistro \star BISTRO/SEAFOOD This pleasant seafood bistro at Dromquinna Manor has an outside seating area overlooking Kenmare Bay. The menu serves dishes like scallops with bacon and butternut squash, or the house special fishcakes with mango salsa. Or you could just have a burger and sea-salted French fries while you take in the wonderful view. This is a good stop for lunch on a sunny day, especially when the weather's fine and you can sit outside.

On N70, 5km (3 miles) west of Kenmare. www.dromquinnamanor.com. **Ø 064/664-2888.** Main courses €11–€25. Mar–Apr weekends 12:30–9pm; May, June, Sept Tues–Sun 12:30–9pm; July–Aug daily 12:30–9pm; Oct Thurs–Sun 12:30–9pm. Closed Nov–Feb.

The Line Tree ******* MODERN IRISH This outstanding restaurant housed in a historic building has been one of the area's go-to fine dining establishments since 1985. The modern Irish menu is sophisticated without being overly complicated. You'll find plenty of locally sourced ingredients: plates such as rack of Kerry lamb served with a mini shepherd's pie (a traditional dish made with minced lamb and mashed potatoes) and garlic confit, or baked salmon with a piquant lemon crust.

Desserts are upscale comfort food: a rich terrine of white and dark chocolate with black currant sorbet, or crepes with butterscotch sauce and praline. The wine list is unsurprisingly excellent, but surprisingly filled with plenty of very affordable choices.

Shelbourne St. www.limetreerestaurant.com. **© 064/664-1225.** Main courses €18–€28. Daily 6:30–9:30pm.

Packie's ** IRISH One of the best and most durable restaurants in Kenmare, Packie's has been a favorite in this town for years. The candlelit dining room is atmospheric, and the crowd is as much local as visitors. And it's easy to understand why—the food is unpretentious but delicious, using a bounty of local ingredients. You might choose to sample steak, lamb, or perhaps super-fresh seafood, all simply prepared but melt-in-your-mouth tasty. Desserts are worth leaving room for. The reasonably priced wine list offers plenty of choices available by the glass.

Henry St. www.kenmarerestaurants.com/packies. **© 064/664-1508.** Main courses €17–€28. Tues–Sat 6–10pm. Closed Feb.

Purple Heather \star IRISH This sweet little lunch spot in Kenmare serves simple, unpretentious meals. It's also rather dark (the euphemism would be "cozy"), but that shouldn't deter you; this cafe is popular with locals, who can't subsist on fast food or the delicate filigree of upscale tourist traps. Start with a leisurely pint of Guinness at the bar in front, before venturing toward the little dining area at the back for a lunch of toasted sandwiches, fluffy omelets, homemade soups, or a bowl of chowder. Henry St. www.thepurpleheatherkenmare.com. © 064/664-1016. Main courses ξ 7– ξ 18. Mon–Sat 11am–5:30pm. Closed bank holidays.

Wharton's Traditional Fish and Chips ****** FISH & CHIPS Proof that not all the best dining experiences come with a hefty price tag, Wharton's is an outstanding "chipper." The menu is traditional—who would have it any other way with fish and chips?—although asking if you'd prefer your fish battered or fried in breadcrumbs is a nice twist. It's nothing too fancy, but that's half the point—this is real Irish fast food. They have a few seats inside or in the little courtyard at the front, or you can get everything to go.

Main St. **© 064/664-2622.** Main courses €6–€10. Daily 11am–9pm.

SHOPPING

The Ring of Kerry has many good craft and souvenir shops, but those in and around Kenmare offer some of the best choices in terms of quality. Kenmare shops are open year-round, usually Monday to Saturday 9am to 6pm. From May to September, many shops remain open until 9 or 10pm, and some open on Sunday from noon to 5 or 6pm.

Avoca at Moll's Gap *** Creative, colorful, and with what must be one of the world's best appointed parking lots, this branch of Avoca is on a mountain pass just off the main Ring of Kerry Road, north of Kenmare. Though quite small, it sells a good selection of the crafts, knitwear, and upscale knick-knacks for which the Wicklow-based company is famous. The cafe upstairs is also a great pit stop for a light lunch or restorative cup of tea and slice of cake. Molls Gap (on R568, signposted from main N71 Ring of Kerry Rd.). www.avoca.ie. **© 064/663-4720.** Mon–Fri 9:30am–5:30pm; Sat–Sun and public holidays 10am–6pm. Cafe closes 5pm.

De Barra Jewellery $\star\star\star$ Young jewelry designer Shane de Barra runs this exquisite little boutique in the center of Kenmare. His creations in gold and other precious materials have a unique, subtle beauty. He has an especially deft touch with freshwater pearls that he forms into lovely necklaces strung together with tiny threads of gold. Prices aren't too high, considering the quality. A true original. Main St. © 064/664-1867.

Lorge Chocolatier $\star\star\star$ Benoit Lorge makes his exquisite artisanal chocolates at this his workshop, 10km (6 miles) south of Kenmare on the N71 road. They're wonderful creations, elegantly

presented—his gift boxes are little works of art in themselves. Too bad their precious, tasty cargo must be eaten. All of it. Right now. N71, Bonane, nr. Kenmare. @ 064/667-9994.

Quills Woollen Market ★ This long-standing business is housed in a delightfully multicolored row of shops in the center of Kenmare. They specialize in traditional Irish knitwear—particularly heavy knit Aran sweaters, coats, and cardigans. They also sell Irish tweeds, shawls, linens, and various home decor pieces like plush sheepskin rugs. It's a great place to stock up on authentic souvenirs. Other branches of Quills are in Killarney, Glengarriff, Ballingeary, and Sneem. Main St www.irishgiftsandsweaters.com. © 064/664-1078.

The Ring of Kerry Drive

Undoubtedly Ireland's most popular scenic route, the Ring of Kerry winds its way along a panorama of rugged coastline, tall mountains, pristine lakes, and beautiful small towns and villages. What you won't find, at least in the summertime, is much in the way of peace. Bicyclists avoid the route because of the scores of tour buses thundering down it from early morning until late in the day. You can drive either way along the Ring of Kerry, but a counterclockwise route gives you the most spectacular views. (The following points of interest along the route are listed in counterclockwise order.) Very large vehicles are always meant to travel this way to avoid accidents and nasty traffic jams around the Ring's perilously narrow bends.

SOS: GPS

You can drive either way along the Ring of Kerry, but we recommend a **counterclockwise** route for the most spectacular views. Drivers of very large vehicles also stick to this direction in order to avoid bottlenecks on the perilously narrow bends. This all worked fine for years—until modern technology intervened with the spread of GPS technology. Now some drivers unfamiliar with the route are being sent by their devices in a clockwise direction, thus causing all sorts of chaos, including some of the worst traffic jams ever seen on the Ring. These problems don't happen every day, but nonetheless, proceed with caution, and perhaps plan on taking a different route if you absolutely have to get somewhere on time.

Often the greatest pleasures along the Ring of Kerry can be found during a scenic drive along a side road or on a quiet byway just begging to be explored. Give in to those temptations—real treasure is waiting in these hills.

From Kenmare to busy Killarney, the Ring road takes you through a scenic mountain stretch known as Moll's Gap.

Departing Killarney, follow the signs for **Killorglin**, a smallish town that lights up in mid-August when it has a traditional horse, sheep, and cattle fair called the **Puck Fair** (see box p. 315) after the *puka* or *puki*, a mischievous sprite in Celtic legend. For the rest of the year, Killorglin is a pretty, quiet town, well worth a wander. The River Laune runs straight through the town center; look for the statue of a goat by the river, symbolizing the *puka*.

Continue on the N70, and glimpses of Dingle Bay will soon appear on your right. **Carrantuohill,** Ireland's tallest mountain at 1,041m (3,414 ft.), is to your left, and bleak views of open bog land constantly come into view.

The Ring winds around cliffs and the edges of mountains, with nothing but the sea below—another reason you will probably average only 50kmph (31 mph), at best. As you go along, you'll notice the remnants of many stone cottages dotting the fields along the way. Most date from the mid-19th-century Great Famine, when millions of people starved to death or were forced to emigrate. This area was

particularly hard hit, with the Iveragh peninsula alone losing three-quarters of its population.



Glenbeigh is next on the Ring, a sweet little seafront town with streets lined with palm trees and a sandy beach. Continue along the sea's edge to **Cahirsiveen**, where you can branch off the N70 onto R565 to visit the lovely seaside town of **Portmagee**, which is connected by a bridge to leafy **Valentia Island.** In the 18th century, the Valentia harbor was notorious as a refuge for smugglers and privateers; it's said that John Paul Jones, the Scottish-born American naval officer in the War of Independence, also anchored here quite often.

From Valentia you can hop a ferry to arguably the most magical site of the Ring of Kerry, an island just off its shore: **Skellig Michael**, a rocky pinnacle towering over the sea, where medieval monks built a monastery in exquisite isolation (see p. 317). Today, the ruins of their church, reached by way of rambling stone staircases up the sides of cliffs at the edge of the cobalt sea, still convey a sense of deep spirituality. Seabirds nest here in abundance, and more than 20,000 pairs of gannets inhabit neighboring **Little Skellig** during the summer nesting season. The crossing to the island can be rough, so you'll want to visit on as clear and calm a day as possible.

Head next for **Waterville**, an idyllic beach resort located between Lough Currane and Ballinskelligs Bay. For years it was a favorite retreat of Charlie Chaplin, and there's a statue of him near the beach.

If you follow the sea road north of Waterville (R567) to the Irish-speaking village of **Ballinskelligs** (see p. 315), you'll see where the medieval monastery is slowly rotting away. A sandy Blue Flag

beach is just past the post office by Ballinskelligs Bay, and at the end of the beach are the remnants of a 16th-century castle.

Continuing on the N70, the next point of interest is **Derrynane** (see p. 316), at **Caherdaniel.** Derrynane is the former seat of the O'Connell clan and erstwhile home to Daniel O'Connell ("the Liberator" who freed Irish Catholics from the last of the English Penal Laws in the 19th century). From there, watch for signs to **Staigue Fort** $\star\star$ (see p. 316), about 3km (2 miles) off the main road in a farmer's field. Historians are still unsure of the fort's purpose, but we do know that it dates from around 1000 _{B.C.}

What's the Frequency, Kerry?

In 1866, Valentia Island became the first place in Europe to have a permanent telegraph link with North America, via an undersea cable. A true feat of 19th-century engineering, the cable was used for precisely 100 years. You can still see the old receiving station (although it's just a shell) at the aptly named Telegraph Field, on the cliffs above Foilhomurrum Bay. A short distance away, a simple, black marble monument stands in muted commemoration of Ireland's role in bringing the world closer together.

KILLORGLIN: THE puck **STOPS HERE**

The first major stop on the Ring of Kerry northward from Killarney, **Killorglin** is a sleepy little town—until August 10, at least, when the annual **Puck Fair** (www.puckfair.ie) incites a 3-day explosion of merrymaking and pageantry.

One of Ireland's last remaining traditional fairs, it's technically an agricultural show; the apex of the event involves capturing a mountain goat (which symbolizes the *puka* or *puki*, a mischievous Celtic sprite) that is then declared *King Puck* and paraded around town on a throne, wearing a crown. It's bonkers but quite a lot fun.

Nobody knows how it began, but one story dates to Cromwell's invasion of Ireland in the mid-17th century. English soldiers were foraging for food in the hills above the town and tried to capture a herd of goats. One escaped to Killorglin and alerted the villagers to mount a defence. Others say the fair is pre-Christian, connected with the Pagan feast of Lughnasa on August 1.

As you cross the old stone bridge over the River Laune, look out for the whimsical statue of the goat on the eastern side—and know that it stands in honor of this town's love for the *puka*.

Sneem, the next village on the circuit (see Blueberry Hill Farm $\star\star$, p. 318), is a colorful little hamlet, where houses are painted in vibrant shades. The colors—blue, pink, yellow, and orange—burst out on a rainy day, like a little touch of the Mediterranean. From here, you're no distance at all from Kenmare, and you've made your way around the Ring.

Ballinskelligs & the Skellig Ring ** RUINS/RELIGIOUS SITE West of Waterville, across a small bay, the coastal village of **Ballinskelligs** contains the absurdly picturesque ruins of St. Michael Ballinskelligs, a medieval priory overlooking the sea. A sandy beach also features the remnants of a 16th-century castle. Ballinskelligs is a starting point for the so-called **Skellig Ring**, a stunning coastal drive that takes in some of the best viewpoints of the mysterious Skellig Islands (see box p. 317). It also passes through some of the most spectacular scenery in the county, and with the merest fraction of the traffic that can clog the Ring of Kerry. However, be warned: Its very remoteness means this route can be tough going, and the roads are very mountainous in places. This is also the edge of Gaeltacht territory, where Irish is the primary language on road signs. To find the Ring, head south through Ballinskelligs. About 0.5km ($\frac{1}{3}$ mile) after the pink An Post building, you'll come to a crossroads. The Skellig Ring (*Morchuaird na Sceilge* in Gaelic) is signposted to the right. The signs continue

throughout the route.

Visitor Information Point: Barbara's Beach Café, Ballinskelligs Beach, Ballinskelligs. Tourist Office: Cahersiveen Community Centre, Church St., Cahersiveen. www.visitballinskelligs.ie. © 066/947-2589 (Cahersiveen, summer only).



The beehive huts atop Skellig Michael, where 6th-century Christian monks lived, worked, and prayed in severe isolation from the mainland.

Derrynane House National Historic Park $\star\star$ HISTORIC HOUSE Daniel O'Connell (1775–1847) was an Irish political leader and member of Parliament, who became known as "the Great Liberator" for his successful campaign to repeal the laws that barred Catholics from holding office. He became particularly famous in his lifetime for his so-called "monster meetings," vast public rallies held across the country (one, on the Hill of Tara, was reckoned to have been attended by nearly a million supporters). His house, at Caherdaniel, is open to the public. It contains a museum devoted to his life featuring various artifacts and items from his personal archives. Not everything will be of interest to those who aren't already familiar with his story, but a few pieces—such as the gilded carriage from which he triumphantly greeted crowds after a brief spell as a political prisoner —are definitely worth seeing. The vast grounds are a scenic spot to wander through.

Signposted from N70 (Ring of Kerry Rd.), approx. 2.5km (1.5 miles) from Caherdaniel. www.heritageireland.ie. \bigcirc 066/947-5113. Admission \in 3 adults; \in 2 seniors; \in 1 students and children; \in 8 families. Mar, mid-Sept to mid-Nov Wed–Sun and public holidays 10:30am–5pm; May to mid-Sept daily 10:30am–6pm.

Staigue Fort ** ANCIENT SITE This well-preserved, surprisingly large prehistoric fort is built of rough stones without mortar of any kind. The walls are 4m(13 ft.) thick at the base. Historians are not certain what purpose it served—it may have been a fortress or just a kind of prehistoric community center—but experts think it probably dates from around 1000 _{B.C.} It's an open site with no visitor center; just this ancient structure, alone and open to the elements in the middle of a farmer's field.

Off N70 just outside Castlecove, on a small farm road (follow signs 4 km/21/2 miles to site).

GREAT, mysterious **WONDER**: A TRIP TO THE SKELLIG ISLANDS

"Whoever has not stood in the graveyard on the summit of that cliff, among the beehive dwellings and beehive oratory, does not know Ireland through and through . . . "

-George Bernard Shaw

The craggy, inhospitable Skellig Islands rise precipitously from the sea. Here gray skies meet stormy horizons about 14km (8 miles) off the coast of the Iveragh Peninsula. From the mainland, Skellig Michael and Little Skellig appear impossibly sharp-angled and daunting even today, even though the mere act of getting there isn't perilous, as it was in the 6th and 7th centuries. Back then, a group of monks built a community on the steepest, most wind-battered peaks. Over time, they carved 600 steps into the cliffs and built monastic buildings hundreds of feet above the ocean. The complex is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Landing is only possible on **Skellig Michael**, the largest of the islands. There is something tragic and beautiful about the remains of the ancient oratories and beehive cells there. Historians know very little about these monks and how they lived, although they obviously sought intense isolation. Records relating to the Skelligs indicate that even here, all but completely hidden, the Vikings found the monastery and punished it as they did all the Irish monastic settlements. Monks were kidnapped and killed in attacks in the 8th century, but the settlement always recovered. To this day, nobody knows why the monks finally abandoned the rock in the 12th century.

Start your exploration at the **Skellig Experience** (www.skelligexperience.com; **\bigcirc 066/947-6306**) on Valentia Island, which is reached via road bridge in Portmagee. The well-designed visitor center tells you all about the extraordinary history of these ancient edifices and also offers boat trips out to see the islands. It's open daily, May, June, and September from 10am to 6pm, and until 7pm in July and August; in March, April, October, and November, it's open on weekdays only from 10am to 5pm. Last entry is 45 minutes before closing. Admission costs \in 5 adults, \in 4 seniors and students, \in 3 children, and \in 14 families.

If you add a cruise to see the Skelligs, the cost is $\notin 30$ adults, $\notin 28$ seniors and students, $\notin 18$ children, and $\notin 85$ families—but note that, at present, the visitor center's own boat trips only cruise *around* the Skelligs, and **do not make landfall.** If you want to see the ruins on Skellig Michael up close, you have to go with one of the many independent boat operators who work the route. A list of endorsed skippers is on the Skellig Experience website; if you use **Des Lavelle** (**\bigcirc 066/947-6124** or 087/237-1017) or **Eoin Walsh** (**\bigcirc 066/947-6327** or 087/283-3522) the fee includes entry to the visitor center. They both charge $\notin 50$ per person.

There are also "unofficial" ways of reaching the islands, although they're very much at your own risk. For a negotiated fee, you can almost always find a fisherman who's willing to take you over, wait, and then bring you back. The crossing will be rougher but certainly more adventurous.

Blueberry Hill Farm ** HERITAGE SITE A good way to amuse younger children for half a day, this working farm still does as much as possible according to traditional methods. As part of the halfday tours, you can help milk cows, make butter, and take part in a treasure hunt. Children get to interact with the animals and even help out at feeding time. There's also a cafe selling tasty homemade scones and other treats. The whole experience is very friendly, authentic, and can be delightful for the little ones. Book ahead, because tours are limited to small groups. Full-day courses in such skills as basket weaving, blacksmithing, food preserving, and beekeeping are available for adults.

Signposted from R568 (Sneem-Killarney Rd.), Sneem. www.blueberryhillfarm.ie. Ø 086/356-1150 or 086/316-0224. Admission €15

adults and children; €60 families. Tours at 10am and 3pm.

WHERE TO STAY ALONG THE RING OF KERRY DRIVE

Although the Ring of Kerry is easily driven as a day excursion from Killarney or Kenmare, don't overlook the option of staying overnight in the countryside or one of the small towns along the Ring—and it just may save you a few euros, too.

Coffey River's Edge ** A bright, cheery building overlooking the River Laune in the center of Killorglin, Coffey's is an exceptional value for the money. Rooms are decently sized, with large beds and contemporary wood furniture. Breakfasts are served in the dining room overlooking the river and picturesque stone bridge, or in fair weather, on a large guest balcony and deck outside. No evening meal is on offer, but the rest of pretty Killorglin is just a short, leisurely stroll away. Owners Finbarr and Anne are both keen golfers and will happily arrange for you to have a game at a local course. The Bridge, Killorglin. www.coffeysriversedge.com. **©** 066/976-1750. 11 units. €60-€70 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Derrynane Hotel \star The view from this place is striking—perched on a promontory overlooking Kenmare Bay, guests look out across a dramatic coastal inlet streaked with tiny green islands and a smattering of pleasure boats cruising around the coast. Accommodations have few frills; some are nicely designed, if rather spartan, and others could do with an upgrade. Package deals include "Golden Breaks" with special discounts for seniors. This place is really geared toward family groups, with standard rooms that actually sleep up to three for the same cost. Plus, some handy extras include an indoor playroom and child-friendly menus at dinner. Other relaxing amenities include a small outdoor pool, sauna, and a seaweed bath treatment room. A small herb garden on the grounds provides ingredients for the in-house restaurant.

Caherdaniel (signposted from N70 Ring of Kerry Rd.). www.derrynane.com. **Ø** 066/947-5136. 70 units. €58–€118 double. Free parking. Breakfast not included in lower rates. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; pool; gym; treatment room; Wi-Fi (free).

walk this way: THE KERRY WAY

Serious hikers test their chops on the **Kerry Way**, a long-distance trail that traverses extraordinary scenery while roughly following the Ring of Kerry. Ireland's longest marked hiking trail, the 202km (126-mile) route includes several "green roads" (old, unused roads built as famine relief projects and now converted into walking paths).

The first stage, from Killarney National Park to Glenbeigh, travels inland over rolling hills and past pastoral scenes. The second stage circles the Iveragh Peninsula and takes in spectacular ocean views, passing through picturesque towns including Cahersiveen, Waterville, colorful Sneem, and lovely Kenmare. The final inland walk brings you via the old Kenmare Road back to Killarney.

The walk is steep in places—the highest point is 385 meters (1,200 feet) in a section known as Windy Gap. There are long stretches of wilderness between civilization—walkers attempting the entire path, or even substantial portions of it, need to prepare carefully. But some short stretches can be easily accessed and make for gentle afternoon walks, suitable for amateurs.

Maps outlining the route, and the best short walks, are available from the Killarney and Kenmare tourist offices. For more information see **www.kerryway.com**.

Iskeroon $\star\star\star$ In a spectacularly beautiful setting on the Ring of Kerry, looking out across the Derrynane coast and out to the Skellig Islands, this extraordinary bed and breakfast is a serene and special place to stay. Built in the 1930s, the house isn't large, but this merely adds to the feeling of special care and attention you experience from the moment you walk through the door. The two suites, with stone floors, king-size beds, handmade furniture, and beautiful pieces of art, have been elegantly renovated. Fresh ingredients are provided for breakfast, but you prepare it yourself in the little

kitchenette that comes with your suite—and there's no better location to enjoy a leisurely breakfast than your balcony overlooking the sea. The only downside is the 3-night minimum stay, but it hardly feels like a negative once you're here. Needless to say it can get booked up far in advance. The former coach house on the grounds is rented out as a full self-catering accommodation for \notin 450 to \notin 500 per week (depending on the time of year).

Bunavalla (halfway between Waterville and Caherdaniel). At the Scariff Inn, follow signs for Bunavalla Pier, then follow signs to Iskeroon near the bottom of the hill. www.iskeroon.com. **© 066/947-5119.** 2 units. €100 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. 3-night minimum stay. Amenities: DVD player and library; kitchenette; Wi-Fi (free).

QC's ****** More of a restaurant-with-rooms than a small hotel, QC's is nonetheless a stylish and unique place to stay on the Ring of Kerry. Accommodations are open-plan contemporary spaces with a minimalist vibe: polished wood floors, huge skylights, and claw-foot tubs next to the bed. A few high-tech extras include Bose stereos. The guest lounge looks as if it's tumbled from the pages of a decor magazine, featuring deep velvet sofas and a cozy wood-burning stove. The superb downstairs restaurant specializes in fresh seafood. They take pride in local flavors cooked to perfection, such as roast hake with samphire and lemon risotto, or local meats served with seasonal vegetables and delicious sauces.

Main St., Cahersiveen. www.qcbar.com. **© 066/947-2244.** 5 units. €73–€109 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

WHERE TO DINE ON THE RING OF KERRY DRIVE

The Blind Piper \star IRISH This friendly and lively pub is one of the top places to eat in Caherdaniel. The high-quality bar menu strikes a nice line between straightforward traditional pub grub and something a little more sophisticated—Guinness stew with fresh soda bread, scampi and chips, burgers made with locally-sourced beef, or pasta. The charming staff makes you feel right at home, and the bar is enlivened by live traditional music sessions on Thursday nights from 9:15pm. The Blind Piper is a bit hard to find, partly because it doesn't have a proper street address. Take the main N70 road through Caherdaniel, and then take the turn next to the big red building in the center of the village. (There's usually a handmade sign here pointing you in the right direction.) The pub is painted bright yellow.

Off main Ring of Kerry Road (N70), Caherdaniel. www.blindpiperpub.com. **© 066/947-5126.** Main courses €11–€17. Mon–Thurs 11am–11:30pm (food served noon—4pm); Fri–Sat 11am–midnight (food served noon—8pm); Sun noon–11pm (food served 12:30–8:30pm).

The Blue Bull \star IRISH This great little pub in tiny, picturesque Sneem serves traditional fare in a couple of cozy dining spaces. The menu doesn't deviate too far from Irish pub classics, but it does it all very well—fish and chips, mussels in garlic sauce, steaks, sandwiches, and salads. The crowd, a good mix of hungry tourists and easy-going locals settling down at the bar, makes for a congenial atmosphere. This is a straight-up traditional pub with a bar area in the front separate from the dining rooms. It's a great spot for eavesdropping on a few conversations, and possibly being asked your opinion about the topic of the day.

South Square, Sneem. **© 066/947-5126.** Main courses €6–€18. Mon–Sat 11am–around midnight; Sun noon–11pm (food until about 9pm).

Jack's Coastguard Restaurant *** SEAFOOD/MODERN IRISH This cheery restaurant lists "Water's Edge" as its address. That's not so much a name as a description; it's right on the harbor in Cromane, a tiny village near Killorglin. The dining room is a bright, modern space boasting beautiful views of the bay, while a pianist plays away in the corner. The fixed-price menus hit elegant notes

with choices like salmon filet with samphire and *Beurre Maitre d'Hotel* (butter made with mustard and parsley), or rib-eye with horseradish fondant potatoes and pepper sauce. For dessert, try the strawberry and balsamic vinegar homemade ice cream. The restaurant is attached to a popular local pub, and live music plays every Monday night in summer.

Water's Edge, Cromane Lower, Killorglin. www.jackscromane.com. **© 066/976-9102.** Three-course fixed-price menus €36. May–Sept Mon, Wed–Sun noon–9pm; Oct Wed–Sun noon–9pm; Nov–Dec Thurs–Sun noon-9pm; Feb–Apr Thurs–Sun noon–9pm. Closed Jan.

Nick's Restaurant and Piano Bar ** SEAFOOD/IRISH The rather Rat Pack feel to this restaurant's name says everything about its old school credentials. Nick's is quite famous in this part of Ireland—it's been here since 1978—and although you won't find cutting-edge modern cuisine here, it's still deserving of its reputation as one of the better places to eat along the Ring of Kerry. Choose from two dining areas: a formal restaurant and a bar, where a simpler (and less expensive) selection is served in more relaxed surroundings. On the main menu are several catches of the day (naturally), grilled sole, shellfish mornay, or a classic seafood platter. It's not all about the fruits of the sea—you can also order steaks, lamb, or maybe a chicken supreme with whiskey cream sauce. The bar menu is more of the fish and chips or steak sandwich variety, but it's still good. Everything is served to the gentle melodies of a live piano accompaniment. Just the same as it ever was.

Lower Bridge St., Killorglin. www.nicks.ie. **Ø 066/976-1219.** Main courses €22–€34. Tues–Sun 5:30–10pm.

Smuggler's Inn \star SEAFOOD/IRISH Overlooking the beach in Waterville, this is a great option for lunch. The menu is mostly seafood caught fresh from Ballinskelligs Bay—think oysters, black sole, and seafood chowder. Local seafood is a specialty—black sole from Ballinskelligs, or Dolus Head baked cod—or you could go for some roast duck or a tender steak. The conservatory dining room has lovely views of the bay, or you can sit outside and take in the full glory of it all. The Smuggler's Inn also does bed-and-breakfast accommodations for around \in 70 to \in 110 per night.

Cliff Rd., Waterville. www.the-smugglers-inn.com. 066/947-4330. Main courses €15–€30. Daily noon–3pm, 6–9pm. No children after 8pm. Closed Nov–Easter.

Tralee

Sandwiched between the Ring of Kerry and the Dingle Peninsula, Tralee doesn't quite live up to its singsong pretty name. Mostly it's a place you go *through*, rather than to. With a population of 24,000, the town is twice the size of Killarney, and it feels like it. This is more a workaday town than a tourist center, and there's not much here for visitors to do. In fact, it can feel a bit rough at times—especially on weekend nights, when the town's many bars are packed. However, it has some attractive Georgian architecture and a few sights worth seeing, with a couple more offerings in the countryside nearby.

EXPLORING IN & AROUND TRALEE

Blennerville Windmill $\star\star$ LANDMARK Reaching 20m (66 ft.) into the sky, this must surely be the most photographed object in Tralee. This picturesque windmill at the edge of a river still works, and that makes it quite rare in this part of the world. Built in 1800, it flourished until 1850, when it was largely abandoned. After decades of neglect, it was restored, and is now fully operational. You can climb to the top of the windmill, and see some of its complex inner workings in detail. The visitor complex has an exhibition on the Famine years (when Blennerville was a major point of emigration), plus an audiovisual theater, craft workshops, and a cafe. The windmill is about a mile outside of central Tralee on the N86.

Windmill St., Blennerville. \bigcirc 066/712-1064. Admission \in 5 adults; \in 4 seniors and students, \in 3 children 6 and over; free for children 5 and under; \in 15 families. Apr–May, Sept–Oct daily 9:30am–5:30pm; Jun–Aug daily 9am–6pm. Closed Nov–Mar.

Carrigafoyle Castle * CASTLE/RUIN This rugged medieval castle, surrounded entirely by water, dates from the 15th century. Its name comes from the Gaelic *Carragain Phoill* (or "Rock of the Hole"), a fitting description for its location in the channel between the land and Carrig Island. It was once the seat of the O'Connor clan, who ruled most of Kerry for a century or so. Besieged by English forces in the late 16th century, it was taken again by Cromwell less than a century later. Although it's a ruin, the tower is almost as tall as that of Blarney Castle (see p. 248). One wall is new, however—modern safety regulations wouldn't allow access to the upper part of the tower without it. Still, it blends in well, and it does mean that you can climb all 104 steps to the top to see the magnificent views.

2km (1¹/₄ miles) west of Ballylongford. \bigcirc 068/43304. Admission \in 5 adults; \in 3 seniors, students and children 6 and over; free for children 5 and under. May–Sept daily 9am–6pm.

Crag Cave ** UNDERGROUND CAVERNS Although they are believed to be more than a million years old, these limestone caves were not discovered until 1983. The guides accompany you 3,753m (12,310 ft.) into the well-lit cave passage on a 40-minute tour revealing massive stalactites and fascinating caverns. It's very touristy, but interesting nonetheless; if need be, you can get your souvenir fix at the crafts shop. There is also a children's play area (endearingly called **Crazy Cave**), although it costs extra. The Garden Restaurant is a useful stop for lunch if you need a quick bite. On the same site is the **Kingdom Falconry** center, where you can watch birds of prey fly and be guided by handlers.

College Rd., Castleisland. www.cragcave.com. \bigcirc 066/714-1244. Caves: \in 12 adults; \in 9 seniors and students; \in 5 children; \in 30– \in 25 families. Kingdom Falconry: \in 8 adults, seniors, and students; \in 5 children. Crazy Cave: \in 8 children for 2 hr. play (accompanying adults free); 3 children \in 20. Combination tickets: \in 20 adults; \in 17 seniors and students; \in 18 children (includes Crazy Cave). Apr–Dec daily 10am–6pm; Dec–Mar Sat–Sun 10am–6pm. Tour times: May–Aug, every $\frac{1}{2}$ hr.; Jan–Apr, Sept–Dec 10:45am, noon, 2:30, 4 and 5:25pm. Take N21 from Tralee to Castleisland, turn left off Tralee Rd. onto Main St., then left onto College Rd.

Kerry County Museum \star MUSEUM Spanning several thousand years of history, up to the present day, this museum's galleries cover (among other subjects) Kerry's ancient past; the coming of the Normans and the medieval period; the Famine years; and the struggle for independence. The high-tech audiovisual presentation includes a tour of the county using archival footage to show how it looked half a century ago. In the Knight's Hall and Medieval Experience, you can wander around a recreated medieval town, with requisite sound effects, dressed-up mannequins, and the like. The museum is in the same building as the Tralee tourism office.

Ashe Memorial Hall, Denny St., Tralee. www.kerrymuseum.ie. **© 066/712-7777.** Admission €5 adults; accompanied children free; €10 families. Jun–Aug daily 9:30am–5:30pm; Sept daily 9:30am–5pm; Oct–May Tues–Sat 9:30am–5pm.

The Seanchaí: Kerry Writers' Museum \star MUSEUM This imaginative museum's innovative displays often feel more like art installations devoted to the life and work of various Kerry writers from the past and present. Life-size statues sit hunched over books, and even propping up a bar, with the text of their best-known works covering them from head to toe. Herein also lies the drawback—Kerry simply hasn't produced many "big beasts" of Irish literature, so the writers celebrated here probably won't ring many bells for the casually interested. But part of the pleasure is discovering new names and hitherto unfamiliar works. A busy schedule of events fills the summer months; check the website for details. Listowel is 26km (16 miles) northeast of Tralee on N69.

24 The Square, Listowel. www.kerrywritersmuseum.com. **© 068/22212.** Free admission. Guided tours €4 adults; €3 seniors, students, and children. Jun–Aug daily 9:30am–5:30pm; Sept–Nov, Mar–May Mon–Fri 10am–4pm. Last tour 1 hr. before closing. Closed Dec–May.

SPORTS & OUTDOOR PURSUITS

Spectator Sports

DOG RACING Greyhounds race year-round on Tuesday and Friday starting at 8pm at the **Kingdom Greyhound Racing Track**, Oakview, Brewery Road (www.igb.ie/tralee; \bigcirc 066/712-4033). Admission is $\in 10$ per person, $\in 5$ seniors and students, $\in 15$ families.

COULD YOU BE THE rose OF TRALEE?

Beauty pageants may have gone out of fashion in much of the world, but at the annual **Rose of Tralee**, these cheesy retro institutions are still going strong.

A 19th-century song about a pretty local girl named Mary O'Connor is at the root of this world-famous beauty contest. William Mulchinock's tear-jerker of a song about the girl he was stopped by fate from marrying so caught the public's imagination that more than 100 years later, it is still performed in Irish pubs worldwide. Thus, in 1959 the idea was born for a contest to find the loveliest lass in Tralee and crown her.

Every August, the town fills with striking young women, those who make them beautiful, and those who want to look at them. The contest rules are fairly generous in terms of just who is Irish, not to mention Traleean—the rules require contestants to be of Irish birth *or ancestry*, so past winners have been from places as far-flung as the U.S. and Australia. The festival lasts 5 days, during which time the entire town becomes somewhat obsessed with it—restaurants, pubs, and theaters all get involved in hosting events related to the Rose of Tralee. In recent years they've also added a men's section, the "Escort of the Year."

If you want to join in the fun, or if you know a pretty girl with an Irish last name, contact the **Rose of Tralee Festival Office** (www.roseoftralee.ie; © 066/712-1322).

Outdoor Pursuits

GOLF The Arnold Palmer-designed Tralee Golf Club, Fenit/Churchill Road, West Barrow, Ardfert (www.traleegolfclub.com; @ 066/713-6379), overlooking the Atlantic 13km (8 miles) northwest of town, is one of the most spectacularly-situated courses in Ireland. Greens fees are a pricey \in 180, although this also allows you to play a second round within a week of the first for \in 60.

About 40km (25 miles) north of Tralee in the northwest corner of County Kerry is Bill Clinton's favorite Irish course, the **Ballybunion Golf Club**, Ballybunion (www.ballybuniongolfclub.ie; \bigcirc 068/27146). This facility offers the chance to play on two challenging 18-hole seaside links, both on cliffs overlooking the Shannon River estuary and the Atlantic. Tom Watson has rated the Old Course one of the finest in the world, while the Cashen Course was designed by Robert Trent Jones, Sr. Greens fees are €55 to €180 or €115 to €210 for golf on both courses within a week, depending on the time of year.

WHERE TO STAY IN TRALEE

Ballygarry House ** On the outer edge of the otherwise unlovely Tralee, this pleasant country inn is ensconced in gardens. Built as a manor house in the 18th century, plenty of the original features have been retained, even though the facilities are thoroughly modern. Elegant guest rooms maintain the country mansion air; superior rooms are surprisingly spacious, with king-size beds. Family rooms are an excellent value at usually the same price as doubles. The fantastic in-house spa is a relaxing, revitalizing hideaway, while the outdoor hot tub, overlooking fields and distant mountains, is a calming oasis. Special inclusive spa offers change monthly—massage, facial, and access to the spa facilities for around \in 80 to \in 100 is the kind of deal you can expect. The Brooks restaurant serves excellent, modern Irish food.

Signposted off N21, Leebrook, approx. 3.3km (2 miles) west of central Tralee. www.ballygarryhouse.com. \bigcirc 066/712-3322. 46 units. \bigcirc 92- \bigcirc 148 double; \bigcirc 120- \bigcirc 228 suites. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; spa; Wi-Fi (free).

WHERE TO DINE IN TRALEE

Denny Lane \star BISTRO A good option for a quick and tasty lunch in Tralee, Denny Lane serves tasty soups, salads, sandwiches, and light lunch specials. It's nothing fancy, but the food is good and the atmosphere congenial. They also do breakfast until a very civilized noon (or brunch till 2pm). Dinner on weekends includes a selection of steaks, seafood, burgers, and other favorites all mixed up with a popular tapas menu.

11 Denny St. www.dennylane.ie. **© 066/712-9831.** Lunch main courses €5–€11. Dinner main courses €16–€26. Mon–Thurs 10am–4pm; Fri–Sat 10am–11pm (last orders 9pm).

THE DINGLE PENINSULA

North of the Iveragh Peninsula, the less visited Dingle Peninsula also has much to offer. To call it "undiscovered" would be too generous—in the summer, Dingle Town is packed with travelers—but it's not as ruthlessly jammed as the Ring of Kerry. And from time to time, even in the high season, you can find yourself blissfully alone amid its natural beauty.

West of Dingle Town, there's a stunning coastal drive lined with archeological sites, known as the **Slea Head Drive.** (It's also a memorable route for cycling.) Some of Ireland's finest beaches line the south side of the peninsula, from the dunes of **Inch Strand** to the dramatic rock formations along **Minard** and **Trabeg** beaches. The north side of the peninsula offers some wide, sandy beaches at **Castlegregory** (*Caislean an Ghriare*), known for its good diving waters, and the more serene beach at tiny **Cloghane** (*An Clochán*) on the southern edge of Brandon Bay. Cloghane is also is a good base for climbers interested in tackling nearby **Mount Brandon** (*Cnoc Bhréannain*), Ireland's second-highest mountain (951m/3,120 ft.).

Dingle Town

A charming, brightly colored little town at the foot of steep hills, **Dingle** (*An Daingean*) has plenty of hotels and restaurants and makes a good base for exploring the region. The town's most famous resident is a dolphin that adopted the place years ago and has been bringing in dolphin-loving tourists ever since. The town's busiest time is in August, when the Dingle Races bring in crowds from throughout the area to watch the horses run every other weekend. (The racetrack is just outside of town on the N86.) In the last week of August, the Dingle Regatta fills the harbor with traditional Irish currach boats in a vivid display of color and history.

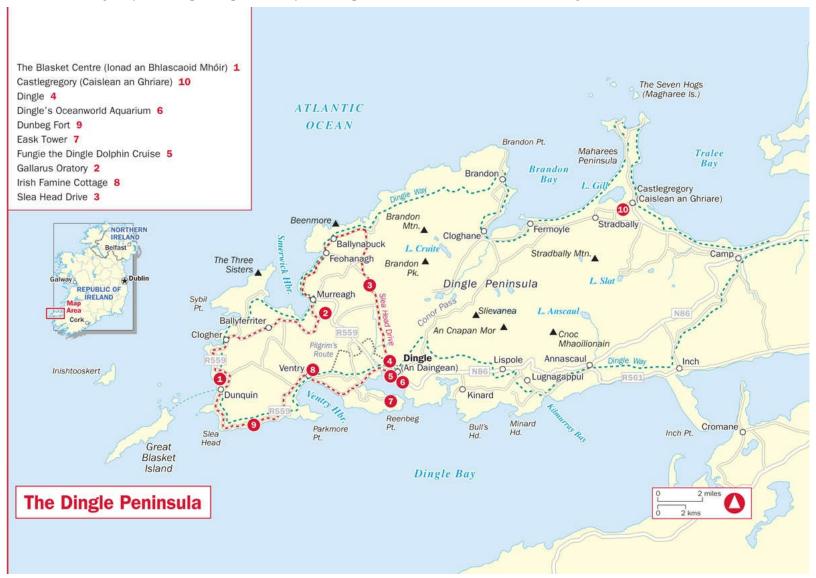
EXPLORING DINGLE TOWN

Dingle Dolphin Boat Tours $\star\star$ BOAT TOURS The story of Fungie the Dingle Dolphin is strange and heartwarming. The bottlenose dolphin was first spotted by Dingle's lighthouse keeper in 1983, as it escorted fishing boats out to sea and then back again at the end of their voyages day after day. The sailors named him, and he became a harbor fixture. Fishermen took their children out to swim with him, and he seemed to love human contact. Now people come from miles around to have a few minutes' time with Fungie, and the fishermen ferry them out to meet him. Trips last about 60 minutes and depart roughly every two hours in low season and as often as every half-hour in high season. Fungie swims right up to the boats that stay out long enough to afford views of the picturesque bay. You can also take an early morning trip (8–10am) in a smaller RIB (rigid inflatable boat) craft that holds only 10 people. On the morning trips only you have the option of hiring a wetsuit and getting in the water with Fungie—but you'll need to book (and tell them in advance that you'll want a wetsuit, which costs extra). The skippers take great lengths to stress that the trips are on Fungie's terms—they don't chase him, and have no control over whether he puts in an appearance (although he usually does). On the standard trips you don't pay if he doesn't show. However, although the little fella is still packing the crowds in at the time of writing, nobody quite knows how old Fungie is. So before you get the little ones too excited you might want to check ahead . . . discreetly.

The Pier. www.dingledolphin.com. \bigcirc 066/915-2626. Tour starts at \notin 16 adults, \notin 8 children 11 and under. Daily, around 11:30am-4pm, weather permitting.

Dingle Oceanworld Aquarium \star AQUARIUM This is a nicely designed aquarium, although it's quite small, given the ticket price. As is the norm at such places, there are lots of sea critters in creatively designed tanks. You can walk through an aquarium tunnel with fish swimming above and around you, and members of the young staff carry around live lobsters, crabs, starfish, and other "inner space" creatures for kids to touch and pet. They also have some super-cute Antarctic Gentoo penguins. This compact, hands-on, interactive place makes a good reward for your kids for being so patient while you took pictures of a pile of rocks back up the road. You get a 10% discount if you buy tickets online.

Dingle Harbour. www.dingle-oceanworld.ie. \bigcirc 066/915-2111. Admission \in 14 adults; \in 9.50 seniors and students; \in 8 children; \in 32– \in 38 families. Jul–Aug daily 10am–7pm; Sept–Jun daily 10am–5pm. Last admission 1 hr. before closing.



Eask Tower \star LANDMARK/VIEWS Built in 1847 as a Famine relief project, this is a remarkable edifice, a 12m (39-ft.) tower built of solid stone nearly 5m (16 ft.) thick with a wooden arrow pointing to the mouth of the harbor. It is certainly interesting to look at, but the main reason for making

the 1.6km (1-mile) climb to the summit of Carhoo Hill is not to see the tower, but the incredible views of Dingle Harbour, Connor Pass, and, on the far side of the bay, the peaks of the Iveragh Peninsula. This is a great place to get your bearings, but save a trip here for a clear day.

Carhoo Hill. From Dingle, follow Slea Head Rd. 3.2km (2 miles), turn left at road. signposted for Colâiste Ide, and continue another 3.2km (2 miles).

Sciuird Archaeological Adventures \star TOURS For serious history buffs, these are a great opportunity to get deeper insight into how prehistoric settlers and early Christians left their mark on the Peninsula. Led by local expert historians, the tours last about a half-day and involve a short bus journey and some easy walking. Four or five monuments, from the Stone Age to medieval times, are on the route. All tours, limited to 8 to 10 people, start from the top of the pier, although pickups from your hotel are possible if you're staying locally. Reservations are required, at least a day or so in advance if possible.

Holy Ground. **© 066/915-1606.** Tour €20 per person. Apr–Sept daily 10:30am and 2pm; rest of year by appointment.

WHERE TO STAY IN DINGLE

Castlewood House *** Overlooking the glassy expanse of Dingle Bay, this lovely whitewashed house is filled with art and antique knick-knacks. The location is breathtaking, and views of the shimmering water, framed by distant mountains, are fully exploited by the huge bay windows, flooding the bright guest rooms with daylight. Beds are chic and comfortable, and accommodations are heavy on designer furniture and well-chosen art. Bathrooms have Jacuzzi tubs. Breakfasts are outstanding—porridge with a dash of whiskey, homemade breads, oranges in caramel, kippers with scrambled egg, or even a light and fluffy omelet with smoked salmon. Despite the beautifully rural feel to the location, Dingle Marina is, in fact, only about 10 minutes' walk away.

Greenmount House *** A welcoming B&B overlooking Dingle Bay, Greenmount House is one of the best places to stay in the area. The view from the front is like a cliché of what you might imagine all of Ireland to be like: rolling green slopes falling gently into the sea at Dingle Bay with the streets of quaint Dingle city curving around the coastline below. The public areas are arranged at the front as much as possible, so that you can admire the view from the guest lounge or breakfast room. The garden has an enclosed hot tub where you can savor a glass of wine. Guest rooms are bright and spacious; some have polished wood floors and others have skylights, letting the daylight pour in. Breakfasts are delicious and plentiful—try the tasty smoked salmon and scrambled eggs. Hosts Mary and John Curran are incredibly friendly and will even arrange personal tours of the area for you, escorted by a member of their own family.

Upper John St. www.greenmounthouse.ie. **Ø 066/915-1414.** 14 units. €100–€155 double. 2-night minimum on summer weekends. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. **Amenities:** Wi-Fi (free).

WHERE TO DINE IN DINGLE

Dingle is one of the best places in Ireland for gourmet seafood, not to mention its more low-rent (but delicious) cousin, fish and chips.

The Chart House $\star\star$ IRISH This friendly restaurant on the outskirts of Dingle is one of the most popular places to indulge in the local bounty. The menu is short but impeccably judged, filled with regional flavor and a hint of global influences. Plates include hake served with mashed parsnip and carrot, and roast lamb with garlic potatoes. Almost everything on the menu is sourced from providers

within the Dingle Peninsula. You can choose from certain dishes on the menu as a \in 33 prix-fixe deal, and the three-course early bird special has almost as much choice as the evening service for just \in 27. The Mall. www.thecharthousedingle.com. **© 066/915-2255.** Main courses \in 18– \in 27. Daily 6–10pm. Times may vary in winter. Closed Jan to mid-Feb.

Doyle's Seafood Bar *** SEAFOOD This is one of the best places in the region for top-notch seafood. It's not cheap, but the food is beautifully prepared. As you'd expect from a place like this, what you find on the menu will depend on the catch of the day; however, specialties include fish stew made with white wine and saffron, turbot with red pepper and chive sauce, or black sole with a lemon and parsley butter. Carnivores are taken care of with simple dishes of steak or lamb—perfectly cooked, but hardly the reason why people flock here. The wine list is extensive, and the early bird menu is served until 7:30pm (€30 for three courses).

4 John St. www.doylesofdingle.ie. Ø 066/915-2674. Main courses €23–€33. Mon–Sat (and Sun on public holiday weekends only) 5–9:30pm. Closed Jan.

Reel Dingle Fish $\star\star$ FISH & CHIPS Dingle is not short of an authentic "chipper" or two, and this is one of the best in town. Everything's cooked the traditional way—fish in batter, with piping hot chips, and no messing around—but there's a greater than average choice of fresh fish to choose from including hake, monkfish, pollock, and locally smoked haddock, in addition to the more usual cod and plaice. They also sell homemade burgers crafted from local beef.

Bridge St. **© 066/915-1713.** Fish and chips €5–€12. Daily noon–around 11pm.

SHOPPING

Dingle has several interesting little craft stores and galleries dotted around the town center and in its environs. Here are a few of the best.

Brian de Staic Jewellery Workshop $\star\star$ Brian is a highly respected jewelry designer who has built up quite a following since he first appeared on the scene over 30 years ago. He specializes in modern interpretations of ancient Celtic motifs, and you'll find everything from pendants and brooches to earrings, bracelets, and crosses. Some of his work is based on instantly recognizable designs; others are more subtle and abstract. It's all exquisite quality. Green St. www.briandestaic.com. **@ 066/915-1298**.

Greenlane Gallery $\star\star$ A great selection of new, contemporary art is on sale at this interesting gallery. Styles vary from abstract watercolors and oils to challenging sculpture. Prices vary, inevitably, but several pieces are really quite affordable. Green St. www.greenlanegallery.com. © 066/915-2018.

The Weavers' Shop $\star\star$ Lisbeth Mulcahy is a talented weaver and fashion designer who creates lovely, colorful items of knitwear, hats, throws, and wall hangings. You can also take a peek at the latest creations being made in the studio out back. The shop is closed on Sundays from October to May. Green St. www.lisbethmulcahy.com. © 066/915-1688.

Louis Mulcahy Workshop ****** Husband of weaver Lisbeth Mulcahy (see above), Louis Mulcahy is a big name in designer Irish pottery. He designs everything on sale in this shop, and personally crafts many of the pieces—chances are you'll be able to come away with a true original. It's all beautifully made, from Deco-influenced vases to kitchenware, tea sets, and ornaments. Considering what a name he is, Louis's prices are pretty reasonable too. The workshop also has a handy cafe. Clogher is 16.5km ($10\frac{1}{3}$ miles) northwest of Dingle on R559. On R559, Clogher, Ballyferriter, near Dingle. www.louismulcahy.com. **©** 066/915-6229. Workshop: May–Sept Mon–Fri 9am–7pm, Sat–Sun 10am–7pm; Oct–Feb Mon–Fri 9am– 5:30pm, Sat–Sun 10am–5:30pm; Mar, Apr Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat–Sun 10am–6pm.

The Slea Head Drive

Looping around the western tip of the Dingle Peninsula, this spectacular scenic drive offers rugged coastal vistas, unspoiled islands, and mossy archaeological sites—picture-postcard Ireland at its best. Leaving Dingle by car, head northwest along R559 following the **Slea Head Drive** road markers. Sights below are listed in the order you'll pass them if you drive the loop counterclockwise. *Note:* This is serious Gaeltacht territory, so by law, all signs—even road hazard signs—are in Gaelic only.



Slea Head.

At any tourist information center, you can get a guide to the various ruined abbeys and old forts along the way. Not far from Dingle, **Gallarus Oratory** \star (see p. 333) is a beautifully preserved, early Christian church building. A few miles away, the sleepy village of **Ballyferriter** (*Baile an Fheirtearaigh*) has an Iron Age fort with a particularly grim back story (see "A Gruesome Tale in Ballyferriter" on p. 334).

From the village of **Dunquin** (*Dún Chaion*), stunningly situated between Slea Head and Clogher Head, you can catch ferries to the **Blasket Islands** (*Na Blascaodaí*) (see p. 332). Abandoned in the 1950s, these days they're inhabited only by seals and seabirds. **Slea Head**, at the southwestern edge

of the peninsula, has pristine beaches, great walks, and extensive archaeological remains such as **Dunbeg Fort** (*Dún Beag*) \star , p. 332.

The Blasket Islands ** HERITAGE/NATURE SITE Overshadowed by the more famous Skelligs (see p. 317), the Blaskets are another group of mysterious, abandoned islands off the Kerry coast, but with more recent stories to tell. For hundreds of years these were home to an isolated community with a rich tradition of storytelling and folklore-all in traditional Gaelic, of course-that was well documented in the late 1800s. In 1953, however, the Irish government ordered a mandatory evacuation when the islands were considered too dangerous for habitation. Various islands have wonderfully evocative names like The Sleeping Giant and Cathedral Rocks. The only island you can actually visit is the largest, Great Blasket, where a few crumbling buildings and skeletal edifices remain—an eerie, ghost town-like atmosphere in an outstandingly beautiful setting. It's all capped off by a stunning 13km (8-mile) walking route that stretches to the west end of the island, passing sea cliffs and beaches of ivory sand. You can pick up maps and other information from the the mainland in Dunquin. Trips aboard the Blasket Centre on Peig Savers (www.greatblasketisland.net; @ 066/057-2626), a nippy RIB vessel, include a 3-hour stop on Great Blasket and a detour to look out for Fungie the Dingle Dolphin (p. 326). They leave from Dingle Marina at 12:30pm every day and cost €35 adults, €20 children. If that doesn't seem long enough, Marine Tours (www.marinetours.ie; @ 086/335-3805) run half-day tours leaving Ventry at 10:30am, and returning at 5pm daily. Their tour includes 3 hours on Great Blasket; the rest of the time is spent cruising around the other islands without making landfall. The cost of this tour is \notin 50.

The Blasket Centre (Ionad an Bhlascaoid): Dunquin (Dún Chaoin). www.blasketislands.ie. \bigcirc 066/915-6444. Admission €4 adults; €3 seniors; €2 children; €10 families. Mid-Mar to Oct daily 10am–6pm. Last admission 45 min. before closing.

Dunbeg Fort (Dún Beag) \star RUINS Sitting atop a sheer cliff just south of Slea Head, outside the village of Vestry, this 5th-century fort's stony walls rise from the cliff edge as if they were always part of it. The round, Iron Age structure's stone walls are still mostly sturdy, although part of the fort has fallen into the sea. Walk around the fort to see where other fortifications and "beehive" huts were built inside the walls thousands of years ago. There's also a mysterious underground passage. You can get information on the history of the fort in the modern visitor's center, and stop for a cup of tea and some hearty soup in the little on-site cafe.

Dunbeg Fort, Slea Head Drive. www.dunbegfort.com. **© 066/915-9070.** Admission €3 adults; €2 children. Daily 9:30am–6pm.



Dunquin Bay.

Gallarus Oratory \star RELIGIOUS SITE This small, beehive-shaped church is one of the bestpreserved pieces of early Christian architecture in Ireland. Built between the 7th and the 9th centuries A.D., its walls and roof are made entirely from dry stones without mortar—yet the interior stays remarkably dry. (Not quite dry enough, sadly, to avoid minor damage during the heavy floods that hit Ireland in 2014.) The small visitor center features displays on the history of the Oratory, plus the obligatory information film. Nearby is the single surviving tower of **Gallarus Castle** that was built in the 15th century. Tours of the castle can be pre-booked with the visitor center (not that there's much to see inside).

Gallarus. www.heritageireland.ie. © 064/663-2402. Free admission. May–Aug daily 10am–6pm. Signposted down small farm road off R559, either 11.8km (7.3 miles) northeast of Dingle or 4.8 km (3 miles) east of Ballyferriter.

Irish Famine Cottage \star HERITAGE SITE This cottage isn't a replica; it's a real dwelling, maintained as it would have been at the time it was abandoned during the Great Famine years of the mid-19th century. The humble stone building, scattered with pieces of furniture, is a stark and haunting sight, perched on a windswept cliff overlooking the coast. Sheep and horses graze nearby, adding to the feeling of wildness and isolation. You can't go inside, but looking in through the windows gives a powerful enough impression of what life was really like for the rural poor. The ticket price includes a bag of feed you can take up with you for the curious farm animals who watch

your approach. *Note:* The cottage is a 2-minute walk up hill from the parking lot, so it may not be suitable for those with mobility problems.

Signposted from R559, Ventry. www.famine-cottage.com. \bigcirc 066/915-6241. Admission \notin 4 adults; \notin 3 children. Apr–Oct daily 10am–6pm. If approaching from the west, sign is just after the turning for Dunbeg Fort.

SPORTS & OUTDOOR PURSUITS

BEACHES The Dingle Peninsula has some of the most dramatic beaches in Ireland. The most famous is **Inch Strand**—a 5km-long (3-mile) creamy stretch of sand dunes in the town of Inch *(Inse)*—but one of the most striking is **Kilmurray Bay at Minard** where, in the shadow of Minard Castle, giant sandstone boulders form a beach unlike anything you've ever seen. It's definitely *not* safe for swimming, but ideal for a stroll or a picnic.

A gruesome TALE IN BALLYFERRITER

The unassuming village of **Ballyferriter** (*Baile an Fheirtearaigh*), part of the Slea Head Drive, is named after a local rebel named Piaras Ferriter. A poet and soldier, he fought in the 1641 rebellion and ultimately became the last area commander to surrender to Oliver Cromwell's English troops.

Just north of the village, you can follow signs to the moody ruins of the **Dún an Oir Fort**, a defensive citadel dating from the Iron Age. A small memorial is dedicated to 600 Spanish and Irish troops who were massacred here by the English in 1580. Most were beheaded—a fact commemorated by the highly gruesome local names for two adjacent fields nearby. The first, where the executions were carried out, is called "the Field of the Cutting." The second, where their partial remains were buried, is "the Field of the Heads."

Like Minard, **Trabeg Beach** confronts the southwest storms of the Atlantic head on. Here, during ebb tide, you will find exquisite wave-sculptured, maroon sandstone shapes below sheer rock cliffs, and small sea caves lined with veins of crystalline quartz. The beauty of the rock sculptures combined with the roar of the surf is magical.

Some of the calmest beaches for swimming in this area are east of Castlegregory, on the more protected west side of Tralee Bay. The beach at **Maherabeg** has a coveted European Blue Flag (meaning it is exceptionally unpolluted and environmentally safe), and the beaches of **Brandon Bay** are particularly scenic—great for walking and swimming.

BIRD-WATCHING In summer, the small, uninhabited islands surrounding **Great Blasket** attract flocks of nesting seabirds, including vast numbers of storm petrels. From Clogher Head north of Dunquin at the western extremity of the Dingle Peninsula, rare autumn migrants can sometimes be seen. **Inch Peninsula**, extending into Castlemaine Harbour south of Inch town, is a wintering ground for brent geese, which arrive in late August and move on in April; there is also a large wigeon population in the fall.

CYCLING Mountain bikes can be rented at **Foxy John Moriarty**, Main Street, Dingle (@ 066/915-1316). Alternatively, bike hire is available at the Mountain Man Outdoor Shop, Strand Street, Dingle (www.themountainmanshop.com; @ 066/915-2400). The cost is normally around \in 15 to \in 20 per day, or \in 55 to \in 80 per week. Employees at both shops know the area well, and can suggest a number of day trips or overnight touring options. Mountain Man runs a great range of guided cycle tours, including a gastro tour and an archeological tour of Slea Head. Not to be outdone, Foxy John's has the advantage of also being a pub, although you might want to save your pints until after your bike ride.

One possible day trip is to take the road out to the tip of the peninsula past Slea Head and Clogher Head. The scenery is outrageously beautiful and the journey is hilly, but not ridiculously so.

DIVING On the North Dingle Peninsula, **Waterworld**, Harbour House, Scraggane Pier, Castlegregory (www.waterworld.ie; © 066/713-9292), is a diving center that offers packages including diving, room, and board at good rates. Classes for beginners are available. The house is a short boat ride from most of the diving sites.

GOLF Sixteen kilometers (10 miles) west of Dingle Town, on the western edge of the Dingle Peninsula, overlooking the Atlantic, the **Dingle Golf Club (Ceann Sibéal)**, Ballyferriter (www.dinglelinks.com; © 066/915-6255), welcomes visitors to play its 18-hole, par-72 course. Greens fees are \in 30 to \in 65, depending on the season.

HORSEBACK RIDING At Dingle Horse Riding, Ballinaboula House, Dingle (www.dinglehorseriding.com; © 086/821-1225), rides are available along nearby beaches or through the mountains. A 1-hour mountain ride starts at €40. Half-day, full-day, and 3- to 5-day packages, including accommodations, meals, and riding, can be arranged.



Horseback riding in Dingle.

day hike: HIGH ATOP MOUNT BRANDON

It'll take a full day to scale **Mount Brandon**, Ireland's second tallest mountain, but the views of ocean and gorgeous countryside are extraordinary.

The approach from the west is a more gradual climb, but the walk from the eastern, Cloghane side is far more interesting, taking in a pastoral vista of the **Paternoster Lakes**. The road to the trail head is signposted just past Cloghane on the road to Brandon town; drive about 5km (3 miles) on this road to a small parking lot and the **Lopsided Tea House**. Be sure to bring plenty of water and food, gear for wind and rain, and a good map. The trail climbs through fields, past an elaborate grotto, and along the slope of an open hillside where red-and-white poles clearly mark the way. As you round the corner of the high open hillside, the Paternoster Lakes and Brandon come into view.

The only seriously strenuous leg is the climb out of this valley to the ridge, a short but intense scramble over boulders and around ledges. Once you reach the ridge top, turn left and follow the trail another .4km (.25 mile) or so to the summit. You can return the way you came or continue south along the ridge, returning to Cloghane on the **Pilgrim's Route**, an old track that circumnavigates the Dingle Peninsula. Although this is a day hike (about 4 hr. to the summit and back), and very well marked, it shouldn't be taken lightly and certainly isn't for amateurs—bring all necessary supplies and let someone know when you expect to return.

Information on routes and weather conditions is available at the Cloghane visitor center.

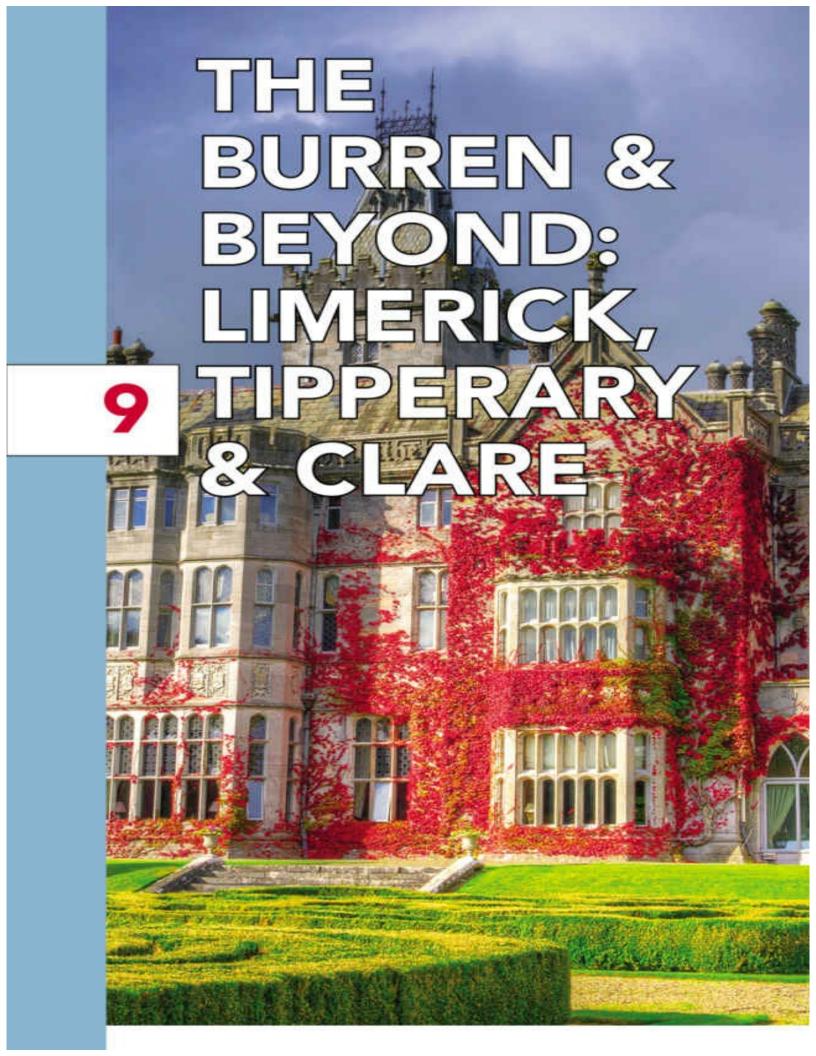
SAILING The Dingle Sailing Club, The Marina, Dingle (www.dinglesailingclub.com; © 087/718-7557), offers an array of courses taught by experienced, certified instructors. Summer courses cost from about $\in 150$ to $\in 200$.

SEA ANGLING For packages and day trips, contact Nick or Maureen O'Connor at Angler's Rest, Ventry (www.iol.ie/~avalon; © 066/915-9947).

WALKING The **Dingle Way** begins in Tralee and circles the peninsula, covering 153km (95 miles) of gorgeous mountain and coastal landscape. The most rugged section is along Brandon Head, where the trail passes between Mount Brandon and the ocean (see "Day Hike: High Atop Mount Brandon," above). The views are tremendous, but the walk is long (about 24km/15 miles, averaging 9 hr.) and strenuous, and should be attempted only by experienced walkers and in good weather. The section between Dunquin and Ballyferriter (also 24km/15 miles) follows an especially lovely stretch of coast. For more information, pick up maps from local tourist offices.

Hidden Ireland Tours, Dingle (www.hiddenirelandtours.com; © 251/478-7519 in the U.S., or 087/221-4002), offers a week of easy to moderate guided hiking through some of Ireland's most beautiful scenery. Among other itineraries, it offers hikes around the Kerry Way, Killarney National Park, Skellig Michael, and the Dingle Peninsula. Prices include luggage transfers and accommodations. Hikes are available April to September.

WINDSURFING The beaches around Castlegregory offer a variety of conditions for windsurfing. Those on the eastern side of the peninsula are generally calmer than those to the west. Equipment can be hired from **Jamie Knox Watersports**, Brandon Bay, Castlegregory (www.jamieknox.com; **© 066/713-9411**), on the road between Castlegregory and Fahamore. The cost runs from around $\in 15$ for 1 hour to $\in 75$ for the whole day. They also offer lessons for surfers of all skill levels; a 2-hour beginner's taster costs $\in 30$ adults, $\in 25$ kids 15 and under.



Adare castle in County Limerick.

N orth of County Kerry, the west Coast of Ireland charms and fascinates with a varied and stunning landscape. From the lush, emerald-green farmland that edges the Shannon River, you can head north to the vast and breathtaking Cliffs of Moher, the ancient beauty of the Rock of Cashel, and finally up steep curving roads to the lunar landscape of the extraordinary Burren National Park. However far you go, there's something wonderful to catch your eye. This is where Ireland begins to get wild.

The first county you come to heading north from Kerry, Limerick is a quiet, rural county, distinguished by the swirls and eddies of the Shannon River and its valley—although you may want to give its eponymous capital city a miss. To the east, Tipperary is filled with pleasant, emerald-green farmland. In truth the county doesn't contain much else that's worth going out of the way for, with one major exception: the Rock of Cashel. As one of Ireland's most spectacular medieval ruins, it's worth a trip across the county all on its own.

County Clare, however, could hardly be a starker contrast. The region's biggest draw is the unique, wild region known as the Burren. Dotted with mysterious ancient stone dolmens and graced with stark, breathtaking vistas, its lunar landscape is quite unlike anywhere else in the country. As if that wasn't enough to impress, Clare also has the famous Cliffs of Moher, a place of high drama and majestic beauty.

ESSENTIALS

Arriving

Several major airlines operate regular, scheduled flights into Shannon Airport, off the **BY PLANE** Limerick-Ennis road (N18), County Clare (www.shannonairport.com; @ 061/712000), 24km (15 miles) west of Limerick. Aer Lingus and Ryanair operate flights from London, Edinburgh, Birmingham, and Manchester in England. A taxi from the airport to the city center costs about €35; airport pre-book with at the Shannon Airport Cabs catch one or you can (www.shannonairportcabs.com; @ 061/333-366).

BY BUS Bus Éireann (www.buseireann.ie; **© 061/313-333**) provides the regular Shannonlink bus service from Shannon Airport to Colbert Station, Limerick's railway station, on Parnell Street. Bus services from all parts of Ireland come to this station. They also operate services from Limerick, Wexford, and Rosslare, into Clonmel Train Station, Thomas Street, Clonmel, County Tipperary (www.buseireann.ie; **© 052/612-1982**). In County Clare, most of the small towns and countryside attractions listed in this chapter—including Bunratty, Kilfenora, Doolin, and the Cliffs of Moher—are all accessible on Bus Éireann, although service isn't frequent in the most rural areas.

BYTRAIN Irish Rail operates direct trains from Dublin, Cork, and Killarney, with connections from other parts of Ireland. They arrive at Limerick's Colbert Station, Parnell Street (www.irishrail.ie; © 061/315555). Irish Rail runs several trains a day from Limerick and Waterford into Clonmel Station on Thomas Street in Clonmel, County Tipperary (www.irishrail.ie; © 052/612-1982). The station is a 10-minute walk from the town center.

BY CAR Although several of the major sights in this region can be reached on public transportation,

you really need a car for the more remote places. Shannon Airport has offices of: Avis (www.avis.ie; © 061/715600), Budget (www.budget.ie; © 061/471361), and Hertz (www.hertz.ie; © 061/471369). Several local firms also maintain desks at the airport; among the most reliable is Dan Dooley Rent-A-Car (www.dan-dooley.ie; © 062/53103).

[FastFACTS] LIMERICK, TIPPERARY & CLARE

ATMs/Banks In Clonmel, a branch of AIB (@ 056/612-2500) is on O'Connell Street. A handy ATM is at Bunratty Castle and Folk Park. Otherwise ATMs are frustratingly rare in the countryside, so make sure you get cash when you can.

Doctors For medical emergencies dial **©** 999. For non-emergencies, your hotel should call you a doctor. Otherwise in Clonmel try the **Western House Medical Centre**, Western Rd. (**©** 052/612-5312). In Limerick City, there's Abbeygrove Surgery in Sir Harry's Mall, off Island Road (**©** 061/419121). In Ballyvaughan, contact the Ballyvaughan Medical Centre (**©** 065/707-7035). In Doolin, try Dr. Catherine Flavin O'Loughlin on Fisher Street (**©** 065/707-4990).

Emergencies For police, fire, or other emergencies, dial @ 999.

Pharmacies In Clonmel, there's McCormack's Pharmacy, 51 Upper William St. (© 061/414-6029). In Limerick City, try Boots the Chemist on Childers Rd. (© 061/422017). In the rural areas of County Clare covered in this chapter, drugstores are fairly scarce, though in Lisdoonvarna you could stop by the Burren Pharmacy on Main St. (© 065/707-4104).

Taxis In Clonmel try Dessie's Cabs (@ 052/612-4425). In Limerick City, contact Munster Cabs (@ 061/412727). Taxis farther out into the countryside, in small towns and villages are rare; the best bet is to ask your hotel, B&B, or restaurant to call you one.

THERE ONCE WAS A poet FROM LIMERICK ...

So how did a genre of bawdy pub poetry come to be associated with this unassuming Irish town? The answer seems buried nearly 300 years in the past. Nobody really knows who wrote the first sharply worded, five-line poem, but the format became popular in the 18th century, due to a group of poets who lived in the town of Croom in County Limerick. Known as the *Fili na Maighe*, or the "Gaelic poets of the Maigue," the poets wrote sardonic, quick-witted poems in Irish that soon became all the rage. Their style was adopted across the region, and within a century, everybody was doing it. Anthologies on the subject list 42 poets and Irish scholars in the county in the 19th century, whose limerick-style compositions covered a range of topics—romance, drinking, personal squabbles, and politics.

But it's possible that the scathing, satiric limerick style we know today rose from an 18th-century battle of wills between a poet and pub owner, Sean O'Tuama, and his friend Andrias MacCraith. Boyhood friends O'Tuama and MacCraith grew up in County Limerick. After a spectacular falling-out (nobody quite remembers over what), they vented their wit in a series of castigating verses about each other. As these became enormously popular, the modern limerick was born. In retrospect, they're kind of cute, although the meter was sometimes a little stretched. As MacCraith once wrote:

O'Tuama! You boast yourself handy, At selling good ale and bright brandy But the fact is your liquor Makes everyone sicker, I tell you this, I, your good friend, Andy.

COUNTY LIMERICK

The majority of County Limerick is peaceful, pleasant farmland. The picture-postcard village of Adare is definitely worth a visit (although you'll see everything from the end of a row of tourist buses), as are Lough Gurr and Rathkeale. Sadly the same cannot be said of Limerick City (see box p. 344); despite the best efforts of the Tourist Board to shake up its image, the city is a rather gritty, unpleasant place. Things have improved a little since the late 2000s, most notably with the recent redevelopment of the visitor center at **King John's Castle**, but unless you're *really* trying to see

everything this island has to offer, Limerick shouldn't demand much of your time.

Visitor Information

The Limerick Tourist Information Centre is on Arthur's Quay, Limerick (© 061/317522). It is open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm; in summer it's usually open weekends too, but call ahead to check.

Another office is located in the Adare Heritage Centre, Main Street, Adare (www.adareheritagecentre.ie; © 061/396-666). It is open daily, year-round, from 9am to 6pm.



Irish traditional cottage houses in Adare village.

Exploring County Limerick

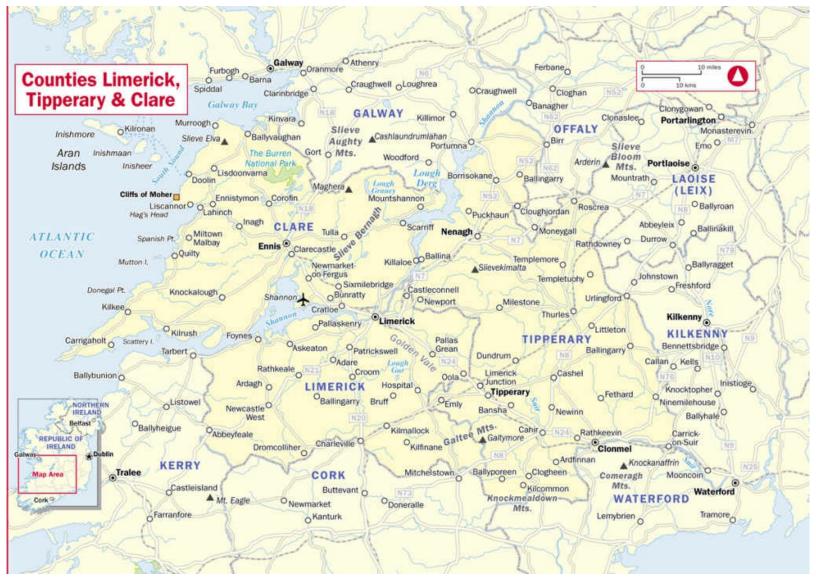
Adare ****** VILLAGE "O sweet Adare" wrote the poet Gerald Griffin (1803—40), "O soft retreat of sylvan splendor/Nor summer sun nor morning gale/E'er hailed a scene more softly tender." Like a town plucked from a book of fairy tales, Adare has thatched cottages, black-and-white timbered houses, lichen-covered churches, and romantic ruins, strewn along the banks of the River Maigue. Unfortunately, all of this means that Adare has many fans. Yes, this place has been seriously discovered by the tour-bus crowds—even by May, which is still officially off season, the roads can get clogged at times—but it's still absolutely worth a stop. Drop in at the Adare Heritage Centre on Main Street, roughly in the middle of the village. Part visitor center, part museum on the history of the town, it also has a small craft store. From June to September the center also runs bus tours to

Desmond Castle, costing €6 adults, €5 seniors, students and children, and €20 families.

Adare Heritage Centre, Main St., Adare, Co. Limerick. www.adareheritagecentre.ie. **© 061/396-666.** Historical Exhibition €5 adults; €3.50 seniors, students, and children, €20 families. Daily 9am–6pm (sometimes closed for lunch).

Foynes Flying Boat Museum ** MUSEUM When Shannon Airport was just a remote patch of undeveloped farmland, this was the center of international aviation in Europe. The first commercial flight from the U.S. to Europe touched down at Foynes Airport, one hot July morning in 1937. Five years later, this became one end of the first-ever regular service between the two continents. (It's absolutely no coincidence that, in the same year, Foynes was also the birthplace of the Irish coffee. The story goes that a flight to New York had to turn back after a particularly violent storm. The bartender was asked to hurriedly prepare something to both warm up and steady the nerves of the unfortunate passengers. Not knowing what else to do, he served hot coffee and threw shots of whiskey in for good measure.) At this engaging museum, you can see a replica of the original Pan Am "flying boat," which may make you swear never to complain about a modern flight again. You can also tour the actual terminal building, kept as it was when the airport closed in 1945, and experience a replica 1940s cinema.

Foynes, Co. Limerick. www.flyingboatmuseum.com. \bigcirc 069/65416. Admission \in 11 adults; \in 9 seniors and students; \in 6 children 5–13; children 4 and under free; \in 28 families. Mid-Mar to May daily 9:30am–5pm; June–Sept daily 9:30am–6pm; Oct to mid-Nov daily 9:30am–5pm. Last admission 1 hr. before closing. Closed Mid-Nov to mid-Mar.



LIMERICK CITY: worth A VISIT?

It is synonymous the world over with a type of lively verse, but spend much time in Limerick's eponymous capital and you might find yourself making up a few off-color rhymes of your own. With a population of 60,000, it's the Republic's fourth largest city (only Dublin, Cork, and Galway are bigger), with a gritty, crime-ridden urban feel usually associated with much bigger cities. In 2008, it suffered the ignominy of being named the murder capital of Europe, while the same report declared Ireland to be Europe's safest country overall.

Simply put, Limerick just isn't very nice.

That said, there have been genuine efforts to make things better. The tourist board is doing its part to clean the place up, with a certain amount of success. A prime example is **King John's Castle** \star (Nicholas Street; www.shannonheritage.com; **O 061/411201**). The stern riverside fortress, dating from 1210, is the centerpiece of Limerick's historic area. But rarely has an historic building been so poorly treated in the modern age; during the 1950s, in an astonishing act of government vandalism, it even had a public housing project built within its central courtyard. Thankfully that's long gone, but the big, modern visitor center building that's gone up in its place still spoils the effect. That said, a recent renovation has greatly modernized and improved the visitor facilities, including high-tech interactive displays. Admission costs €9 adults, €7 seniors and students, €5.50 children, €21 to €26 families (free for children 4 and under). It's open April to September from 9:30am to 5:30pm, and October to March from 9:30am to 4:30pm (last admission an hour before closing).

Located in an 18th-century customs building with a fine Palladian front, the **Hunt Museum** $\star\star$ (Rutland Street; www.huntmuseum.com; © 061/312833) has exhibits on ancient Greece and Rome, and paintings by Picasso and Renoir. Admission costs \in 5.50 adults, \in 4.50 seniors and students, \in 3.50 children and \in 14 families. It's open Monday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm, and Sunday from 2 to 5pm.

The Limerick City Gallery of Art \star , in People's Park at the corner of Perry Square and Mallow St. (www.gallery.limerick.ie; @ 061/310633), has a regularly changing program of contemporary art exhibitions and a permanent collection that includes work by Irish painters Jack B. Yeats and Sir John Lavery. Its opening times are Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 10am to 5:30pm; Tuesday 11am to 5:30pm; Thursday 10am to 8:30pm; Saturday 10am to 5pm; and Sunday noon to 5pm (closed on public holidays). Admission is free.

Lough Gur ** LAKE/ANCIENT SITES Occupied continuously from the Neolithic period to late medieval times, this lovely lake's shores hold an unusual preponderance of ancient sites. Most of the sights are well signposted on the R512, the drive that skirts around the lake's edge. Archaeologists have uncovered foundations of a small farmstead built around the year 900, a lake island dwelling built between 500 and 1000, a wedge-shaped tomb that was a communal grave around 2,500 $_{B.C.}$, and the extraordinary Grange Stone Circle, a 4,000-year-old site with 113 upright stones forming the largest prehistoric stone circle in Ireland. An interesting Heritage Centre helps put it all into context. The center underwent a half-million euro renovation in 2015, and there are new exhibits dedicated to explaining why Neolithic people chose this area to settle. To find the center, head south through the village of Ballyneety; after about 6.5km (4 miles), you'll come to Reardons Pub in Holycross. Take the first left afterward, keep to the left, and this road will take you straight there. The lake itself is a great place to explore and have a picnic.

11km (6³/₄ miles) SE of Limerick City on R512, Lough Gur, Co. Limerick. www.loughgur.com. \bigcirc 061/385186. Free access to Lough Gur itself; Heritage Centre €5 adults; €4 seniors and students; €3 children; €15 families. Heritage Center Mar–Oct Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun noon–6pm. Nov–Feb Mon–Fri noon–4pm; Sat–Sun noon–5pm.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

FISHING Get information, licenses, permits, and equipment at the Fishing, Shooting and Archery Store, The Milk Market, Ellen Street, Limerick (© 061/413484). Celtic Angling, in nearby Ballingarry, Adare (www.celticangling.com; © 069/68202), sells all the supplies you need. They also offer daylong salmon-fishing excursions on the Shannon, including pickup from Limerick City,

equipment, and licenses. A day's fishing will cost on average $\in 170$ to $\in 300$ for one person, plus $\in 50$ to $\in 100$ for each additional person in a group; equipment rental is included in the price. (Owner Paddy Dunworth also offers guided sightseeing trips and hillwalking excursions; check the website for details.)

IF THE story FITZ...

"Honey Fitz" was the nickname of John Fitzgerald (1863–1950), maternal grandfather to President John F. Kennedy. Born in America to Irish immigrants (his father was from Limerick), Fitzgerald was twice elected mayor of Boston. According to the biographer Robert Dallek, Fitz had a reputation for being "the only politician who could sing 'Sweet Adeline' sober and get away with it." Hence the nickname, in praise of his sweet singing voice. Between Adare and Limerick, the small town of Patrickswell is home to the bijou **Honey Fitz Theatre** (www.loughgur.com/honeyfitz; **© 061/385386**). This is the main venue for the **Lough Gur Storytelling Festival**, a 5-day event in late October that celebrates the art of the good yarn, through a program of music, drama, and poetry. The theater was opened in 1994 by Fitzgerald's granddaughter, Jean Kennedy Smith (who was then U.S. Ambassador). Naturally, "Sweet Adeline" was sung during the ceremony.

GOLF The par-70 inland course at the Limerick Golf Club, Ballyclough (www.limerickgolfclub.ie; \bigcirc 061/415146), 4.8km (3 miles) south of Limerick, has greens fees of \in 50 weekdays, \in 70 weekends, year-round. The par-71 inland course at Castletroy Golf Club, Castletroy, Co. Limerick (www.castletroygolfclub.ie; \bigcirc 061/335753), 4.8km (3 miles) east of Limerick, charges greens fees of \in 40 Monday to Thursday, \in 50 Friday to Sunday, year-round.

HORSEBACK RIDING The county's fields provide good turf for horseback riding. Rates run about €25 to €30 per hour. The Clonshire Equestrian Centre, Adare, Co. Limerick (www.clonshire.com; © 061/396770), offers riding holidays for adults and children. They're also one of the only riding schools in Ireland to offer riding for disabled visitors.

Where to Stay in County Limerick

Limerick City's economic growth spurt in the 1990s and 2000s led to the construction of several large, impersonal chain hotels there. But why would you bother? The real finds are in the rural parts of County Limerick, where you can hide away in a lovely old cottage on a tranquil farm, or splurge on a night in a grand country-house retreat.

Adare Manor $\star\star$ Surrounded by a whopping 340 hectares (840 acres) of landscaped grounds, on the very edge of charming Adare village, this luxurious resort looks impressively Victorian gothic from the outside. Indoors, you'll find a beautifully restored and converted manor house; it's mostly 19th-century, although check out the elaborately-carved 15th-century doors on the ground floor. Guest rooms are spacious and individually decorated in traditional (some might say fussy) style. Hidden away on the grounds are 15 modern 3-bedroom self-catering villas, plus 18 townhouses. There's also a swimming pool and a pampering spa. Adare Manor is renowned as a golf destination, with a highly rated 18-hole championship course. Archery, clay pigeon shooting, and horseback riding can all be easily arranged. The **Oak Room** $\star\star\star$ restaurant is one of the best in the area (see p. 348).

Adare, Co. Limerick. www.adaremanor.com. **© 061/605200.** 62 units. €480–€995 double; €600–€800 villas. 2-night minimum stay in villas. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: 2 restaurants; bar; room service; spa; pool; gym; golf course; Wi-Fi (free).

Courtyard Cottage \star A former cowshed may not sound like the height of glamour, but this is a beautifully converted, elegant space. You really feel away from the herd (no pun intended), with 202 hectares (500 acres) of farmland between you and civilization. And what could be more civilized

than going up to the manor house, where the charming owner and family resides, for dinner—or even having it brought to your door if you prefer? ($\in 25$; or you can fend for yourself in the cottage's own kitchen.) You can rent this place as a fully self-catering option, or as a B&B, with tasty Irish breakfasts cooked every morning up at the house.

Askeaton, Co. Limerick. \bigcirc 061/392112. 2 units. \in 100– \in 160 B&B; \in 550– \in 660 per week self-catering. Free parking. Breakfast included in B&B rate. Amenities: Dinner on request (notice required); kitchen; tennis court; no Wi-Fi.

Echo Lodge ** This place was once a convent, before being converted into a chic and stylish hotel. Bedrooms are reasonably small, but decorated in such a way that they could be described as "traditional," only without the acres of chintz that usually implies—instead they use vintage print wallpapers, tasteful color schemes, and pleasantly eccentric, *objets d'art* touches here and there, such as mini-Ionic columns for bedside tables. The **Mustard Seed **** restaurant is one of the best in the region (see p. 348). There's usually a good handful of special offers on the website.

Ballingarry, Co. Limerick (13km/8 miles south of Adare). www.mustardseed.ie. **Ø 069/68508.** 76 units. €130–€320 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; Wi-Fi (free in public areas only).

Fitzgerald's Woodlands House Hotel ** The bedrooms at this pleasant, modern hotel aren't particularly fancy, but they're enormous—rare for a place that can still give you change when you hand over a $\in 100$ bill to pay for the night. The hotel makes a big deal out of how good its beds are, thanks to a full 10 cm (4 in.) down mattress topper on each of the beds. The in-house Revas Spa offers relaxation treatments and a thermal suite to while away the last hint of travel fatigue; you can book couples' packages that include massages and afternoon tea for two for around $\in 270$.

Adare, Co. Limerick. www.woodlands-hotel.ie. \bigcirc 061/605100. 94 units. \bigcirc 70– \bigcirc 140 double. \bigcirc 165– \bigcirc 239 suite Free parking. Breakfast included. Dinner, bed and breakfast packages included. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; spa; Wi-Fi (free).

Where to Dine in County Limerick

Dutifully demolishing the rule that the best restaurants are usually found in cities, the rural byways of County Limerick contain several places to eat that would be serious contenders on any "best of" lists for the whole of Ireland.

Foley's \star PUB FOOD/GRILL Nearly 16km (9 miles) southwest of Adare, just off the main N21 road, this friendly little bar and grill focuses on hearty, unpretentious comfort food, such as steaks, seafood chowder, or maybe a sizzling filet of rainbow trout with lemon juice and sea salt. They sometimes have live music here in the evening, though it's more of the local rock band variety than flutes and fiddles. Heading from the direction of Adare, take the R523 turnoff signposted for Athea. Foley's is located on the right, just after the road straightens out.

Mortell's ** SEAFOOD/DELI This great deli restaurant is an excellent lunch option if you're in Limerick City. The seafood (much of it local) is beautifully prepared, and cooked right in front of your eyes, although you can also opt for a burger or simply a cup of coffee and a sandwich. The lively, chatty staff keep everything running smoothly.

40 Roaches St., Limerick, Co. Limerick. © 061/415457. Lunch main courses €5–€14. Mon–Sat 8am–5pm.

The Mustard Seed ******* MODERN EUROPEAN The in-house restaurant of the excellent Echo Lodge ****** hotel (p. 347) is one of the best-loved, and most widely known, in the region. The restaurant has its own kitchen garden that supplies many of the ingredients. The four-course menus are imaginative and scintillating; after a starter of salmon with Guinness-cured almonds, you could go for Ballybunion beef with leek fondant, or wild turbot with garlic and lime. Dinner and bed and breakfast

deals are usually offered on the website.

At the Echo Lodge hotel, Ballingarry, Co. Limerick (13km/8 miles south of Adare). www.mustardseed.ie. **© 069/68508.** Fixed-price 4-course dinner €60. Daily 6:45–9:15pm.

The Oak Room *** MODERN IRISH Another superb hotel restaurant, the Oak Room is part of Adare Manor ****** (see p. 346). The high stone windows and silver candelabra of the dining room here should leave you in no doubt that this is a place where you're expected to sit up straight—gentlemen, a tie if you please. The food certainly lives up to the promise of being something special. Herb-and-citron-marinated salmon makes a deliciously piquant starter before a main course of beef filet with cracked pepper jus, or rack of lamb with a wild garlic crust. And if you're enjoying the place too much to leave at the end of the meal . . . well you probably should anyway, the cheapest rooms here cost about €480.

Adare, Co. Limerick. www.adaremanor.com. **Ø 061/605200.** Main courses €25–€35. Daily 6:30–10pm.

The Wild Geese $\star\star\star$ MODERN IRISH What is it about Adare that breeds superlative restaurants? The Wild Geese, in the center of the village, mixes fresh, local ingredients with global accents. A main of roast chicken could be stuffed with soft Bluebell Falls goat cheese, a specialty from County Clare; or some monkfish may arrive accompanied with pureed celeriac in a lemon-and-scallion sauce. There's also a vegetarian menu. Sunday lunch, which often features dishes seen on the evening menu, is significantly cheaper than dinner service, at just $\in 20$ for two courses.

Adare, Co. Limerick. www.adaremanor.com. **© 061/396451.** Main courses €25–€32. May–Sept Tues–Sat 6:30–10pm, Sun noon–3pm, 5:30–10pm; Oct–Apr Tues–Sat 6:30–10pm, Sun noon–3pm. Closed most of Jan.

COUNTY TIPPERARY

In many ways County Tipperary is a bit mysterious. Everybody's heard of it, but few have actually been. It's a bit out of the way—too far from most major tourist hot spots for an easy day trip—and its big attractions are few. This works to its advantage, though, because far from the tour buses and the bleeping of digital camera shutters, you may just find the Ireland everyone is looking for: welcoming, unspoiled, green, and peaceful.

Visitor Information

The Clonmel Tourist Office is at 6 Sarsfield St., Clonmel (© 052/612-2960). It's open year-round, Monday to Friday, from 9:30am to 1pm and 2pm to 4:30pm. The small Cashel Tourist Office is at the Heritage Centre, Main Street, Cashel (© 062/61333), open March to October daily 9:30am to 5:30pm and November to February 9:30am to 5:30pm Monday to Friday. A seasonal office is at Castle Street, Cahir (© 052/714-1453), open April to October, Monday to Saturday, from 9:30am to 6pm.

Exploring County Tipperary

Clonmel, the capital of Tipperary, is the unassuming gateway to the region. A working town, largely unspoiled by tourism, Clonmel (whose name in Gaelic, *Cluain Meala*, means "Meadows of Honey") makes a pleasant strategic touring base. Looking at this sleepy town on the banks of the Suir, it's hard to believe that it once withstood a Cromwellian siege for 3 brutal months.

North of Clonmel and deep in the Tipperary countryside, **Cashel**, with its monastic buildings and dramatic setting, is not to be missed. Because it's on the main N8 road, most people pass through en route from Dublin to Cork.

From Cahir, there's a gorgeous drive north through the scenic Galtee Mountains to the pristine

11km (7-mile) Glen of Aherlow, a secluded and scenic pass between the plains of counties Tipperary and Limerick.

Ahenny High Crosses \star RELIGIOUS SITE You're likely to have this little-known and rarely visited site to yourself, except for the cows whose pasture you will cross to reach it. The setting is idyllic and gorgeous on a bright day. The well-preserved Ahenny high crosses date from the 8th or 9th century. Tradition associates them with seven saintly bishops, all brothers said to have been waylaid and murdered. Their unusual stone "caps," thought by some to represent bishops' miters, more likely suggest the transition from wood crosses, which would have had small roofs to shelter them from the rain. Also note their intricate spiral and cable ornamentation in remarkably high relief, which may have been inspired by earlier Celtic metalwork.

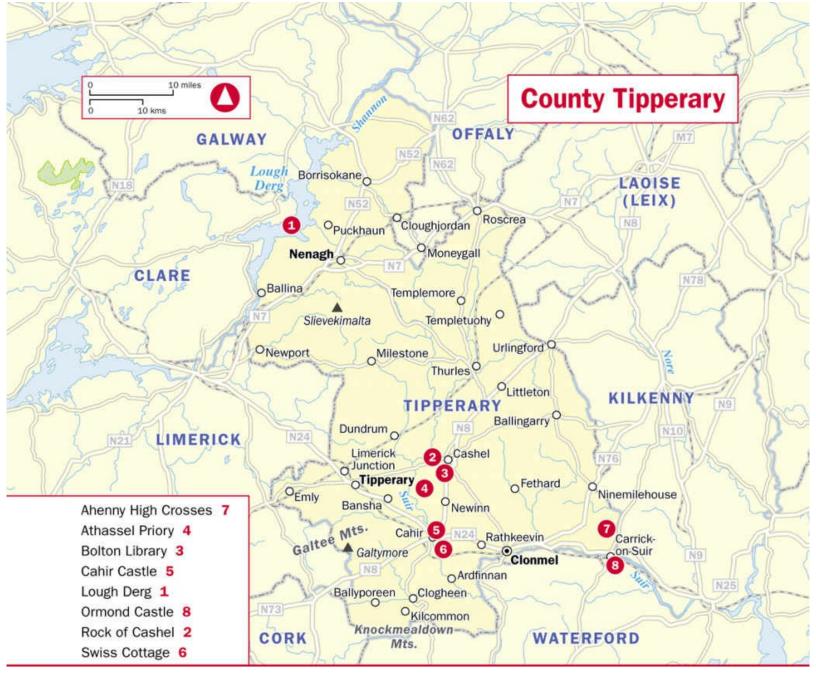
Kil Crispeen Churchyard, Ahenny, Co. Tipperary. 8km (5 miles) north of Carrick-on-Suir, signposted off R697. Free admission (box for donations).

Athassel Priory \star RELIGIOUS SITE/RUINS Many delightful details still remain from the original medieval priory that once stood here. An Augustinian priory, founded in the late 12th century, it was once elaborately decorated. The main approach is over a low stone bridge and through a gatehouse. The church entrance is a beautifully carved doorway at the west end, while to the south of the church you can see the graceful arches of the cloister, eroded by time. Look for a carved face protruding from the southwest corner of the chapel tower, about 9m (30 ft.) above ground level.

3km (2 miles) south of Golden, Co. Tipperary. Take signposted road from Golden, on the N74; the priory is in a field just east of the road.

The Bolton Library \star LIBRARY Not far from the **Rock of Cashel** $\star \star \star$ (see p. 352), this curious and unexpected library has a great collection of valuable antiquarian manuscripts, including some early medieval books. The collection on display features works by, among others, Jonathan Swift, Dante, Machiavelli, and Sir Isaac Newton. It also contains what is supposedly the smallest book in the world.

On the grounds of St. John the Baptist Church, John St., Cashel, Co. Tipperary. **Ø 062/61232.** Admission €2.50 adults; children free. Mon–Wed 10am–3pm, Thurs 10am–2:30pm.



Cahir Castle ** CASTLE On a rock in the middle of the River Suir, this remarkably complete medieval fortress can trace its history from the 3rd century, when a fort was first built on the rock—hence the town's Gaelic name, "City of the Fishing Fort." The present structure, which belonged to the Butler family for 600 years (1375–1961), is Norman. It has a massive keep, high walls, spacious courtyards, original gateways with a portcullis still intact, and a fully restored great hall. The interpretive center offers an engaging 20-minute video introduction to the region's major historic sites, and you can take a guided tour of the castle grounds. But do take the time to walk through the castle buildings, which are not included in the tour.

Cahir, Co. Tipperary. $\bigcirc 052/744-1011$. Admission $\notin 4$ adults; $\notin 3$ seniors; $\notin 2$ students and children; $\notin 10$ families. Mar to mid-June daily 9:30am-5:30pm; mid-June to Aug daily 9am-6:30pm; Sept to mid-Oct daily 9:30am-5:30pm; mid-Oct to Feb daily 9:30am-4:30pm. Last admission 1 hr. before closing.

Ormond Castle ** CASTLE This mid-15th-century castle built by Sir Edward MacRichard Butler on a strategic bend of the River Suir has laid in ruins for centuries. What still stands, attached to the ancient battlements, is the last surviving Tudor manor house in Ireland. Trusting that "if he built it, she would come," Thomas Butler constructed an extensive manor in honor of his most successful relation (and childhood friend), Queen Elizabeth I. He was to be disappointed. Elizabeth never

dropped by, but many others have, especially since the Heritage Service partially restored this impressive piece of Irish history. The manor's plasterwork, carvings, period furniture, and collection of original 17th- and 18th-century royal charters will make you glad you bothered to visit and wonder why Queen Bess never did.

Signposted from the center of Carrick-on-Suir, Carrick-on-Suir, Co. Tipperary. **© 051/640787.** Free admission. Mar to late-Sept daily 10am–1:30pm, 2–6pm. Closed late-Sept to Feb. Last admission 45 min. before closing.

PETTICOAT loose & OTHER SCENIC DIVERSIONS

Driving up from County Waterford, you might want to travel via the **Vee Gap**, an 18km-long (11-mile) road winding through the Knockmealdown Mountains from Lismore and Cappoquin in County Waterford, to Clogheen in County Tipperary. It's a dramatic drive, which peaks at the Tipperary-Waterford border, where the two slopes of the pass converge to frame the patchwork fields of the Galtee Valley far below. At this point, numerous walking trails lead to the nearby peaks and down to the mountain lake of **Petticoat Loose**—named after a, shall we say, lady of flexible morals. A more edifying local character was Samuel Grubb, who so loved these slopes that he left instructions to be buried upright overlooking them. Look for the rounded stone cairn off the road between Clogheen and the Vee Gap, where Samuel does indeed stand entombed, facing the Golden Vale of Tipperary.

The Vee Gap also has some terrific walking paths. About 2km (1¹/₄ miles) north of R669 and R668, you reach the highest point in the gap; a parking lot is here, as well as a dirt road continuing down to a lake—Bay Lough—nestled into the slope below. This dirt road, once the main thoroughfare over the gap, now offers a fine walk to the shores of the lake, with outstanding views of the valley to the north. For a panoramic perspective of the region, start walking due east from the gap parking lot to the summit of Sugarloaf Hill; the hike is extremely steep, but well worth the effort—the views from the ridge are superb.

The Rock of Cashel *** RELIGIOUS SITE/RUINS Worth the long drive it takes to get here from almost anywhere else, this is one of Ireland's most iconic medieval ruins, a dramatically craggy abbey atop a hill in the center of Cashel that dominates views for miles around. An outcrop of limestone reaching some 60m (197 ft.) into the sky, the so-called "Rock" tells the tales of 16 centuries. It was the seat of the kings of Munster at least as far back as 360, and it remained a royal fortress until 1101, when King Murtagh O'Brien granted it to the church. Among Cashel's many great moments was the legendary baptism of King Aengus by St. Patrick in 448. Remaining on the rock are the ruins of a two-towered chapel, a cruciform cathedral, a 28m (92-ft.) round tower, and a cluster of other medieval monuments. Inside the cathedral, extraordinary and detailed ancient carvings survive in excellent condition. The views of and from the Rock are spectacular. Guided tours are available most days; check with the visitor center for times.

Cashel, Co. Tipperary. www.heritageireland.ie. \bigcirc 062/61437. Admission \in 6 adults; \in 4 seniors; \in 2 children and students; \in 14 families. Mid-Mar to early June daily 9am–5:30pm; early June to mid-Sept daily 9am–7pm; mid-Sept to mid-Oct 9am–5:30pm; mid-Oct to mid-Mar daily 9am–4:30pm; last admission 45 min. before closing.



The Rock of Cashel in County Tipperary.

Swiss Cottage \star HISTORIC HOUSE A hunting and fishing lodge for the earls of Glengall from around 1812, the Swiss Cottage is a superb example of *cottage orné:* a rustic house embodying the ideal of simplicity that so appealed to the Romantics of the early 19th century. The thatched-roof cottage has extensive timberwork, usually not seen in Ireland, and is believed to have been designed by John Nash, a royal architect. The interior has some of the first wallpaper commercially produced in Paris. A guided tour (the only way to see the building) lasts approximately 40 minutes.

Off Dublin-Cork Rd. (N8), Kilcommon, Cahir, Co. Tipperary. \bigcirc 052/744-1144. Guided tour \notin 4 adults; \notin 3 seniors; \notin 2 students and children; \notin 10 families. Apr to late-Oct daily 10am–6pm; last tour 45 min. before closing.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

BIRD-WATCHING As many as 15 species of Irish water birds—including mute swans, coots, gadwalls, and gray herons—can be seen at the **Marlfield Lake Wildfowl Refuge**, several miles west of Clonmel in Marlfield. On your way, you will pass signposts for **St. Patrick's Well**, less than 1.6km (1 mile) away, a tranquil spot with an effervescent pool of reputedly healing crystalline water and an ancient Celtic cross rising from the middle of the pool. Legend has it that St. Patrick himself visited here.

CYCLING Centered around the town of Nenagh, the North Tipperary Cycle Network is the

collective name given to three scenic cycling routes around the north Tipperary countryside. The signposted routes pass Lough Derg, small riverside villages, and farmland, before looping back to Nenagh. They vary in length from 30km ($18\frac{1}{2}$ miles) to 67km ($41\frac{1}{2}$ miles). Maps and other information about the loops can be found at www.everytrail.com. To hire a bike locally, contact Moynana, 4 Cecil Walk, Nenagh (www.moynans.com; © 067/31293).

FISHING The **River Suir**, from Carrick-on-Suir to Thurles, was once one of the finest salmon rivers in Europe, but recent excessive trawling at its mouth has threatened its stock. It's still a decent salmon river, especially in the February run and from June to September. Trout (brown and rainbow) are in abundance here in the summer. Here you'll find some of the least expensive game fishing in Ireland; single weekday permits cost around €45. Trout permits are issued by local fishing clubs; prices vary. The fishing season lasts from St. Patrick's Day to the end of September. Get in touch with the local tourist offices for more details. The **River Nore** and the nearby **River Barrow** are also known for good salmon and trout fishing.

WALKING In the Clonmel area, you'll find some excellent river and hill walks, some more challenging than others. The most spectacular is the ascent of famed **Slievenamon**, a mountain rich in myth. Inexpensive, detailed trail maps for at least a half-dozen walks are available at the Clonmel Tourist Office on Sarsfield Street, Clonmel. Also available is a free leaflet guide to the birds, butterflies, and flora of nearby **Wilderness Gorge**.

The **Galtee Mountains**, northwest of the Knockmealdowns, offer some great long and short walks. Trail maps and all the information and assistance you need are available at the **Glen of Aherlow Fáilte Society**, just behind the Coach Road pub, Coach Road, Newtown (www.aherlow.com; **©** 062/56331). It's open daily June to October from 9am to 6pm, with variable hours at other times of year. One beautiful route on a well-defined trail loops around the crystalline waters of Lake Muskry, sitting at the base of cliffs on the north side of the range. Walking time to the lake and back is 3 hours. (To get there, take R663 west out of Bansha, and follow signs for the town of Rossadrehid. To get to the trail, ask for directions in Rossadrehid; there are several turns, and the landmarks change frequently because of logging.) Alternatively, if you continue up past the lake to the top of the ridge, you can walk along the ridge top to Galtymore, a prominent dome-shaped peak about 5km (3 miles) west of Lake Muskry. It is a beautiful but extremely demanding walk, about 6 hours to Galtymore and back.

THE lough derg DRIVE

At the meeting point of Counties Clare, Limerick, and Tipperary, the Shannon River's largest lake, Lough Derg—virtually an inland sea—creates a stunning waterscape 40km (25 miles) long and almost 16km (10 miles) wide. The road that circles the lake for 153km (95 miles), the **Lough Derg Drive**, is one of Ireland's great scenic drives, a continuous photo opportunity with panoramas of glistening waters, gentle mountains, and hilly farmlands unspoiled by commercialization.

The drive is also a collage of colorful shoreline towns, starting at the lake's south end with **Killaloe**, County Clare, and **Ballina**, County Tipperary. They're so close that they are essentially one community—only a splendid 13-arch bridge over the Shannon separates them. In the summer, its pubs and bars fill with weekend sailors. **Killaloe** is a picturesque town with lakeside views at almost every turn and restaurants and pubs perched on the shore. **Kincora**, on the highest ground at Killaloe, was traditionally said to be the royal settlement of Brian Boru and the other O'Brien kings, although no trace of any buildings survives.

Memorable little towns and harborside villages like **Mountshannon** and **Dromineer** dot the rest of the Lough Derg Drive. Some towns, like **Terryglass** and **Woodford**, are known for atmospheric old pubs where spontaneous sessions of traditional Irish music are likely to break out. Others, like **Puckane** and **Ballinderry**, offer unique crafts. On the north shore of the lake in County Galway, **Portumna** is worth a visit for its forest park and castle.

The best way to get to Lough Derg is by car or boat. Because the area has limited public transportation, you will need a car to get around the lake. Major roads that lead to Lough Derg are the main Limerick-Dublin road (N7) from points east and south, N6 and N65 from Galway and the west, and N52 from the north. The Lough Derg Drive, which is well signposted, is a combination of R352 on the west bank of the lake and R493, R494, and R495 on the east bank.

Some other great walks begin at the **Vee Gap**, a dramatic notch in the Knockmealdown Mountains. For more on this area, see "Petticoat Loose & Other Scenic Diversions" on p. 352.

Where to Stay in County Tipperary

Ashley Park House ****** The enchanting quality of this 18th-century manor house hotel overlooking Lough Ourna is helped by the fact that you can row out to an island on the lake and explore an overgrown ruined castle. The house is decorated with heavy references to its historic origins, with Regency-era color schemes and quality antique furniture. Fishing can be arranged on the Lough, as can horseback riding; or you could just stroll around the beautiful gardens, with their vast swathes of peaceful woodland. Four-course dinners, served in the elegant red dining room, can be arranged for around \in 50 per head.

On N52m 8km north of Nenagh, Co. Tipperary. www.ashleypark.com. **Ø** 067/38223. 5 units. €100–€140 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Dinners on request (notice required); Wi-Fi (free).

Bansha House \star This Georgian manor house in tiny Bansha, in the shadow of the Galtee Mountains, is 18km (11 miles) southwest of Cashel. Guest rooms are simple and a bit old-fashioned —not all have private bathrooms, for instance, so make sure you ask for one if that's important—but it's cheerful, cozy, and well run. Guests are free to wander the enormous grounds, and the owners also run a horse-breeding stable next door—ask and they'll take you to meet the occupants. A self-catering cottage on the grounds, overlooking where the horses run, sleeps up to five.

Bansha, Co. Tipperary. www.banshahouse.com. **062/54194.** 7 units. €90–€100 double. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Hotel Minella $\star\star$ The River Suir babbles along in front of this modern hotel in Clonmel, overlooked by a distant mountain range. Bedrooms are properly spacious, with large, comfortable beds and modern (if rather uninspiring) decor. Some even have their own hot tubs. The hotel has a small spa with a swimming pool, though you'll need to book ahead for treatments. If you want slightly more space, they also have 10 well-equipped apartments on the grounds; these can be rented on a

self-catering basis for added privacy. The only real downside to this place is that it's a popular venue for weddings, reunions, and parties, especially in summer.

Coleville Rd., Clonmel, Co. Tipperary. www.hotelminella.com. **Ø 052/612-2388.** 90 units. €110–€150 double. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; gym; swimming pool; Wi-Fi (free).

Saratoga Lodge ** Lough Derg is not far from this homey farmhouse B&B, where hostess Val Beamish and her super-friendly dogs welcome those seeking a bit of peace and tranquility. The enormous grounds provide ingredients for her wonderful breakfasts and dinners—fruits, vegetables, eggs, even honey, all fresh-as-can-be. (What hasn't come from the garden almost certainly didn't have far to travel.) Guest rooms are colorful and artsy. There's a truly restful atmosphere here, enhanced by the almost total lack of television—none in the rooms, though there is one in the lobby if you *really* must. Non–dog lovers should probably avoid this place though, as should those with mobility problems (all bedrooms are upstairs).

Barnane, Templemore, Co. Tipperary. www.saratoga-lodge.com. **0 050/431866.** 3 units. €96 double. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. Dinner €30. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Where to Dine in County Tipperary

The pickings are a little thin in Tipperary—it's more of a lunch-on-the-go kind of place—but it's not without interesting and unique dining options of its own.

Befani's ** MEDITERRANEAN/TAPAS This cheerful little restaurant in Clonmel is a pleasant surprise in a region where Irish cooking is king. The tapas menu is short but satisfying, with a couple of nods to exotic flavors (Thai prawns with lemongrass and chili tempura, for instance). Entrees combine Irish and Mediterranean flavors, so hake filet comes with pasta *al Nero di Seppia* (a sauce made with squid ink); seared scallops come with black pudding and fig jam.

6 Sarsfield St., Clonmel, Co. Tipperary. www.befani.com. **Ø** 061/617-7893. Tapas €6–€8; main courses €16–€26. Mon–Sat 9–11am, 12:30–2:30pm, 5:30–9:30pm; Sun 9–11am, 12:30–4pm, 5:30–9:30pm. Tapas served Mon–Sat 12:30pm–2:30pm.

Chez Hans ** EUROPEAN Located in a converted church building—which, rather wonderfully, was bought in the 1860s with a 1,000-year lease on terms of one shilling per year—Chez Hans is one of the most reliable restaurants in Cashel. Menus change several times a week, based on what's freshest and best. Seafood features heavily (Kilmore Quay scallops with salad Niçoise perhaps, or organic salmon served with seasonal vegetables), or you could opt for some local lamb with an herb crust, or monkfish with butternut puree. The dining room is a beautiful space, redolent of the building's past life. Reservations are recommended. The restaurant is a 2-minute walk from the Rock of Cashel.

Rockside, Cashel, Co. Tipperary. www.chezhans.net. **© 062/61177.** Main courses €24–€38. Tues–Sat 6–10pm.

The Lazy Bean Café \star CAFE This is a place that takes coffee and tea seriously. In addition to an exceptionally fine coffee, you can order tea that comes in a traditional Japanese suki teapot. They serve very good wraps, bagels, and focaccia sandwiches at lunchtime, or you can choose from the varied all-day breakfast menu. They also have free Wi-Fi.

The Square, Cahir, Co. Tipperary. www.thelazybeancafe.com. **© 052/744-2038.** Lunch €5–€8. Daily 9am–6pm.

Quimby's \star CAFE/DELI This cute little cornerside cafe serves tasty snacks and brasserie-style lunches. The menu has plenty of traditional favorites—potato and leek soup, Irish stew, deliciously fluffy potato pancakes—or you could opt for a simple chicken salad. They also do a great breakfast if you're in these parts and want an alternative to hotel fare.

97 Irishtown, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary. **Ø 052/618-0255.** Main courses €8–€14 Mon–Sat 9:30am–5:30pm.

COUNTY CLARE

With its miles of pasture and green, softly rolling fields, Clare seems, at first, a pleasantly pastoral place. But head to the coast and a dramatic landscape awaits you, with plunging cliffs and crashing waves. Turn north, and you'll find visual drama of a different kind, courtesy of the lunar landscapes of the Burren.

Visitor Information

The **Burren Centre** in Kilfenora (© 065/708-8030) is the place to go for information on the Burren region. In addition, visitor information points are on Main Street in **Ballyvaughan** (© 065/707-7464) and at the **Cliffs of Moher** (© 065/708-6141).

Exploring the Burren

The **Burren National Park** $\star\star\star\star$ (see p. 361) is by far and away the county's greatest attraction. You could spend several days exploring its profound wilderness, although a day is plenty to hit the high points. One of the best ways to explore the Burren is to take the R480. Through a series of corkscrew turns, the road curves from **Corofin** through gorgeous scenery to **Ballyvaughan**, a delightful little village overlooking the blue waters of Galway Bay.



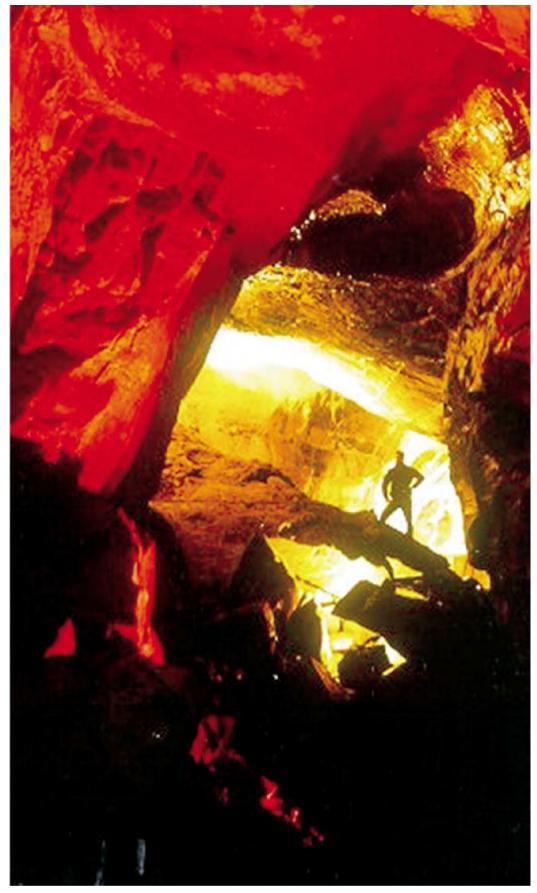


Lisdoonvarna, on the park's western edge, is a charmingly old-fashioned spa town that has long been known for its natural mineral springs (see "Loved Up in Lisdoonvarna" on p. 370). Each summer, it draws thousands of people to bathe in its sulfuric streams, iron creeks, and iodine lakes.

Aillwee Cave $\star\star$ CAVES The story of how this deep cave system came to be discovered starts with a curious dog. In 1944, a local farmer followed his dog into a small opening in the hillside. He was astonished to find that it opened out into a huge cavern with 1,000m (3,280 ft.) of passages running straight into the heart of a mountain. The publicity-shy farmer kept it to himself for decades before eventually spreading the word. Professional cave explorers later uncovered its magnificent bridged chasms, deep caverns, a frozen waterfall, and hollows created by hibernating brown bears. (Brown bears have been extinct in Ireland for 10,000 years.) Guided tours are excellent here, usually led by geology students from area universities. Enjoy the scary moment when they turn out the lights for a minute so you can experience the depth of the darkness inside. Tours last approximately 30 minutes, and are conducted continuously. A couple of other attractions are on the same site. The Burren Birds of Prey Centre is a working aviary designed to mimic the natural habitat of the buzzards, falcons, eagles, and owls that live there. For €70 per person you can take a private "Hawk Walk," where a handler shows you the birds up close, and teaches you how to handle a hawk for yourself. It culminates in a guided forest walk, where you learn how to release the bird and call it back. Tickets, which include admission to the cave and the Birds of Prey Center, must be booked in advance. There are also a couple of craft shops on site, where among other things, you can buy

Aillwee's own brand of cheese.

Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare. www.aillweecave.ie. \bigcirc 065/707-7036. Admission to caves: $\in 13$ adults; $\in 6$ children; $\in 37$ families. Birds of Prey Centre: $\in 10$ adults; $\in 8$ children; families $\in 25$. Combined ticket: $\in 18$ adults; $\in 10$ children; $\in 50$ families. May–June daily 10am–5:30pm (flying displays noon, 3pm); July–Aug daily 10am–6:30pm (flying displays noon, 2, 4pm); Sept–Oct, Mar–Apr daily 10am–5:30pm (flying displays noon, 3pm); Jan–Feb, Nov–Dec daily 10am–5pm (no flying displays). Times are first and last tour.



Aillwee Cave was unknown in modern times until a farmer stumbled into it in the mid-20th century.

THE burren NATIONAL PARK

The stark, otherworldly landscape of the **Burren National Park** spreads across 1,653 hectares (4,083 acres) carved by nature from bare carboniferous limestone, both desolate and beautiful. Sheets of rock jut and undulate in a kind of moonscape as far as you can see. Amid the rocks, delicate wildflowers somehow find enough dirt to thrive; ferns curl gently around boulders, moss softens hard edges, orchids flower exotically, and violets brighten the landscape. With the flowers come butterflies that thrive on the rare flora. Even the Burren's animals are unusual: The pine marten (small weasels), stoat (ermine), and badger, all rare in the rest of Ireland, are common here.

The Burren began to develop 300 million years ago when layers of shells and sediment were deposited under a tropical sea. Many millions of years later, those layers were exposed by erosion and poor prehistoric farming methods, and since then, it's all been battered by the Irish rain and winds, producing the haunting landscape you see today.

Humans first began to leave their mark here about 7,000 years ago. The park is particularly rich in archaeological remains from the Neolithic through the medieval periods—dolmens and wedge tombs (approximately 120 of them), ring forts (500 of those), round towers, ancient churches, high crosses, monasteries, and holy wells.

Though there's no official entrance, the park is centered at Mullaghmore Mountain—and like all National Parks in Ireland, it's completely free to enter. The Burren Centre (www.theburrencentre.ie; $\bigcirc 065/708-8030$), on R476 to Kilfenora, provides an informative overview with films, landscape models, and interpretive displays. Admission to the center costs $\in 6$ adults, $\in 5$ seniors and students, $\in 4$ children age 6 to 16, and $\in 20$ families (free for children 5 and under). It's open from mid-March to May, September and October daily from 10am to 5pm; and from June to August daily from 9:30am to 5:30pm. A craft shop and tearoom are also on site, and local guide Tony Kirby (www.heartofburrenwalks.com; $\bigcirc 065/682-7707$) leads $2\frac{1}{2}$ -hour guided walks from outside the center at 2:15pm, daily except Mondays, in June, July, and August. The cost is $\in 20$, including entry to the exhibition. The center is next to the ruins of Kilfenora Cathedral, which contains some interesting wall carvings—look for the heads above what's left of the doors and windows.

With its unique terrain and meandering walking paths, the Burren lends itself beautifully to walking. The **Burren Way** is a 42km (26-mile) signposted route stretching from Ballyvaughan to Liscannor, incorporating old "green roads": unpaved former highways that crisscross the Burren landscape in inaccessible areas. (Most were created during the Great Famine as work projects for starving locals.) An information sheet outlining the route is available from any tourist office. You can also contact **Guided Walks and Hikes** (www.burrenguidedwalks.com; **@ 065/707-6100**) for guided walks and hikes of varying lengths.

Corcomroe Abbey ** RELIGIOUS SITE/RUINS Set jewel-like in a languid green valley bounded by rolling hills, the jagged ruins of this Cistercian abbey are breathtaking. Donal Mór O'Brien founded the abbey in 1194, and his grandson, a former king of Thomond, is entombed in the structure's northern wall. Some interesting medieval and Romanesque carvings are set in the stone, including one of a bishop with a crosier. Corcomroe is a lonely spot, except for Easter morning, when people come from miles around to celebrate Mass. It's meant to be quite a sight. Look out for a mound, surrounded by trees, beside the road on the way out—it's the remains of an ancient ring fort. Signposted from L1014, near Oughtmama, Co. Clare. No phone. Free admission (open site).

Poulnabrone Dolmen * ANCIENT SITE This portal tomb is an exquisitely preserved, prehistoric site made all the more peculiar and arresting by the alien Burren landscape in which it sits. Its dolmen (or stone table) is huge, and surrounded by a natural pavement of rocks. The tomb has been dated back 5,000 years. When it was excavated in the 1980s, the remains of 16 people were found. And yet, the greatest mystery remains how the gigantic boulders were moved and lifted—the capstone alone weighs $4\frac{1}{2}$ tonnes (5 tons). In the summer, you probably won't have much trouble finding this sight—just look for all the tour buses. At times they literally block the road.

On R480, 8km (5 miles) south of Aillwee Cave (see p. 360). Free admission (open site).



5,000-year-old Polnabrone Dolmen in Burren, County Clare.

Exploring the Clare Coast

One of Ireland's most photographed places, the **Cliffs of Moher** draw thousands of visitors to Clare's remote reaches every day of the year, rain or shine. Rising to vertiginous heights above the Atlantic Ocean, the cliffs are undeniably impressive. It's well worth a visit, but be aware that in the high season, the crowds can rather spoil the effect.

Farther along the Clare Coast, **Lahinch** is an old-fashioned Victorian seaside resort, with a wide beach and long promenade curving along the horseshoe bay. Golfers will already know all about this town, as it's renowned for its outstandingly good golf course (see p. 368).

Traditional Irish music is always on heavy rotation in Clare, which has a vibrant music scene. The secluded fishing village of **Doolin**, near Lahinch, is the unofficial capital of Irish traditional music. The village is also a departure point for the short boat trip to the beautiful and isolated **Aran Islands** (see p. 381).

The Clare Coast is dotted with seaside resorts with varying degrees of crowds and beauty, places such as **Kilrush, Kilkee, Miltown Malbay,** and **Ennistymon.** This part of the county is a marvelous place to snap photos of signs with quirky place names, like Puffing Hole, Intrinsic Bay, Chimney Hill, Elephant's Teeth, Mutton Island, and Lover's Leap.

Bunratty Castle & Folk Park ** HERITAGE SITE Built in 1425 and restored in the 1950s, Bunratty is an impressive, early-15th-century castle, and home to two major tourist attractions: a "living history" recreation of a 19th-century village, and a riotous nighttime medieval banquet. You can tour the surprisingly complete interior of the castle, with its fine collection of medieval furniture and art. The restored walled garden is a beautiful place to wander around. However, the folk park is probably the bigger draw here. Actors in period costume wander around as you walk through the authentic-looking village center, complete with everything from a post office and schoolroom to a doctor's office. You can go inside each one and chat to the occupants. Meanwhile, professional craftspeople work their trades, using traditional methods. There's even a Victorian-style pub. It's all great fun, and a brilliant way to imbue kids with a sense of history. In the evenings, the medieval banquet takes over the castle's Great Hall. After a full, sit-down meal, there's a lively show of music, dancing, and folk stories—all performed by actors and musicians in medieval garb. There are two sittings nightly, at 5:30 and 8:45pm. Booking is essential.

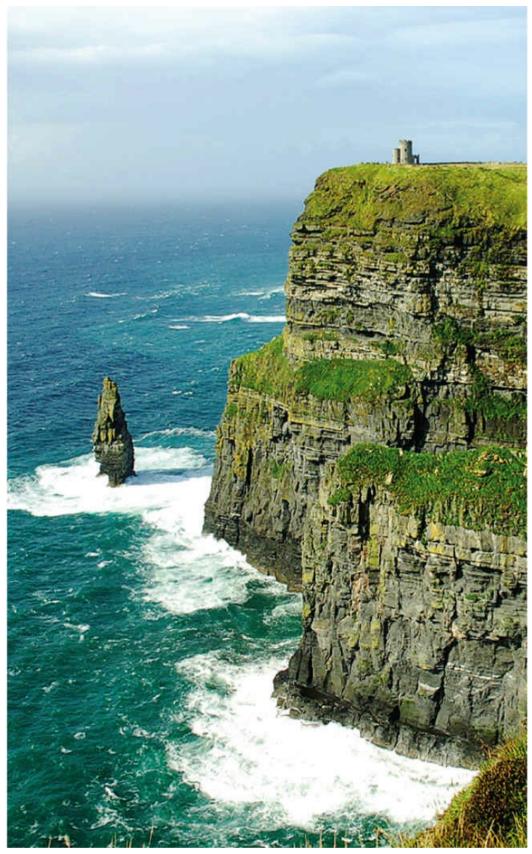
Signposted from N18 (Shannon-Limerick Rd.), Bunratty, Co. Clare. www.shannonheritage.com. \bigcirc 061/361-511. Admission \in 15 adults; \in 10 seniors and students; \in 9 children; \in 34– \in 38 families. Medieval banquet: \in 54 adults; \in 37 children 10–12; \in 25 children 6–9; children 0–5 free. Daily 9am–5:30pm. Last admission to castle 1 hr. before closing; to park, 45 min. before closing.

Bunratty Winery \star FACTORY TOUR In a coach house dating from 1816, this winery produces traditional medieval wines including mead—a drink made from honey, fermented grape juice, water, matured spirits, and herbs, a historical favorite of the upper classes. The winery is also one of only a couple of distilleries officially licensed to brew Irish potcheen, a heady potato whiskey that was so popular and pernicious, it was banned in 1661—and was only made legal again in 1997. (For more on potcheen, see p. 398). Most of the products are made for Bunratty Castle's medieval-style banquets, but visitors are welcome at the working winery to watch the production in progress and taste the brew.

Next to Bunratty Castle, Bunratty, Co. Clare. www.bunrattymead.net. @ 061/362-222. Free admission. Mon–Fri 9:30am–5:30pm.

Cliffs of Moher ****** NATURE SITE The cries of nesting seabirds are faintly audible amid the roar of the Atlantic crashing against the base of these breathtaking cliffs that undulate for 8km (5 miles) along the coast, towering as high as 214m (702 ft.) over the sea. In bad weather, access to the cliffs is (understandably) limited, as the wind can blow very hard here. When the weather is fine, a guardrail offers you a small sense of security as you peek over the edge, though some foolhardy visitors insist on climbing over it for a better view of the sheer drop (a fierce anti-climb policy is intended to put a stop to that). On a clear day, you can see the Aran Islands in Galway Bay as misty shapes in the distance. Look the other way, and you'll see a constant throng of tour groups, coaches, and cars. The enormous visitor center houses gift shops, a high-tech "Cliffs of Moher Experience," and various other exhibits. Furthermore, the visitor center has the only (legal) car park, which you can't use without buying entry tickets to the whole center—effectively turning it into a steep *per person* parking charge. If this doesn't put you off the whole place, head up the path beside the visitor center to **O'Brien's Tower** for the best view of the cliffs. The 19th-century tower is a knockout spot for photos —though you have to pay an extra couple of euro to climb the stairs.

Nr. Liscannor, Co. Clare. www.cliffsofmoher.ie. **Ø 065/708-6141.** Admission €6 adults; €4 disabled, seniors and students; children 15 and under free. Price includes parking and visitor center admission. Mar, Oct Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat–Sun 9am–6:30pm; Apr Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, Sat–Sun 9am–7pm; May, Sept Mon–Fri 9am–7pm, Sat–Sun 9am–7:30pm; June Mon–Fri 9am–7:30pm, Sat–Sun 9am–8pm; July–Aug daily 9am–9pm; Nov–Feb daily 9am–5pm.



Cliffs of Moher.

Doolin $\star\star$ VILLAGE Doolin's old pubs and restaurants ring with the sound of fiddle and accordion all year long, earning this secluded fishing village a reputation as the unofficial capital of Irish traditional music. Most famous among them is **Gus O'Connor's Pub** (Fisher St.; www.gusoconnorsdoolin.com; © 065/707-4168), set among a row of thatched fisherman's cottages, about a 10-minute walk from the seafront. Great though the craic is here, the pub's fame inevitably draws crowds, and it can get packed to the rafters on a busy night. If you're looking for something a little more authentic, head up the road to **McGann's** (Main St.; www.mcgannspubdoolin.com; © **065/707-4133**); it's less well known and not so unrelentingly jammed as Gus O'Connor's. In fact, on many nights, there are no locals in Gus's at all—they're all here, downing pints of Guinness and listening to the fiddles. Feel free to join them. Doolin is on R479, about 7.8km ($4^{3}/_{4}$ miles) west of Lisdoonvarna.

Tourist Information Point: at the Hotel Doolin, Fitz's Cross, Doolin, Co. Clare. © 065/707-4111 or 086/856-9725.

Ennis Friary \star RELIGIOUS SITE/RUINS When you walk around what's left of Ennis Friary, it can be hard to get a sense of its original scale. Records show, however, that in 1375 it was the home and workplace for no less than 350 friars and 600 students. Founded in 1241, this Franciscan abbey was a famous seat of learning in medieval times, making Ennis a focal point of Western Europe for many years. It was finally forced to close in 1692, and thereafter fell into ruin, but it's been partly restored, and contains many beautifully sculpted medieval tombs, decorative fragments, and carvings, including the famous McMahon tomb, with its striking representations of the Passion. The nave and chancel are the oldest parts of the friary, but other structures, such as the 15th-century tower, transept, and sacristy, are also rich in architectural detail.

Abbey St., Ennis, Co. Clare. www.heritageireland.ie. **Ø 065/682-9100.** Admission €4.50 adults; €3.50 seniors; €2.50 children and students; €11 families. Easter–Sept daily 10am–6pm; Oct daily 10am–5pm. Last admission 45 min. before closing.

The Mass Hole

To say golf is a religious experience in Ireland wouldn't just be hyperbole. Only in Ireland can you experience the unique hazard of the "Mass hole." When the celebration of Mass was outlawed during penal times, secret Masses were often held in hidden dales, culverts, and gorges, out of sight of the British. A few golf links have incorporated such places into their courses. For example, hole 5 at the Lahinch Golf Course (see p. 368) has a uniquely hidden spot that could easily have served this purpose. The Waterville Golf Course in County Kerry is the only course open about the practice (the 12th hole there is known to all as The Mass Hole), but make friends with locals wherever you play, and you might learn of others.

Knappogue Castle & Walled Gardens ** CASTLE Midway between Bunratty and Ennis, this regal castle was built in 1467 as the home of the MacNamara clan—who, along with the O'Briens, dominated the area for more than 1,000 years. Oliver Cromwell used the castle as a base in the mid-17th century while pillaging the countryside, which is why, unlike many castles, it was largely left intact. The original Norman structure also has elaborate late-Georgian and Regency wings, added in the early and mid-19th century. Later, in the 20th century, it fell into disrepair, but was rescued by Texan Mark Edwin Andrews (1903–1992), a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Navy. He and his wife, Lavone, an architect, worked closely with area historical societies and returned the castle to its former glory, even furnishing it with 15th-century furniture. The Andrews family then turned Knappogue over to the Irish people. The peaceful walled gardens have been meticulously restored to their Victorian condition—look out for the wonderful statue of Bacchus. The gardens supply herbs for the **medieval banquets**, held nightly at 6:30pm, from April to October. Tickets cost €48 adults, €33 children 9–12, €22 children 6–8 (free for children 5 and under). Call or visit the castle's website to book. *Note:* There is no cafe or restaurant on site during the day.

Quin, Co. Clare. \bigcirc 061/360-788. Admission \in 6.50 adults; \in 4 seniors; \in 3.50 children 5–16; children 5 and under free; \in 17– \in 20 families. Apr–Oct daily 9:30am–5:15pm. Last admission 45 min. before closing.

Scattery Island \star ISLAND/RUINS This unspoiled island in the Shannon Estuary near Kilrush has atmospheric monastic ruins dating from the 6th century. A high, round tower and several churches are

all that remain of an extensive settlement that was founded by St. Senan. To visit the island, speak to one of the boat operators who arrange the 20-minute ferry rides from the Marina in Kilrush. Frequency depends on demand, and even in summer there may be only one trip per day. Or you can ask at the Kilrush information center, just past the pier. Kilrush is on N68, 43km (28 miles) southwest of Ennis.

Information center: Merchants Quay, Kilrush, Co. Clare. **© 065/682-9100.** Free admission. Ferry prices vary; usually around €15–€20 round trip.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

BIRD-WATCHING The **Bridges of Ross**, on the north side of **Loop Head**, is one of the prime autumn bird-watching sites in Ireland, especially during northwest gales, when several rare species have been seen with some consistency. The **lighthouse** at the tip of the head is also a popular spot for watching seabirds.

DOLPHIN-WATCHING The Shannon Estuary is home to about 70 bottlenose dolphins, one of four such resident groups of dolphins in Europe. Two- and four-hour cruises are run by **Dolphinwatch** (www.dolphinwatch.ie; @ 065/905-8156). Fees start at €26 for adults, €14 for children ages 6 to 16, and €5 for children 5 and under. Advance booking is essential.

GOLF Trump International Golf Links, Doonbeg (www.trumpgolfireland.com; © 065/905-5600), has links designed by golf pro Greg Norman in a breathtaking setting. The magnificent 15th hole ends in a funnel-shaped green surrounded by sky-high dunes. It was bought by Donald Trump in 2014, so it should come as no surprise that the bling quotient is high here. With a helipad and a complex that includes a country club, hotel, and cottages, it should also come as no surprise that greens fees are quite high; expect to pay between \in 50 and around \in 180 per person.



Atlantic winds and stunning views are a constant distraction at the seaside Lahinch Golf Course.

Also famous, and almost as pricey, is Lahinch Golf Club, Lahinch (www.lahinchgolf.com; \bigcirc 065/708-1003). It has two attractive 18-hole links courses, with the "Old Course"—the longer championship links course—being the one that has given Lahinch its worldwide repute. This course's elevations, especially at the 9th and 13th holes, make for great views, but it also makes wind an integral part of play. Watch the goats, Lahinch's legendary weather forecasters: If they huddle by the clubhouse, it means a storm is approaching. Visitors are welcome to play, especially on weekdays; greens fees are \notin 50 to \notin 165 for the Old Course and a more affordable \notin 20 to \notin 35 for the newer Castle Course. The East Clare Golf Club, Scariff/Killaloe Road, Bodyke, County Clare (www.eastclare.com; \oslash 061/921322), is another 18-hole championship course. Greens fees are \notin 20 to \notin 25.

SURFING & OTHER WATERSPORTS If you enjoy boating, tubing, water-skiing, windsurfing, canoeing, or other water activities, this is the place for you. If you've always wanted to try surfing, here's your chance: Lahinch Surf School (www.lahinchsurfschool.com; \bigcirc 087/960-9667), set up in a hut on Lahinch promenade, specializes in getting people suited up and out on the waves—whether you surf every weekend or have never hit a board in your life. They're friendly and know their stuff. Wet suits, surfboards, and lessons are included. Private lessons cost around €100 to €140, depending on the

time of year; group lessons cost around €40.

Another watersport that's big business in this part of the country is **river cruising.** If you're experienced, you can rent a barge or cruiser and make your own way, or you can rent a cruiser or barge complete with crew, or take a cabin on a shared cruiser. It all depends on your level of expertise, and the depth of your pockets. Several companies rent cabin cruisers along this stretch of the river including **Emerald Star Line** (The Marina, Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim; www.emeraldstar.ie; © 071/962-7633).

SWIMMING Lough Derg in the southern part of the county is known for clear, unpolluted water that's ideal for swimming, particularly at **Castle Lough, Dromineer,** and **Portumna Bay.** Portumna Bay has changing rooms and showers.

WALKING Portumna Forest Park, at the northern tip of Lough Derg, has some excellent walks, as does the shoreline. For a touch of scenic wilderness, walk a portion of the **Slieve Bloom Way,** a circular 34km (21-mile) signposted trail that begins and ends in Glenbarrow, County Laois; see **www.slievebloom.ie** for details.



Students look forward to their next break at the Lahinch Surf School.

Where to Stay in County Clare

County Clare contains the most unique and special places to stay in the region. That said, it's perhaps a little surprising that there aren't more of them.

Aran View House Hotel★ The clue's in the name at this small but friendly hotel in Doolin: The house looks across an expanse of lawn and sea, out to the Aran Islands in the distance. It was built in the mid-17th century and has good-sized guest rooms that maintain a traditional feel. The bar wisely takes full advantage of the amazing view out front, making this a lovely spot for an early evening pint as the sun goes down. Breakfasts are good too. Doolin is about a 10-minute drive up the coast from the Cliffs of Moher.

Coast Rd., Doolin, Co. Clare. www.aranview.com. Ø 065/707-4420. 13 units. €105–€115 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; Wi-Fi (free).

Fergus View $\star\star$ More breathtaking views are to be had at this sweet B&B near Corofin, one of the gateways to the Burren. You could sit for ages marveling at the long vista of rolling fields and rambling hills, joined by the wonderful owner, Mary, as she brings you a fortifying tray of tea to sip by the open fire. Mary is also an expert on the Burren and all this area has to offer visitors, and will happily share her encyclopedic knowledge. Guest rooms are small and simple, but the beds are comfortable. On the grounds is a self-catering lodge that sleeps five. Fergus View is closed from November to Easter.

Kilnaboy, 3.2km (2 miles) north of Corofin on road to Kilfenora, Co. Clare. www.fergusview.com. **Ø** 065/683-7606. 6 units. €76 double. Discounts for 2 nights or more. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Gregan's Castle Hotel *** An elegant 18th-century house in an extraordinary setting, Gregan's is one of the most unique and peaceful hotels in this part of Ireland. Manager Simon Haden is the second generation of hoteliers in his family to run this place, although it's been a hotel for much longer—famous guests of the 20th century included J. R. R. Tolkien, who was apparently so inspired by the lunar-like views of the surrounding Burren that he drew on them to describe Mordor in *The Lord of the Rings*. Guest rooms are design-magazine chic, with modern furnishings and bay windows. Televisions are banned in the hotel, to enable guests to get maximum benefit from the peace and tranquility of the surroundings. Even if you can't stretch to the cost of a night here, consider booking a table in the superb restaurant, **Gregan's Castle ***** (see p. 372). Chef David Hurley's modern Irish cooking is utterly superlative—though if you don't want to splurge, the excellent bar food menu is much cheaper. Check the website for some attractive dinner, bed, and breakfast packages, and midweek deals.

Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare. www.gregans.ie. **Ø 065/707-7005.** 22 units. €230–€300 double; €350–€430 suite. Free parking. Breakfast included. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; Wi-Fi (free).

LOVED UP IN lisdoonvarna

If you've been looking for love in all the wrong places, clearly you've never been to Lisdoonvarna. This County Clare town lives for *l'amour*. There's a Matchmaker Pub on the main street (inside the Imperial Hotel); two local residents call themselves professional matchmakers (Willie Daly, a horse dealer, and James White, an hotelier); and every autumn, the town hosts the month-long **Lisdoonvarna Matchmaking Festival** (www.matchmakerireland.com). Thousands of lovelorn singletons come in search of The One, and locals cheer them on. Up and down each street, every atmospheric corner is used for mixers and minglers. Residents stir the pot by hosting romantic breakfasts, dinners, games, and dances. So good are their intentions and so charming is their belief in true love—in the idea that there really is somebody out there for everybody, and that they should all come together in a far-flung corner of western Ireland to find one another—that you may just fall for it. Lisdoonvarna can be found on the main N67 road, between Ballyvaughan and Ennistimon.

Moy House $\star\star$ An extraordinary squat tower house built in the 19th century, overlooking the crashing waves of the Atlantic Ocean, Moy House is a unique place. You can climb the four-story central tower for the best view out to sea, although the view from some of the guest rooms is almost as good. (The cheaper ones have views of the grounds, not the sea.) Rooms are designed in a muted, contemporary style, with large beds and modern bathrooms. In what has to be a one-of-a-kind feature, one bathroom even has an original, glass-covered well. You can walk down to the beach for a stroll along the dramatic shoreline, or relax in the drawing room—the house is packed with bookshelves. The restaurant is excellent, with a very strong emphasis on seasonal produce, but it's certainly not cheap at \in 75 per person for a five-course, fixed-price menu. Check the website for good package deals, including 2-night getaways for around \notin 250.

On N67, 1.6km (1 mile) south of Lahinch, Co. Clare. www.moyhouse.com. 9 units. €138–€217 double; €228–€379 suite. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Restaurant; Internet in public rooms.

Where to Dine in County Clare

Barrtra Seafood Restaurant ** SEAFOOD A friendly, family-run place with a good line up of simple, tasty seafood, this restaurant looks out over Liscannor Bay. Just look at a map and you'll quickly see why that makes this such a lovely spot in the late evening—the sun sets over the sea on a virtually direct line to the dining room. The menu is simple and fresh, focusing on locally caught seafood served with tasty sauces or unadorned, and a few well-chosen vegetables on the side. It's not all fishy—you could go for a hearty steak and horseradish crème fraiche instead, or perhaps mix the two up with the popular surf 'n' turf (steak served with scallops and garlic butter). It's advisable to call ahead to check opening times outside the summer season.

Miltown Malbay Rd., Lahinch, Co. Clare. www.barrtra.com. **© 065/708-1280.** Three course fixed-price menu €35. Daily noon–2:30pm, 6–10pm. Closed Jan–Feb.

Bay Fish & Chips ★ FISH & CHIPS A 10-minute drive from the Cliffs of Moher, the Bay serves fresh, tasty fish and chips. There's nothing fancy here—battered seafood and chunky, steaming chips —but it's the simplicity of this dish that makes it such a universally loved staple in this part of the world. Specials always include a fresh catch of the day. Portions are formidable, and the staff will happily chat to you while you wait for the batter to turn that irresistible shade of golden brown. To get here from the Cliffs, just head south on R478 for a little over 5.5km ($3\frac{1}{2}$ miles). It's on the main street as you drive through Liscannor—look for the small white building with a blue wave painted on one end.

Main St., Liscannor, Co. Clare. **© 083/112-3351.** Fish and chips €5–€10. Daily noon–around 11pm.

The Cherry Tree *** MODERN IRISH Overlooking a lake in the sweet village of Killaloe, the Cherry Tree has raked in awards over the years, and with good reason. The menu, which uses plenty of local ingredients, is simple yet sophisticated, wisely giving space for those local flavors to come to the fore. A starter of scallops from West Cork could lead on to sea bass filet served with braised leeks and lemon butter sauce, or maybe a rack of Limerick lamb with garlic mashed potatoes. The early bird menu, served from 6pm to 9pm on Wednesday and Thursday, and from 6pm to 7:30pm on Friday and Saturday, is a great value at \in 26 for three courses. Booking is advisable.

Lakeside, Ballina, Killaloe, Co. Clare. www.cherrytreerestaurant.ie. **Ø 061/375-688.** Main courses €15–€27. Tues–Sat 12:30–3pm, 6–10pm; Sun 12:30–3pm.

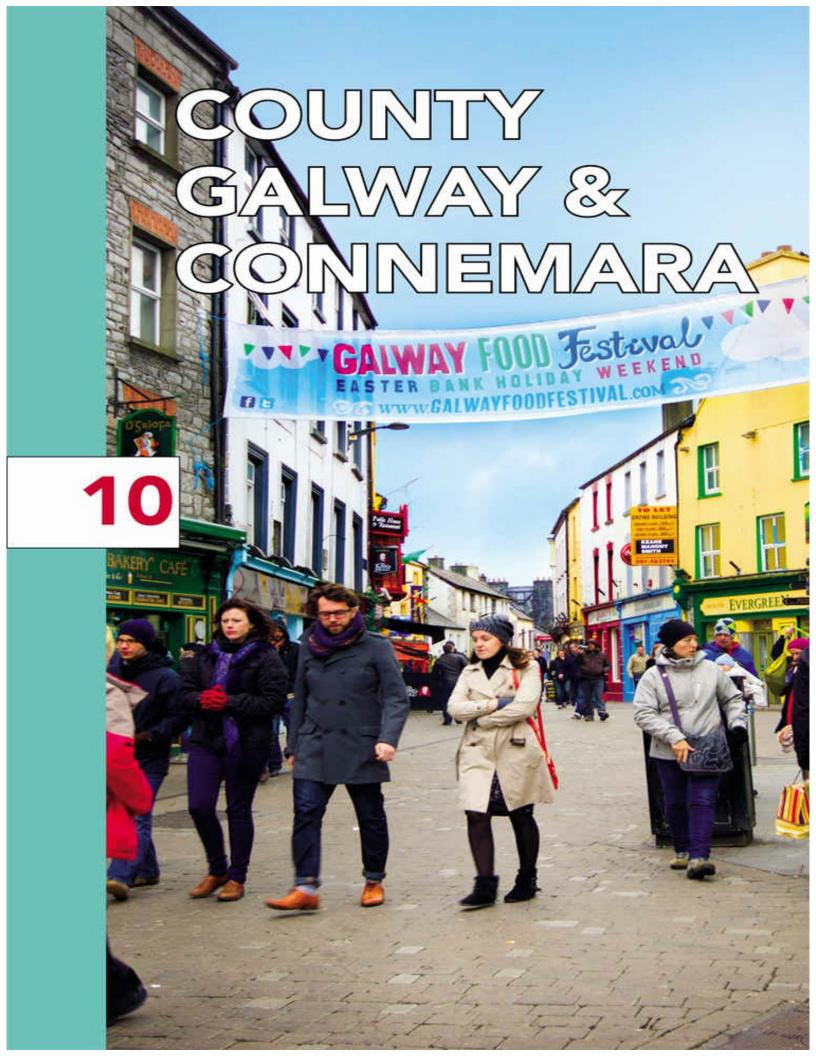
Durty Nelly's * IRISH/PUB FOOD You don't walk into a pub called Durty Nelly's expecting haute cuisine. Nonetheless, a few welcome surprises are to be found here. They serve genuine, appetizing

pub food—fish and chips, steak sandwiches, burgers, and salads. Those who don't mind a bit of cheesy tourist novelty can have their picture taken while pouring their own pint of Guinness. The proximity to **Bunratty Castle** $\star\star$ (see p. 363) will mean that most travelers will probably see it as more of a lunch spot than a dinner destination, but there are actually three dining rooms here—the more refined Oyster and Loft restaurants offer an upmarket version of the same food (good steaks, Thai curries, fresh seafood, and so on). And if you're wondering about the name, "Durty Nelly" was a somewhat ribald heroine of Irish folklore, said to have invented the magical cure-all (and highly alcoholic) variety of moonshine, potcheen (see p. 398).

Next to Bunratty Castle, Bunratty, Co. Clare. www.durtynellys.ie. \bigcirc 061/364-861. Lunch main courses \notin 12– \notin 25. Mon–Thurs, Sun 10:30am–12:30am; Fri–Sat 10:30am–2am (food served noon–10pm). Oyster Restaurant: daily noon–5:30pm, 5:30–10pm. Loft Restaurant: daily 5:30–10pm.

Gregan's Castle *** MODERN IRISH The hugely talented David Hurley is the head chef at the exceptional in-house restaurant of the Gregan's Castle Hotel in Ballyvaughan. His menus are exquisite; easily the equal of top-level restaurants in major cities. The seven-course tasting menu forms the entirety of the dinner service, although a slightly cheaper, three-course dinner menu is available until 7:30pm. A typical meal could start with a few expertly prepared canapés, before moving on to chicken and sweetbread terrine, wild Wicklow venison, or perhaps some impeccably presented local seafood. Desserts are sumptuous; compressed pineapple with coconut and lime, for instance. If you love Gregan's so much that you don't want to leave (and that would be perfectly understandable), rooms start at around €230 per night during high season. For more on the hotel, see p. 370.

Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare. www.gregans.ie. \bigcirc 065/707-7005. Fixed-price menu \notin 69; 7-course tasting menu \notin 75, or \notin 115 with wines. Daily 6–9pm.



Street scene in historic Galway City.

F or many travelers to Ireland, Galway is the farthest edge of their journey. Part of the reason they draw the line here is because the county looks so otherworldly—with its bleak bogs, heather-clad moors, and extraordinary light—they think that it must be the end of all that's worth seeing in Ireland. If not the end of the world. It isn't, of course, but Galway *is* just far enough west to escape the touristy bustle of Kerry or Cork. And that's a compelling part of its attraction—here you can climb hills, catch fish, explore history, and get away from it all in the Irish countryside. With its misty, mountain-fringed lakes, rugged coastline, and extensive wilderness, County Galway is a wild and wooly area. And yet, nestled just outside its most dramatic and unkempt part—the windswept, boggy expanse of Connemara—is one of Ireland's most sophisticated towns. Though small, Galway city has long been a center for the arts, and the winding, medieval streets of its oldest quarter have a seductively bohemian air.

ESSENTIALS

Arriving

BYBUS Buses from all parts of Ireland arrive daily at **Bus Éireann Travel Centre**, Ceannt Station, off Eyre Square, Galway, County Galway (www.buseireann.ie; © 091/562-000). They also provide daily service to Clifden.

BY TRAIN Trains from Dublin and other points arrive daily at Ceannt Station in Galway City, off Eyre Square.

BY CAR Galway is on the main N18, N17, N63, N67, and M6 roads. Journey time from Dublin is about 2 hours; from Killarney it's about 3 hours; and from Cork it's about 2¹/₂ hours. Outside of Galway City, which is easily accessible by public transportation, your options in this region get pretty limited if you don't have a car. Buses to rural areas sometimes run only a handful of times per day, and remote sites may be completely inaccessible without a car. To hire one in Galway, try **Budget**, 12 Eyre Square (www.budget.ie; © 091/564-570) or Irish Car Rentals at Motorpark, Headford Road (www.irishcarrentals.com; © 091/741150).

BY PLANE Galway has an airport, but as of this writing it has not been used for regular scheduled flights since 2011. There were a small handful of commercial flights from the airport in 2014 and 2015, but none on a regular basis, or with major airlines. There's a possibility they will resume in future, though, so it may be worth checking www.galwayairport.com for updates.

[FastFACTS] GALWAY

ATMs/Banks In Galway, a Bank of Ireland (© 091/567-321) and an AIB (© 091/561-151) are on Eyre Square. There's also an AIB on Courthouse Square in Clifden (© 095/21129). ATMs are frustratingly rare the farther you get into the countryside, so make sure you get cash when you can.

Dentists For dental emergencies, your hotel should contact a dentist for you; otherwise, in Galway City try Eyre Square Dental

Clinic at 1 Prospect Hill, Eyre Square (© 091/562-932).

Doctors For medical emergencies dial **©** 999. For non-emergencies, your hotel should call you a doctor. Otherwise in Galway City visit the **Crescent Medical Centre**, 1 The Crescent (**©** 091/587-213). In Clifden, contact **Dr. Ciaran MacLoughlin** on Main St. (**©** 095/21141).

Emergencies For police, fire, or other emergencies, dial @ 999.

Internet Access In Galway City, Chat 'R Net, 2 Eyre Square (© 091/539-912), offers Internet access and low-cost international calls. You'll be lucky to find any place in the countryside, although the majority of even the small rural B&Bs listed in this chapter have Wi-Fi.

Pharmacies In Galway City, Eyre Square Pharmacy is at 2 Eyre Square (© 091/539-912). If you need a drugstore after hours, the University Late Night Pharmacy, opposite the University College Hospital on Newcastle Road (© 091/520-115) is open until 9pm weekdays, though it doesn't stay open late on weekends.

Taxis In Galway City try Abby Taxis (© 091/533-333) or Galway Taxis (© 091/561-111). Taxis in small towns and villages are rare; the best bet is to ask at your hotel or B&B.

GALWAY CITY

A small but thriving and cultured city, Galway still has its winding medieval lanes, but it also has a cosmopolitan core. The city's hub is busy **Eyre Square** (pronounced Air Square), which is a few minutes' walk from everywhere. The **River Corrib** runs through the town, with the charming, artsy historic district on its east bank between **St. Nicholas' Church** and the harbor. (Look for the riverside **Spanish Arch** and the **Spanish Parade**, bearing witness to the city's 16th-century heyday as an international port.) Overlapping the medieval district, the Latin Quarter is a small but vibrant section, filled with lively (read: noisy) bars, nightclubs, and restaurants.



Fishing boats in Galway Dock.

To see the highlights, follow the signposted Tourist Trail of Old Galway (a handy booklet outlining the trail is available at the tourist office and at most bookshops). The historic core is tiny but tangled, so getting lost is half the fun of going there. You certainly won't want your car in Galway City's center—if you've driven here, you'll want to park and walk.

Galway City is a natural base for exploring the area around Galway Bay, including **Rossaveal**, where you can catch ferries to the hauntingly beautiful **Aran Islands** (see p. 381).

Visitor Information

The Galway Tourist Office is on Forster Street, Galway (www.galway.ie; © 091/537-700). The city also has a smaller tourist information point on Eyre Square.

Exploring Galway City

Corrib Princess Cruise \star TOUR Sit back and take in the view from this 157-passenger, two-deck boat, as it cruises along the River Corrib out of Galway City. The journey along the river takes in castles, historical sites, and assorted wildlife, while an enthusiastic hostess shows passengers how to fix the perfect Irish coffee and will often try to liven things up with a bit of traditional dancing. It's not

for those averse to the tourist experience, but the 90-minute trip is very picturesque. You can buy tickets at the dock or at the *Corrib Princess* desk in the tourist office. It's advisable to call ahead or check the website for up-to-date sailing times.

Departs from Woodquay, Galway City. www.corribprincess.ie. **© 091/592-447.** €16 adults; €14 seniors and students; €8 children 4–16; €37 families. Sailings May–June, Sept daily 2:30, 4:30pm; July–Aug daily 12:30, 2:30, 4:30pm.

Galway Arts Centre ** CULTURAL CENTER Once the home of W. B. Yeats's patron, Lady Gregory, this attractive town house housed local governmental offices for many years. Today, it offers an excellent program of concerts, readings, and exhibitions by Irish and international artists, returning, in a way, to a form Lady Gregory would have appreciated. Usually two or three exhibitions run at any one time.

47 Dominick St., Galway City. www.galwayartscentre.ie. © 091/565-886. Free admission. Mon–Fri 10am–5:30pm; Sat 10am–2pm.

Galway Cathedral \star CATHEDRAL Officially the "Cathedral of Our Lady Assumed into Heaven and St. Nicholas," Galway's cathedral has an impressive domed exterior that looks suitably Romanesque in style, although it was actually built in the 1960s. The striking interior has rows of symmetrical stone archways and dramatic lighting. Contemporary Irish artisans designed the statues, colorful mosaics, and stained glass windows. The limestone for the walls was cut from local quarries, while the polished floor is made from Connemara marble.

University and Gaol rds., beside the Salmon Weir Bridge on the river's west bank, Galway City. www.galwaycathedral.ie. © 091/563-577 (select option 4). Free admission, donations welcome. Daily 8:30am-6:30pm.

Galway City Museum \star MUSEUM Overlooking the Spanish Arch, built in 1594 by the docks where Spanish galleons used to unload their cargo, this rather endearing modern museum is a good place to acquaint yourself with the city's history. Permanent galleries downstairs relate to Galway's prehistoric and medieval periods, while the upper levels deal with the city's more recent past, including its relationship with the arts. Highlights include a large collection of intricate embroidered textiles, made by a local order of nuns between the 17th and 20th centuries, and some engaging exhibits relating to the history of cinema in the city. A lively program of special events includes talks, touring exhibitions, and hands-on arts workshops.

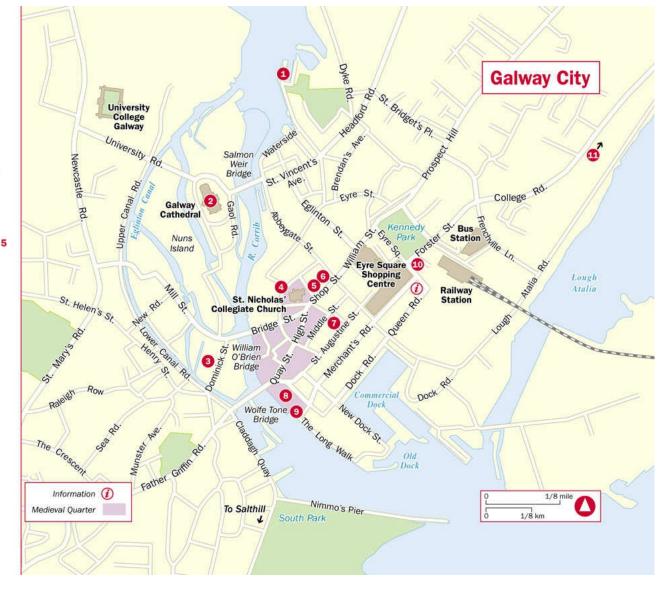
Spanish Parade, Galway City. www.galwaycitymuseum.ie. © 091/532-460. Free admission. Easter–Sept Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun noon–5. Oct–Easter Tues–Sat 10am–5pm. Closed Sun Oct–Easter and Mon year-round.

Galway Irish Crystal Heritage Centre \star FACTORY TOUR Not as well-known as its feted Waterford rival, Galway Crystal is just as distinctive and beautiful. At this modern visitor center, you can observe the master craftspeople at their work, from blowing the molten glass to cutting the finished product (weekdays only, although the center is open daily). However, most people just come to browse the huge factory shop, with its glittering array of crystal and other craft items, such as Belleek pottery.

East of the city on the main Dublin Rd. (N6), Merlin Park, Co. Galway. www.galwaycrystal.ie. **© 091/757-311.** Free admission. Mon–Fri 9am–5:30pm; Sat 10am–5:30pm; Sun and public holidays noon–5pm.

Aran Islands Ferries ticket office 10 Corrib Princess 1 Galway Arts Centre 3 Galway Cathedral 2 Galway City Museum 8 Galway Irish Crystal Heritage Centre 11 Hall of the Red Earl 7 Lynch's Castle 6 Lynch Memorial Window 5 St. Nicholas' Collegiate Church 4 Spanish Arch 9







The bustling streets in Galway, known since the 15th century as the City of Tribes.

Hall of the Red Earl $\star\star$ ANCIENT SITE This fascinating site is what's left of a baronial hall from the Middle Ages, built by the powerful de Burgh family, Anglo-Norman earls who essentially ruled this region in the 13th century. In the late 1200s, they erected what must have been a lavish hall in which to hold court, receive subjects, settle disputes, and generally live it up in true medieval style. The earls were eventually overthrown by local tribes and the building was abandoned. Centuries of building work obliterated any trace, until the foundations were uncovered by building work in 1997. You can tour them on glass gangways and view some of the thousands of artifacts that were also discovered during the excavation.

Custom House, Druid Lane, Galway City. © 091/564-946. Free admission. May–Sept Mon–Fri 9:30am–4:45pm; Sat 10am–1pm. Oct– Apr Mon–Fri 9:30am–4:45pm. Closed Sun.

THE aran islands

When you see the ghostly shapes of the Aran Islands floating 48km (30 miles) out at sea like misty Brigadoon, you instantly understand why these sea-battered and wind-whipped isles have been the subject of fable, song, and film for thousands of years.

All three islands—Inis Mor (Inishmore), Inis Meain (Inishmaan), and Inis Oirr (Inisheer)—are rather strange looking, with a ring of rocks around their outer edges and, inside, small farms surrounded by soft green grass and wildflowers. Life on the islands is deeply isolated. To this day, many of the 1,500 inhabitants maintain a traditional lifestyle, fishing from *currachs* (small crafts made of tarred canvas stretched over timber frames), living in stone cottages, relying on pony-drawn wagons to get around, and speaking Gaelic. They still wear the classic, creamy, handmade *bainin* sweaters that originated here, as there's nothing better for keeping out the chill.

Inishmore is the largest island and the easiest to reach from Galway. Most visitors disembark from the ferries at Kilronan, Inishmore's main town (though it's only the size of a village). From there, it's easy to arrange transportation around the island: Horsedrawn buggies can be hailed like taxis as you step off the boat, minivans stand at the ready, and bicycle-rental shops are within sight. Drop in at Oifig Fáilte (Aran Island Tourist Information), in Kilronan (© 099/61263) to pick up walking maps, ask questions, and generally get yourself going.

The islands have some excellent geological sights, including the magnificent **Dún Aengus**, a vast, 2,000-year-old stone fortress on Inishmore, on the edge of a cliff that drops 90m (295 ft.) to the sea. Its original purpose is unknown—some think it was a military structure, others say it was a vast ceremonial theater. From the top are spectacular views of Galway Bay, the Burren, and Connemara. Nearby, in what look like an Irish country cottage, the charming cafe/restaurant **Teach Nan Phaidi** $\star \star$ (\bigcirc **099/20975**) offers cakes, stews, sandwiches, and soups—comfort food, in other words, and incredibly welcome after a blustery day on the island.

Aran Island Ferries (www.aranislandferries.com; \bigcirc 091/568-903) runs daily service to Inishmore and Inishmaan. Boats leave from Rossaveal (Ros a' Mhíl) 37km (23 miles) west of Galway City. The crossing takes 40 minutes. Call for sailing times. The booking office is at 4 Forster Street in Galway. A shuttle bus goes from nearby Queen's Street to the ferry port, but you must check in at the booking office least 90 minutes before the sailing time if you want to take it. The return crossing costs €25 adults, €20 seniors and students, €13 children. The shuttle bus costs €7 adults, €6 seniors and students, €4 children.

Although visiting the Aran Islands is a thoroughly do-able day trip from Galway City, if you're tempted to stay overnight, the best hotel is **Kilmurvey House** $\star\star$ (www.kilmurveyhouse.com; **O 099/61218**), overlooking Dún Aengus Fort. Austere outside, inside it's all cheerful, bright rooms and polished wood floors. Owner Teresa Joyce is extremely welcoming, and her home-cooked breakfasts are delicious (try her porridge made with whiskey). Guest rooms are enormous. Rates are $\in 100$ to $\in 120$ for a double; breakfast is included.

The Tribes of Galway

By the 15th century, 14 wealthy merchant families ruled Galway Town, giving it a nickname it still bears today —"City of Tribes." These families, mostly of Welsh and Norman origin, ruled as an oligarchy, and you still see storefronts and businesses bearing these names: Athy, Blake, Bodkin, Browne, Darcy, Deane, Font, French, Joyce, Kirwan, Lynch, Martin, Morris, and Skerret.

Lynch's Castle \star HISTORIC HOUSE Dating from 1490 and renovated in the 19th century, this impressive structure was once home to the Lynch family, who ruled the city for many years. It's one of the oldest medieval town houses in Ireland and is now a branch of the Allied Irish Bank. Gargoyles preside over the exterior, while inside is a small display telling the building's history. Abbeygate St. and Shop St., Galway City. Free admission. Mon–Wed, Fri 10am–4pm; Thurs 10am–5pm.

St. Nicholas' Collegiate Church ★★ CHURCH Galway's oldest church—it's claimed that Christopher Columbus prayed here in 1477 before one of his early attempts to reach the New World —St. Nicholas' was established about 1320. Over the centuries, it has changed from Roman Catholic to Church of Ireland and back again at least four times. Currently, it's under the aegis of the Church of

Ireland. Inside are a 12th-century crusader's tomb with a Norman inscription, a carved font from the 16th or 17th century, and a stone lectern with barley-sugar twist columns from the 15th century. You can arrange guided tours conducted by a knowledgeable and enthusiastic church representative. Call or ask at the church for details.

Jcn. of Mainguard St. and Lombard St., Galway City. www.stnicholas.ie. © 086/389-8777. Free admission (donations requested). Daily 9am–6pm; opening times may vary in winter. No tours Sunday morning.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits SPECTATOR SPORTS

GREYHOUND RACING The hounds race year-round Thursday to Saturday at the modern **Galway Greyhound Track**, College Road, off Eyre Square (\bigcirc 1890/269-969). Doors open 7pm and admission is upwards of $\in 10$ adults, $\in 5$ seniors and students, and $\in 1$ children. Check the website for package deals that include meals in the on-site restaurant.

HORSE RACING Galway has one of the most famous racetracks in Europe, the subject of fable and song. Horses pound the track at the **Galway Racecourse**, Ballybrit (www.galwayraces.com; **0 091/753-870**), less than 3km (2 miles) east of town. See "A Day at the Races" p. 383 for more details.

OUTDOOR PURSUITS

CYCLING To rent a bike, contact Richard Walsh Cycles, Headford Road, Woodquay (© 091/565-710).

FISHING Set beside the River Corrib, Galway City and nearby Connemara are popular fishing centers for salmon and sea trout. For gear and equipment, try **Duffy's Fishing & Shooting,** 5 Main Guard St. (© 091/562-367), or **Great Outdoors Sports Centre**, Eglinton Street (© 091/562-869).

GOLF Less than 3km (2 miles) west of the city is the 18-hole, par-69 seaside course at Galway Golf Club, Blackrock, Galway (www.galwaygolf.com; © 091/522-033). Greens fees are €35 to €40.

HORSEBACK RIDING Riding enthusiasts head to **Aille Cross Equestrian Centre**, Aille Cross, Loughrea, County Galway (www.connemara-trails.com; \bigcirc 091/843-968), about 32km (20 miles) east of Galway. Run by personable Willy Leahy (who has appeared often on American television), this facility is one of the largest in Ireland, with 50 horses and 20 Connemara ponies. For about €25 to €50 an hour, you can ride through nearby farmlands, woodlands, forest trails, and along beaches.

Shopping

Given its status as both a tourist hub and a vibrant arts community, it's no surprise that Galway has fairly good shopping. Some of the best is in tiny clusters of shops in historic buildings, such as the **Cornstore** on Middle Street or the **Grainstore** on Lower Abbeygate Street. **Eyre Square Centre**, the downtown area's largest shopping mall, with around 50 shops, incorporates a section of Galway's medieval town wall into its complex.

Most shops are open Monday to Saturday 9 or 10am to 5:30 or 6pm. In July and August, many stay open late, usually until 9pm on weekdays, and some also open on Sunday from noon to 5pm.

A DAY AT THE races

Almost as big a social event as it is a sporting one, the **Galway Races** are a big deal in the Irish horse-racing calendar. People dress up in posh frocks and big hats, and the crowds cheer enthusiastically as the competing racehorses pound the turf. Horse lovers and high rollers pour in from around the country for the race weeks in July, August, and September. The animals are the best around, and the atmosphere is electric. Ticket prices vary depending on the event and day of the week, but expect to pay from around $\in 20$ to upwards of $\in 40$ for a ticket. Multi-day and season tickets are also available. The racetrack is in Ballybrit, on the north side of the city. See www.galwayraces.com or call the track directly on $\bigcirc 091/735-870$ to find out more.

ANTIQUES & VINTAGE CURIOS

The Gaiety Antique & Vintage Store \star The owners of this friendly store are third-generation antiques dealers and furniture restorers. They specialize in antique furniture, ornaments and other curios, from Ireland and further afield. 3 St. Frances St., Galway City. © 091/564-966.

BOOKS

Charlie Byrne's Bookshop $\star\star$ Packed floor-to-ceiling with books—secondhand, antiquarian, and new—this wonderfully chaotic bookshop has a huge stock covering just about anything. *The Irish Times* named this the best bookshop in Ireland in 2013. Cornstore Mall, Middle St., Galway City. www.charliebyrne.com. © 091/561-766.

Kenny's Book Shop and Galleries Ltd ★ Another long-standing favorite of Galway bibliophiles, Kenny's has a great selection of new books on all topics, plus and secondhand and hard-to-find antiquarian titles. They also have an interesting little art gallery in the same store. Lisobun Retail Park, Tuam Rd., Galway City. www.bookshop.kennys.ie. © 091/709-350.

CRYSTAL, CHINA & SOUVENIRS

Galway Irish Crystal $\star\star$ This local brand of fine crystal rivals Waterford Crystal. At the factory on the edge of town, you can watch the craftspeople at work and purchase armfuls of the stuff yourself. See p. 378 for more details. Dublin Rd., Merlin Park, Co. Galway. www.galwaycrystal.ie. © 091/757-311.

Treasure Chest ★ This large craft store and gift emporium in the town center sells china (including Belleek and Royal Doulton), plus Aran sweaters, Irish linens, handicrafts, and a host of other souvenirs. 31–33 William St. and Castle St., Galway City. www.treasurechest.ie. **©** 091/563-862.

JEWELRY

Blacoe $\star\star$ This popular jewelers in the Eyre Square Centre sells Claddagh rings, engagement rings, and a large range of jewelry featuring traditional Irish motifs. There are plenty of pieces on offer for well under $\in 100$. 212 Eyre Square Centre, Galway City. www.blacoe.ie. © 091/561-003.

The Tragic Tale of Lynch's Window

One block away from Eyre Square on Market Street, the Lynch Memorial Window sits in a wall above a built-up Gothic doorway. It commemorates the tragic story of the 16th-century Galway mayor James Lynch FitzStephen, who condemned his own son to death for the murder of a Spanish merchant. After finding no one to carry out the deed, he executed the boy himself. The act destroyed him and he retreated into a life of seclusion.

ESSENTIAL SOUVENIR: THE claddagh RING

Known worldwide as a symbol of love and friendship, the delicate **Claddagh** (pronounced *Clod*-uh) ring is probably a design you'll recognize, even if the name is new to you—the symbol of two hands holding a heart topped with a crown. Over the years this iconic design has also become a symbol for Ireland and its diaspora.

Claddagh rings first appeared sometime in the 17th century, although the design was based on a much older European tradition, dating back to Roman times. The hands are said to represent friendship, the crown loyalty, and the heart love—the three ingredients of a perfect marriage.

Originally, the ring was a wedding band worn facing out for engagement and facing in for marriage. Though no longer widely worn as a symbol of marriage, it is still frequently worn as a friendship ring and makes a lovely memento. The first rings were made in Galway—or more precisely, just over the Father Griffin Bridge, on the west bank of the River Corrib, in the town of Claddagh. It's now a residential satellite to Galway, but in ancient times it was a kingdom with its own laws, fleet, and customs.

Thomas Dillon's jewelry store on Quay Street (see below) claims to be the original creator of the Claddagh ring—it has been doing a roaring trade in the traditional souvenirs since 1750.

Cobwebs ** Located opposite the Spanish Arch, this great little store sells antique and modern jewelry, plus curios, antiques and objects d'art. 7 Quay Lane, Galway City. www.cobwebs.ie. **©** 091/564-388.

Fallers of Galway \star Fallers make and sell the Claddagh ring, a traditional Galway souvenir that symbolizes love and friendship (see "Essential Souvenir" above). They also have a large stock of other jewelry with Celtic motifs. Williamsgate St., Galway City. www.fallers.com. © 091/561-226.

Hartmann & Son Ltd. ★ Another maker of Claddagh rings, Hartmann's also specialize in watches and diamonds. This is one of Galway's real high-end jewelry stores. 29 William St., Galway City. www.hartmanns.ie. © 091/562-063.

Thomas Dillon's Claddagh Gold \star This chirpily colored little store makes two bold claims: to be the original maker of Claddagh rings (they're the only ones allowed to stamp the rings with "original"), and the oldest jewelry store in Ireland as a whole. If the date they were established— 1750—is anything to go by, it's probably true. The shop has a tiny little museum displaying some early Claddagh rings from the 1700s. 1 Quay St., Galway City. www.claddaghring.ie. © 091/566-365.

MUSIC & MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

P. Powell and Sons \star Usually just called Powell's, this is an excellent source for instruments including penny whistles, bodhráns and the like—as well as a good range of traditional music CDs. The Four Corners, Williams St., Galway City. © 091/562-295.

TWEEDS, WOOLENS & CLOTHING

Irish Tweeds \star Although not the oldest tweed maker in town by any means, Irish Tweeds has a great selection of traditionally made garments, including snazzy hats, jackets and nightwear. They also ship worldwide, free of charge. 51 William St., Galway City. © 091/561-900.

Mac Eocagain/Galway Woollen Market \star This colorful store is one of the best for traditional, hand-loomed Aran knits, plus lace and other traditional textiles. Visitors who live outside the European Union don't have to pay sales tax on items bought from here. 21 High St., Galway City. © 091/562-491.

O'Máille (O'Malley) \star Another excellent place to buy Aran knitwear and other Irish knits, this store also has a claim to fame of its own—when *The Quiet Man* was filmed near here in 1951, they provided the costumes for all the actors, including John Wayne. 16 High St., Galway City. www.omaille.com. **@** 091/562-696.

Galway City After Dark THEATER

Druid Theatre ** THEATER Highly respected across Ireland and beyond for its original, cuttingedge productions, the Druid has been one of the region's foremost arts institutions since the 1970s. They're particularly known for premiering new work from up-and-coming writers, so expect to find challenging, intelligent material being staged here. They also produce new versions of classic plays by Irish, British, and European dramatists. Shows can sell out some time in advance, however, and are often out on the road (the Druid is a touring company), so it's advisable to check out what's on and make bookings as far in advance as possible. Ticket prices range from around \in 15 to \in 45. Flood St., Galway City. www.druid.ie. **©** 091/568-660. Ticket prices and performance times vary by show.

PUBS & BARS

Crane Bar $\star\star$ Considered one of the best pubs in the city for traditional music, the Crane Bar has live bands every night from 9:30, and on some weekend afternoons too. Admission is usually free, but some sessions in the upstairs bar cost anything from a couple of euro to around $\in 20$. 2 Sea Rd., Galway City. www.thecranebar.com. © 091/587-419.

Front Door \star This cheerful pub, which sprawls over two floors, is a wonderfully social place where you can saunter in at lunchtime for a tasty sandwich and a pint, and find yourself staying for hours. They sometimes show Irish sports on big TV screens. High St., Galway City. www.frontdoorpub.com. © 091/563-757.



Kerwan's Lane in Galway.

Halo $\star\star$ Playful decadence is the vibe at this popular nightclub, which pitches itself at a youngbut-not-too-young demographic (under 23s are not admitted). They have five bars and a good, slightly retro cocktail menu (though it's quite pricey). 36 Upper Abbeygate St., Galway City. www.halonightclub.com. @091/565-976.

Murty Rabbitt's $\star\star$ This charming and unspoiled late 19th-century pub has a delightfully old-fashioned feel. (It's still run by the same family who owned it all the way back then, too. How's that for tradition?) Rabbitt's sometimes has live music in the evening. 23–25 Forster St., Galway City. © 091/566-490.

The Quays $\star\star$ Another good place to hear live music, the Quays has the highly unusual distinction of having interior decor that was reclaimed from a French church dating back to the Middle Ages. The what's on list is a real mixed bag—you could find anything from trad to 80s rock, hip hop to indie. Expect the fun to kick off around 9pm. Quay St. and Chapel Lane, Galway City. © 091/568-347.

Roisin Dubh $\star\star$ As much a concert venue as it is a bar, this place gets great acts—expect to see a few famous names crop up among the packed program of live music and standup comedy. Dominic St., Galway City. www.roisindubh.net. © 091/586-540.

Where to Stay in Galway City

Galway City has a handful of good, reasonably priced accommodations, although as with many Irish cities, you'll get more for your money by staying in the 'burbs—in this case, pretty Salthill, a mile or two to the west of the center.

The G *** This is a modern and luxurious hotel, full of chic designer flourishes and contemporary art, overlooking the glassy waters of Lough Atalia and Galway Bay about a 5-minute drive northeast of the city center. Many bedrooms have floor-to-ceiling windows to take full advantage of those views, flooding the place with natural light. Service is outstanding, with charming and attentive staff. Treatments in the beautifully designed spa aren't cheap, but very good package deals are on offer, including a massage, use of the thermal suite (usually \in 20), and dinner in the hotel restaurant, for just \in 150 per person. **Gigi's** restaurant serves good modern Irish food, with plenty of local meats and seafood. The menu has a nice innovation—you can choose from one of three set menus, which are ordered by price ("Treat" will set you back \in 25 for three courses, while "Indulge" is a much steeper \in 55 for four courses).

Wellpark, Galway City. www.theghotel.ie. \bigcirc 091/865-200. 101 units. \notin 110– \notin 206 double; \notin 234– \notin 411 suite. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; spa; gym; Wi-Fi (free).

The House Hotel ** This upbeat, funky hotel in the heart of Galway City has a modern vibe. The public areas are filled with playful design statements, from polka-dot chairs to hot-pink sofas. Guest rooms, however, are far more muted and restful, with oatmeal, white, or green color schemes, and the slightest hint of a retro theme. The restaurant is good, and surprisingly reasonable for a hotel of this size in the center of the city. The in-house cocktail bar is a lively nightspot. That said, you're spoiled for choice when it comes to nightlife in this neighborhood—Galway's buzzing Latin Quarter is literally on your doorstep.

Spanish Parade, Galway, Co. Galway. www.thehousehotel.ie. \bigcirc 091/755-111. 134 units. \in 109– \in 249 double. Discounted parking at nearby lot (\in 8 for 24 hr.). Breakfast not included in lower rates. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; Wi-Fi (free).

Marless House ** This pleasant, friendly B&B in Salthill, a small seaside commuter town immediately to the west of Galway, is an exceptionally good value for the money. Guest rooms are spacious and spotlessly clean, though some have slightly overwhelming floral color schemes. Mary and Tom are thoughtful hosts; they have arrangements with several local tour companies, so if you want to book an organized trip to one of the major sights in the region—including the Aran Islands or the Cliffs of Moher—the tour bus will come and pick you up directly from here, and drop you back at the end of the day. Mary is also a fount of sightseeing information, and will cheerfully help you draw up an itinerary. Breakfasts are delicious and filling.

8 Threadneedle Rd., Salthill, Co. Galway. www.marlesshouse.com. **© 091/523-931.** 6 units. €70–€80 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Sea Breeze Lodge ** Another good option in Salthill, just outside Galway City, this stylish little B&B overlooks Galway Bay. The modern, gray exterior gives way to stylish, contemporary spaces inside. Guest rooms are spacious and contemporary, with polished wood floors and big windows, looking out over the bay or garden. Beds are enormous—the larger ones are super king-size (the European equivalent of an American king-size), and all have luxurious memory foam mattresses. Breakfasts are served in a pleasant little conservatory overlooking the garden. The hotel can arrange tours of the major sights in the area, including an all-day trip to the Aran Islands for €25 per person. There's no restaurant, but the center of Galway is only about 5km (3 miles) by car or taxi.

9 Cashelmara, Salthill, Co. Galway. www.seabreezelodge.org. **Ø 091/529-581.** 6 units. €128–€212 double. €212–€232 suite. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Where to Dine in Galway City

Unsurprisingly, Galway City is the focus of the region's culinary scene. That's not to say that the range of options is particularly varied, but there are some excellent places—particularly if you're after some good, fresh, local seafood.

Aniar ******* MODERN IRISH This Michelin-starred restaurant in the center of Galway City is one of the best, and most fashionable, places to eat in the region. Head chef Ultan Cooke has won as many fans for his passionately slow-food ethos as for his delicious food. Well, almost as many. It's mainly the food. The menu is tiny, but always designed firmly according to what's best and in season. Pigeon might be served with parsnip and plum; or filet of John Dory with mussels and monk's beard (the leaves of the soda plant). The only downside is the cost. This is not a cheap night out, although the tasting menus are less expensive than you might expect from a place this trendy—choose from two courses for €35, all the way up to ten courses for €100. Needless to say, reservations are essential. 53 Lower Dominick St., Galway City. www.aniarrestaurant.ie. **© 091/535-947.** Main courses €30–€35. Tues–Thurs 6–10pm, Fri–Sat 5:30–10pm. Closed Sun and Mon.

Ard Bia at Nimmo's ****** SEAFOOD/BISTRO/CAFE The pleasantly rustic dining room at this fashionable restaurant in Galway City doubles as a popular cafe during the day. At any time, the emphasis is the same: delicious, homey flavors, with local and seasonal produce. Stop in for some tasty, creative sandwiches at lunch, or maybe some fresh hummus with roast vegetables. In the evening, expect local fish with harissa and mussel broth, or perhaps some pheasant with pancetta-crushed potatoes. The wine list is excellent, and reasonably priced—you can pop in just for a glass or two without eating, if you don't mind perching on a barstool. They also do a popular brunch on weekends.

Spanish Arch, Long Walk, Galway City. www.ardbia.com. \bigcirc 091/561-114. Lunch main courses: \notin 7– \notin 12. Dinner main courses: \notin 20– \notin 26. Mon–Fri 10am–3:30pm (lunch served from noon), 6–10pm; Sat–Sun 10am–3:30pm (brunch only), 6–10pm.

G.B.C. (Galway Bakery Company) ** BAKERY/BISTRO Hugely popular with locals, this cheerful bakery and cafe also has a busy bistro restaurant upstairs. The downstairs cafe serves breakfast, fresh bakery goods, and light meals all day; it's a buzzing spot for a cup of coffee and a mid-afternoon treat. Meanwhile, upstairs is a proper sit-down bistro, albeit a pleasantly informal one, serving steak, roast chicken, fajitas, pasta, and fresh salmon. The evening set menu offers much the same hearty kind of fare, but the early bird menu tends to have a couple of different options—such as burgers, open sandwiches, and even an extremely late-in-the-day full Irish breakfast.

Williamsgate St., Galway City. www.gbcgalway.com. Ø 091/563-087. Lunch main courses: €8–€12. Dinner main courses: €11–€17. Cafe: daily 8am–9pm. Daily 8am–10pm

Gourmet Tart Company ** BAKERY/INTERNATIONAL A French-style bakery and patisserie with a restaurant attached, the Gourmet Tart Company is very popular with locals for snacks, light meals, and sweet treats. The home-baked cakes, tarts, and pastries make for a tempting mid-afternoon snack or a breakfast on the go. (The cafe also does a very good sit-down breakfast if you want to linger.) At lunch they sell sandwiches and assorted deli items to take out. At night, however, a full menu of delicious, international fare at very reasonable prices suddenly appears—filet of sole with new potatoes, Thai curry with coconut rice, or perhaps a salad of Parma ham, pears, and Cashel blue cheese. Brunch is popular on Sundays. The Gourmet Tart Company also has smaller (deli/bakery only) branches on Abbeygate Street and Headford Road in Galway City.

Jameson Court, Salthill, Co. Galway. www.gourmettartco.com. \bigcirc 091/861-667. Breakfast: $\notin 2 - \notin 9$. Lunch main courses: $\notin 8 - \notin 11$. Dinner main courses: $\notin 8 - \notin 17$. Sun-Thurs 7:30am-7pm; Fri-Sat 7:30pm-11pm. Last food orders 6pm Mon-Thurs, 9pm Fri-Sat, 6pm Sun.

Kirwan's Lane $\star\star$ MODERN IRISH/SEAFOOD The exposed stone walls of the elegant downstairs dining room at this popular restaurant speak to the building's medieval origins. Open the menu, however, and everything suddenly seems bang up to date—this is one of the most popular and reliable restaurants in Galway City for modern Irish cuisine. Seafood is a specialty–langoustine and lamb linguine with chili and garlic; or a cold platter of smoked salmon, prawns and oysters. Carnivores are not overlooked, with a good selection of meat dishes too (try the steak with horseradish potatoes).

Kirwan's Lane, Galway City. www.kirwanslane.com. **Ø 091/568-266.** Main courses €17–€25. Mon–Sat 12:30–2:30pm, 6–10pm; Sun 6–10pm.

THE GALWAY oyster FESTIVAL

On the main road south (N18) of Galway you'll pass two unremarkable small fishing villages, **Clarenbridge** and **Kilcolgan**. If you're here at the end of September, however, these villages become an essential stop, when they host the annual **Galway Oyster Festival** (www.galwayoysterfest.com). Now in its 61st year, the 5-day festival is packed with traditional music, song, dancing, sports, art exhibits, and, above all, oyster-tasting events and oyster shucking competitions.

Martine's Quay Street ****** BISTRO A friendly, cozy restaurant in the center of Galway City, Martine's serves excellent, Irish-influenced bistro style cooking, with just a hint of an international accent. The menu is short but well judged: dishes like tempura of hake or goat's cheese salad, followed by a juicy steak or catch of the day. They take their meat seriously here: The specials board includes a "cut of the day," according to what's best. The early bird menu is an excellent value at $\in 20$ for two courses (or $\in 25$ for three). It's also not really early bird at all—it's available all night, every night. Martine's is also a good choice for a simple but delicious lunch of salads, sandwiches, and a few larger plates, all for around $\in 10$ or less.

21 Quay St., Galway City. www.winebar.ie. **Ø 091/565-662.** Main courses €14–€30. Daily 12:30–3pm, 5–10:30pm.

Oscars Seafood Bistro $\star\star\star$ SEAFOOD Another standout spot for seafood in Galway City, Oscar's is a cheerful, relaxed kind of place. The dining room is filled with modern art, as fabric drapes across the ceiling add a bohemian touch. You could start with some prawns, cooked simply in garlic and butter, then try some Clare Island salmon with seasonal vegetables; seared scallops with lime drizzle; or a plate of crab claws and prawns, dripping with local cheese. Ingredients are sourced from local producers and farmers' markets. The fixed-price menu is exceptional value, at just \in 19 for two courses (served Mon–Thurs until 7:30pm).

Dominick St., Galway City. www.oscarsbistro.ie. **© 091/852-180.** Main courses €15–€26. Daily noon–9pm.

The Pie Maker ** PIES Just try to beat *this* for an authentic Irish food experience. With its oldstyle red-and-gold frontage and dimly lit, quirkily decorated dining room, it's a cozy and atmospheric place. The menu consists of pies, pies, and more pies, in light, fresh pastry crusts. There are a couple of sweet options, but most are savory with hot, fresh fillings of meat and vegetables, such as roast beef, curried chicken, chicken and mushroom, or sausage and mozzarella. Super-traditional sides come in the form of creamy mashed potatoes and garden peas. And if by some miracle you have room for dessert, try the amazing Banoffee pie, a heavenly combination of whipped cream, banana, and toffee, with a crumbly base. Pies can also be ordered to go. *Note:* The Pie Maker doesn't take cards; it's cash only around here.

10 Cross St. Upper, Galway City. **② 085/758-1581.** Main courses €5–€10. Daily noon–10pm.

ATHENRY: FADED medieval SPLENDOR

Remarkably intact after more than six centuries, the medieval town walls of **Athenry**—about 25 minutes' drive east from Galway—surround a charming small town that feels like a time-warp experience. Those walls are some of the best-preserved in Ireland, constructed in the 1300s, with well over half of the original 2km ($1\frac{1}{3}$ mile) circuit still surviving—up to 5m ($16\frac{1}{2}$ ft.) tall in places.

Start with a visit to the **Athenry Heritage Centre** on The Square, in the town center (www.athenryheritagecentre.com; **O 091/844661**). As well as providing all the usual orientation—including maps for walking routes and the best sections of wall—it has a lively **Medieval Experience.** Aimed mostly at kids, it has plenty of interactive exhibits, dress-up areas, and recreations of a torture dungeon and medieval street. Admission costs \in 7.50 adults, \in 5 children, \in 26 families. You can also play Robin Hood by trying your hand at archery; hour-long lessons cost \in 25 and all equipment is provided. The center is open Monday to Friday, 10am to 3pm.

Just a 10-minute walk away, on Court Lane, is the medieval **Athenry Castle**. The modest tower keep is the only substantial part that survives, although you can go inside. Look for some interesting carvings on the main doorway and on the interior side of the window arches. Admission costs \notin 4 adults, \notin 3 seniors, \notin 2 students and children, and \notin 10 families. From April to September it's open daily from 9:30am to 6pm, and in October it's open Monday to Thursday from 9:30am to 5pm.

Also worth checking out are the ruins of a **Dominican Priory**, just around the corner from the castle on Bridge Street. Built in the mid-13th century, it was comprehensively destroyed by Cromwell's forces 400 years later. Today it's just a picturesque ruin, incongruously surrounded by modern houses; to medievalists, however, it's of particular interest because of its elaborately carved gravestones.

To reach Athenry from Galway, take the main M5 motorway east of the city for about 25km ($15\frac{1}{2}$ miles). The turnoff is well signposted at junction 17, for Athenry and Craughwell. Athenry also has a little train station; trains go about every hour and take between 15 and 30 minutes. The return fare is around $\in 6$.

Sheridan's Cheesemongers ** DELI/WINE BAR Well, this is an unusual idea—an artisan cheese shop and deli, doubling up as a bar where you can order a glass of wine and some nibbles. Food comes in the form of delicious cheeseboards and charcuterie, much of it locally produced. So simple, so delicious, and hugely popular too—you might struggle to get one of the few tables during busy times. This is a really good alternative to heavy restaurant food when all you really want is a chat and a sophisticated snack. Oh, and the selection of cheeses is sensational. The shop is open Monday to Friday from 10am to 6pm, Saturday from 9am to 6pm, and Sunday from noon to 6pm. See below for food service times.

Church Yard St., Galway City. www.sheridanscheesemongers.com. \bigcirc 091/564-832 or \bigcirc 091/564-829 (shop). Main courses $\in 5-\in 10$. Tues–Thurs 5–10pm; Fri 2pm–midnight; Sat noon–midnight; Sun 5–10pm. Wine bar closed Mon.

Side Trips from Galway City

Heading west out of Galway City, the winding R336 coast road snakes along the edge of Galway Bay. The first major stop on the headland is the busy modern beach resort of **Salthill** (*Bóthar na Trá*), a summer magnet for Irish families (think the Jersey shore in the U.S., or Blackpool in England). It has a boardwalk and a fine beach, plus lots of bars, fast food, amusement rides, and game arcades, a good respite if you've got kids (as long as you don't mind the crowds). Farther along the scenic road are some charming historic towns including Gaelic-speaking **Spiddal** (*An Spidéal*). The road continues as far as **Inverin** (*Indreabhán*), then turns northward, with signposts for **Rossaveal** (*Ros an Mhíl*). From Rossaveal, you can make the shortest sea crossing from the Galway mainland to the **Aran Islands** (see p. 381). If you continue on R336, you'll leave the Galway Bay coast and travel past the rocky and remote scenery approaching the center of Connemara. Along the way you'll pass **Ros Muc**, site of the **Padraig Pearse Cottage** \star (see p. 395).

On the main road inland from Galway City, heading south and east, are a string of attractions

related to one of Ireland's greatest poets, W.B. Yeats (see "Following in the Footsteps of Poets," p. 396). Other worthwhile attractions within a short drive of Galway City include the well-preserved medieval town of **Athenry** (see facing page) and **Dunguaire Castle.**

Galway Atlantaquaria \star AQUARIUM Also known as the National Aquarium of Ireland (the largest in the country), this is a fantastic change of pace for kids who are tired of trudging around historic ruins. One's imagination is captured right from the first exhibit—a dramatic "splash room," where a large, one tonne (just under a ton) capacity tank goes off every minute or so with a giant splash, which is designed to imitate the natural movement of waves on the Galway coast. Highlights of the thoughtful exhibits include the enormous two-story ocean tank, housing a couple of hundred sea creatures (including small sharks); a wreck tank that's home to dangerous conger eels; and touch pools in which kids can handle tame starfish and hermit crabs, under supervision from the aquarium staff. There's also the opportunity to tickle some inquisitive rays, though make sure your hands are wet first or your touch can burn their skin.

The Promenade, Salthill, Co. Galway. www.nationalaquarium.ie. \bigcirc 091/585-100. Admission $\in 12$ adults; $\in 8.50$ seniors and students; $\in 8$ children 3–16; $\in 5$ extra children; $\in 23-\in 34$ families. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun 10am–6pm.



Salthill is a popular beach town for Irish families.

Medieval Banquet at Dunguaire Castle \star CASTLE/ENTERTAINMENT One of the better *ye olde worlde* style entertainments in this part of Ireland, the medieval banquet at Dungaire Castle is actually pretty good fun. It's best not to worry about the accuracy of its supposed medievalness, but that's hardly the point. After being welcomed with a goblet of mead, you're seated in a satisfyingly atmospheric, candle-lit hall, with long communal tables. A (mostly) traditional Irish-style dinner is served—smoked salmon, leek and potato soup, that kind of thing—with jugs of wine left on the table to lubricate the proceedings. A live show follows, featuring song and poetry from some of the great Irish writers. (None of them medieval, but remember what we told you about not worrying?) There are two sittings nightly, at 5:30 and 8:45pm, and reservations are essential as far in advance as possible, as the midsummer dates can get booked up. Dunguaire Castle itself is worth a look around; a tower house-style late medieval castle built in 1520, it overlooks Galway Bay and was once home to Irish poet and wit Oliver St. John Gogarty (see "Following In the Footsteps of Poets," p. 396). Outside of the banquet, it's open 10am to 5pm.

On N67 (Ballyvaughan Rd.), Dunguaire, Co. Galway. www.shannonheritage.com/EveningEntertainments/DunguaireCastleBanquet. **061/360-788.** Banquet €48 adults; €30 children 9–12; €22 children 6–8. Reservations essential. Apr–Oct daily 5:30, 8:45pm. Dunguaire is near Kinvara, approx. 26km (16 miles) southeast of Galway.



Padraig Pearse Cottage \star HISTORIC HOUSE One of the leaders of Ireland's 1916 Easter Rising, Dublin-based Padraig Pearse (1879–1916) made this simple, rather bleak thatched-roof structure his country retreat, where he used his time to improve his knowledge of the Irish language. Now a national monument, the cottage contains documents, photographs, and other memorabilia.

Inbhear, near Ros Muc., Co. Galway. \bigcirc 091/574292. Admission \notin 4 adults, \notin 3 seniors, \notin 2 children/students, \notin 10 family. Mid-March to April, daily 10am–5pm, May–September daily 10am–6pm.

Spiddal Craft Village (Ceardlann an Spidéil) ** CULTURAL CENTER On the main road as you enter Spiddal from Galway, this is a fantastic collection of cottage-style crafts stores and workshops. The artists in residence here change, but selection is always diverse. At this writing, they include a basket maker; a couple of wonderful contemporary ceramicists; a jeweler specializing in pieces made from pre-euro Irish coins (you can pick them out by your birth year); a traditional weaver; and a stained-glass artist. Plenty of the work is affordable without stretching the budget too far. Even if you're not buying, it's an inspiring place to browse. The on-site **Builín Blasta Café** sells delicious bakery goods, snacks, and light meals, in addition to takeaway deli items. You can contact the individual artists via the main website.

About 15km (9 miles) west of Galway on R336, Spiddal, Co. Galway. www.ceardlann.com. @ 086/806-7352. Mon–Sat 11am–5:30pm; Sun 1–5:30pm.

FOLLOWING IN THE footsteps OF POETS

In the early 1900s, every summer the area southeast of Galway City became a sort of Bloomsbury Society West, as Dublin's greatest literary minds decamped to a cluster of nearby manor homes. About $36\text{km} (22\frac{1}{3} \text{ miles})$ southeast of Galway City, near the northern border of the Burren (see chapter 9), you'll see signs to the beautiful **Coole Park National Forest** (www.coolepark.ie; **O 091/631804**). This was once a country home of the dramatist and arts patron Lady Augusta Gregory (1852–1932), who, along with W. B. Yeats and Edward Martyn, founded the **Abbey Theatre** \star in Dublin (see p. 174). Sadly, her house no longer stands, but her influence is memorialized in a tree on the grounds on which the following people carved their initials while visiting with her: George Bernard Shaw, Sean O'Casey, John Masefield, Oliver St. John Gogarty, W. B. Yeats, and Douglas Hyde, the first president of Ireland. Clearly, this is an exceptional place. The visitor center shows a number of films on Lady Gregory and Coole Park, and has a tearoom, picnic tables, and some lovely nature trails for wandering. The visitor center is open daily 10am to 5pm in April to June and in September, with extended hours from 10am to 6pm in July to August. Admission is free.

Not too far away from the home of his friend, W. B. Yeats (1865–1939) had his own summer home in Gort at **Thoor Ballylee**. The restored 16th-century Norman tower house served as the inspiration for his poems "The Winding Stair" and "The Tower." In the interpretive center, an audiovisual presentation examines the poet's life. Also on the grounds are the original Ballylee Mill, partially restored, and a bookshop specializing in Anglo-Irish literature. The tower suffered severe flood damage in 2014 and had to close while work was carried out to save the building. It was subsequently taken over by a local group who are planning to turn it into a cultural center. This is expected to be open by 2016, but no other information was available at this writing. The site is on the N18 at Gort.

Not too far away from Yeats's and Lady Gregory's summer homes, west off the main road, between Gort and Kilcolgan, **Dunguaire Castle,** Kinvara (www.shannonheritage.com; © 061/360-788), sits on the south shore of Galway Bay. Once the royal seat of the 7th-century King Guaire of Connaught, the castle was taken over later by the legendary Oliver St. John Gogarty (1878– 1957), Irish surgeon, author, poet, and wit. Yeats and Lady Gregory were great friends and frequent guests. Today, Dunguaire's greatest appeal is the exquisite view from its battlements of the nearby Burren and Galway Bay. Stay for a **medieval banquet** here on a summer evenings (see p. 394). Dunguaire is on the N67 just east of Kinvara.

CONNEMARA

If you look for Connemara on road signs, you may be looking forever, because it's not a city or county, but rather an area or region—but one with a very distinct identity. Like the Burren in County

Clare, the boundaries are a bit hazy. Most agree that Connemara is west of Galway City, starting at Oughterard and continuing toward the Atlantic. You know it when you see it, as it's an area of heartbreaking barrenness and unique beauty, with dark bogs and tall jagged mountains punctuated by curving glassy lakes dotted with green islands. (As Oscar Wilde wrote, "Connemara is a savage beauty.") The desolate landscape is caused, in part, by an absence of trees that were felled and dragged off long ago for building ships, houses, and furniture. Connemara is part of the **Gaeltacht**, or Irish-speaking area, so many signs are in Gaelic only.

It's a varied place—in fact, you could say that there are two Connemaras. South of the Galway-Clifden road is a vast bog-mantled moorland dotted with lakes, and with a low, indented, rocky coastline. North of the Galway-Clifden road, tall quartzite domes and cones form the Maumturks and the Twelve Bens (also called the Twelve Pins), rising toward the breathtaking Killary fiord—the only ford in the 6,000 or so islands that make up the British Isles archipelago—near where Mayo takes over from Galway.

Visitor Information

The Clifden Tourist Office is on Galway Road, Clifden (© 095/21163). It's closed in winter.

Exploring Connemara

The main road through Connemara—the N59 highway up from Galway City to Clifden and Leenane is hardly a crowded superhighway, but you'll still want to branch off from it to explore the region's wild and rugged coast. Loops such as the R341 from Ballyhinch to Roundstone, the Sky Road from Clifden, or the Connemara Loop from Letterfrack reward travelers who have time to get off the beaten track.

As the region's biggest town (though that's not saying much), the seaside town of **Clifden** (*An* **Clochán**) has an enviable location at the edge of the blue waters of Clifden Bay, where miles of curving, sandy beaches skirt the rugged coastline. It's an attractive Victorian town with colorful shop fronts and church steeples thrusting skyward, well provided with restaurants, shops, hotels, and pubs, and thus makes a handy base for exploring the area. Still, it's also quite touristy. If you prefer a quieter location, seek out one of the many smaller towns and villages in the area, such as the small fishing port of **Roundstone** (*Cloch na Rón*) \star on the south coast about 24km (15 miles) away, which is also equipped with all of the essentials: pristine beaches, comfortable guesthouses, good restaurants, shops to explore, and more than its share of natural charm. North of Clifden, the little community of **Letterfrack** (*Leitir Fraic*) sits at the edge of **Connemara National Park** (see facing page), close to the extraordinary Gothic **Kylemore Abbey** (p. 401). The tiny village, founded by Quakers, has a handful of pubs and B&Bs in a glorious natural setting. It's near the bright white sands of **Glassillaun Beach** and **Lettergesh**, where horses raced across the sand in the film *The Quiet Man*. North and east of Letterfrack, on the shore of Killary Fiord, Leenane (*Leenaun*) is the starting point for a number of excellent scenic hikes.

TAKING A (moon) SHINE TO POTCHEEN

"Keep your eyes well peeled today, the excise men are on their way, searching for the mountain tay, in the hills of Connemara . . . "

Potcheen is a potent form of Irish moonshine, traditionally brewed from grain or potatoes. It was banned by the English crown in 1661, in an act that effectively criminalized thousands of distillers overnight. That didn't stop people from making the stuff, however, and after 336 years on the wrong side of the law, potcheen was finally made legal again in 1997.

One 17th-century writer said of potcheen that "it enlighteneth ye heart, casts off melancholy, keeps back old age and breaketh ye wind." Its usefulness didn't stop there, evidently, as history records the drink being used as everything from a bath tonic to a substitute for dynamite.

Potcheen has long been used in fiction as a symbol of Irish nationalism, its contraband status rich with rebellious overtones. The traditional folk song "The Hills of Connemara" describes potcheen being secretly distributed under the noses of excise men.

In 2008, the European Union awarded the drink "Geographical Indicative" protection. This means that only the genuine Irish product is allowed to carry the name (the same status enjoyed by champagne and Parma ham).

You'll find potcheen for sale in a few souvenir stores. Like most liquors it can be drunk straight, on the rocks, or with a mixer, but at anything from 80 to a massive 180 proof, potcheen packs a mean punch, so enjoy . . . cautiously.

Aughnanure Castle \star CASTLE Standing on an outcrop of rock surrounded by forest and pasture, this sturdy fortress is a well-preserved Irish tower castle with an unusual double *bawn* (a fortified enclosure) and a still-complete watchtower that you can climb. It was built around A.D. 1500 as a stronghold of the "Ferocious" O'Flaherty clan, who dominated the region and terrified their neighbors in their day. The castle's fireplaces are so big that you could fit a double bed in them. The ruined banqueting hall contains the remains of a dry harbor.

Oughterard, Co. Galway. www.heritageireland.ie. \bigcirc 091/552-214. Admission \notin 4 adults; \notin 3 seniors; \notin 2 children; \notin 10 families. Mid-Mar to late Oct daily 9:30am-6pm.



Connemara Mountains.

Connemara National Park *** NATURE SITE This gorgeous national park encompasses over 2,000 hectares (4,940 acres) of mountains, bogs, grasslands, and hiking trails. Some of the best lead through the peaceful *Gleann Mór* (Big Glen), with its River Polladirk, or up to the Twelve Bens (also called the Twelve Pins), a small, quartzite mountain range north of the Galway-Clifden road. Nearby are the lesser-known, equally lovely **Maumturk** range and the breathtaking Killary Fiord—the only fiord in Ireland, indeed this entire region of Europe. None of the Twelve Bens rises above 730m (2,392 ft.), which makes their summits quite accessible to those who don't mind walking at a steep incline. Frequent rainfall produces dozens of tiny streams and waterfalls, and the views are spectacular. The excellent visitor center south of the crossroads in Letterfrack dispenses general information on the park and sustenance in the form of tea, sandwiches, and fresh baked goods. Visitor Centre: signposted from N59, Letterfrack, Co. Galway. www.connemaranationalpark.ie. **@** 076/100-2528. Free admission.

Visitor Centre: Mar-Oct 9am-5:30pm. Park: daily, year-round.

DARE YOU TAKE ... THE spooky SHORTCUT?

If you're planning a drive across the Connemara National Park to Clifden, you may want to make a shortcut across the rough but beautiful "bog road" more prosaically known as R341. Unless you're traveling at night, that is. A hotel manager in these parts once told us that many locals consider the road to be haunted, and won't take it after dark. Spooks or not, it's certainly dark and scary at night, and should be avoided in bad weather.

walk this way: LOUGH INAGH TO THE MAUM EAN ORATORY

Nestled between the Maumturk and the Twelve Bens mountains in the heart of Connemara, the waters of **Lough Inagh** lie cupped in a spectacularly beautiful valley, where mountain slopes rise precipitously from the valley floor and small streams cascade into the lake in a series of sparkling waterfalls. The R344 cuts through the valley, linking Recess to the south and Kylemore Lake to the north.

The Western Way, a walking route that traverses the high country of Galway and Mayo, follows a quiet country road above the R344 through the Lough Inagh Valley. To reach the beginning of the walk, drive north on the R344, turning right on a side road—look for the sign for Maum Ean—about 200m (656 ft.) before the Lough Inagh Lodge Hotel. Continue on this side road for about 6km $(3^{3}/4 \text{ miles})$ to a large gravel parking lot on the left. Park here, and follow the well-worn trail 2km $(1^{1}/4 \text{ miles})$ to the top of the pass, through glorious mountain scenery.

At the top of the pass, which has long been associated with St. Patrick, a small oratory has been built. There's a hollow in the rock known as **Patrick's Bed**, a life-size statue of the saint, and a series of cairns marking the Stations of the Cross. Together, these monuments make a striking ensemble, strangely eerie when the mists descend and conceal the far slopes in their shifting haze. A clear day offers great views, with the Atlantic Ocean and Bertraghboy Bay to the southwest and more mountains to the northeast. The round-trip walking time is about one hour.

Dan O'Hara's Homestead Farm ** HERITAGE SITE This excellent open-air museum tells the story of Connemara, its people, and how they worked this rocky and inhospitable land. Dan O'Hara was a real person who farmed 3 hectares (8 acres) of land for himself and his family, until the potato famine destroyed their livelihood and they were evicted. His tragic tale-recounted at the museumends with Dan's children being taken into care and him dying broke in New York, where he eked out a living as a match seller. The reconstructed farmstead is set up exactly as it would have been in the years before the Famine, complete with farm dwellings. The heritage center has exhibits and an informative historical film. Also on the grounds of the museum is a dolmen and prehistoric tomb. About 6.5km (4 miles) east of Clifden off N59, Lettershea, Clifden, Co. Galway. www.connemaraheritage.com. @ 095/21246. Admission €8 adults; €7 seniors and students; €4 children; €20 families. Apr-Oct daily 10am-6pm; last admission 1 hr. before closing. A place of seclusion and spectacular beauty, this small emerald-green gem **Inishbofin **** ISLAND lies 11km (6³/₄ miles) off the northwest coast of Connemara. Try to come here on a day when the skies are clear enough to deliver the unforgettable views of and from its shores. Once the domain of monks, then the lair of pirate queen Grace O'Malley (see p. 435), later Cromwell's infamous priest prison you can still see his original, star-shaped barracks-Inishbofin is currently home to just 180 yearround human residents, a seal colony, and a sea bird sanctuary. Numerous ferries to the island operate from the port of Cleggan (13km/8 miles northwest of Clifden off N59) daily April through October. Cloonamore, Inishbofin Island Discovery, Inishbofin Island, County Galway (www.inishbofinislanddiscovery.com; @ 095/45819 or 086/171-8829), sails twice a day, or three

(www.inishbofinislanddiscovery.com; © 095/45819 or 086/171-8829), sails twice a day, or three times a day in summer. Round-trip fares are $\in 20$ adults, $\in 10$ children 5 to 18, and $\in 5$ children 4 and under. *Note:* Reservations are essential, and evening sail times are liable to be brought forward in

bad weather—so make sure you keep an eye on the hour. Inishbofin, Co. Galway.

Kylemore Abbey ** RELIGIOUS SITE As you round yet another bend on the particularly barren stretch of country road around Kylemore, this extraordinary neo-Gothic abbey looms into view, at the base of a wooded hill across the mirror-like Kylemore Lake. The facade of the main building—a vast, crenelated 19th-century house—is a splendid example of neo-Gothic architecture. In 1920, its owners donated it to the Benedictine nuns, and the sisters have run a convent boarding school here ever since. You can see a little of the interior, but it's disappointingly plain; the exterior and the grounds are the attraction here and are impressive enough to justify a visit. The highlight is the restored Gothic chapel, an exquisite cathedral in miniature with a plain, somber cemetery to one side; a lavish Victorian walled garden; and the breathtaking views of it all from across the lake. The complex includes a decent restaurant that serves produce grown on the nuns' farm, as well as tea and good scones, a shop with a working pottery studio, and a visitor center. The abbey is most atmospheric when the bells are rung for midday office or for vespers at 6pm.

Kylemore, Co. Galway (follow signs from N59). www.kylemoreabbeytourism.ie. \bigcirc 095/52011. Admission \in 13 adults; \in 10 seniors; \in 9 students and children 11–17; \in 26– \in 3 families. Children 10 and under free. Mid-Mar to June, Sept–Nov 9:30am–5:30pm; Jul–Aug 9am–7pm; Nov to mid-Mar daily 10am–4:30pm.



Kylemore Abbey in Connemara.

A WALK ON THE wild SIDE

Here's one hazard you won't encounter in the Irish countryside: dangerous wildlife. Fearsome beasts that were once common around these parts—including brown bears, wolves, and wildcats—are long since extinct, and we all know the story about St. Patrick banishing the snakes.

You may, however, meet European foxes (more like midsize dogs than their American cousins) or badgers, but both are notoriously timid creatures; leave them alone and they'll quite happily follow suit. In fact, if the experience of your brave Frommer's authors is anything to go by, the worst you have to fear is an attack of the heebie-jeebies brought on by encountering large spiders (up to $14 \text{ cm}/5\frac{1}{2}$ in. long), although very few are at all venomous.

Nope, nothing to fear in the countryside—that is, unless you believe in monsters. **Doyar-Chú** are creatures said to live in the lakes of County Galway. Half-dog, half-fish, and about the size of a crocodile, they supposedly lie in wait for unsuspecting hikers and dog walkers, ready to drag them underwater with their terrifying jaws.

Meanwhile, **Muckie** is a Loch Ness monster-type beastie occasionally spotted in the Lakes of Killarney. Descriptions range from your average terrifying sea monster to, well, a scary giant black hog that rises out of the depths of Lough Leane. (That's right. *Hog.*) A few years ago, a sonar survey of the lakes showed a large unidentified object that could conceivably have been a living creature, but it vanished instantly. A Japanese TV crew went searching for the beast in 2004 but failed to find anything.

Our advice? Bring a camera. That seems to ensure the monsters will leave you alone, given that nobody's ever managed to photograph one of them.

Except for those chunky house spiders, of course.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

One-stop shopping for outdoorsy activities—kayaking, water-skiing, hill and coastal walking, rock climbing, archery, you name it—can be found at the **Killary Adventure Company**, Leenane, Co. Galway (www.killary.com; © 095/43411). Rates start at around €30 per session.

CYCLING Bicycles can be rented year-round from **Mannion Cycles**, Bridge Street, Clifden, Co. Galway (© 095/21160). The rate for a regular touring bike in high season starts at \in 15 per day, \in 90 per week.

DIVING You can rent equipment and take lessons at Scubadive West, Renvyle, Co. Galway (www.scubadivewest.com; © 095/43922).

FISHING Lough Corrib is renowned for brown-trout and salmon fishing. Brown-trout fishing is usually good from the middle of February, and salmon is best from the end of May. The mayfly fishing begins around the middle of May and continues for up to 3 weeks.

For salmon and sea trout, the **Ballynahinch Castle Hotel** at Ballynahinch, Recess, Co. Galway (www.ballynahinch-castle.com; © 095/31006), is an angler's paradise. Fishing licenses, tackle, maps, and advice are available at the hotel.

At **Portarra Lodge**, Tullykyne, Moycullen, Co. Galway (www.portarralodge.com; © 091/555-051) packages are available, including B&B accommodations in a modern guesthouse on the shores of Lough Corrib, dinners, and boats and tackle. Owner Michael Canney is an avid angler and a great guide to this part of Galway. Weekly packages that include half-board, boat, and *ghillie* (guide) are available.

GOLF Visitors are welcome at the 18-hole, par-72 championship seaside course of the Connemara Golf Club, Ballyconneely, Clifden, Co. Galway (www.connemaragolflinks.com; © 095/23502). Greens fees are \notin 50 to \notin 75.

The **Oughterard Golf Club**, Oughterard, Co. Galway (www.oughterardgolfclub.com; © 091/552-131), is an 18-hole, par-70 inland course. Greens fees are €20 to €30.

HORSEBACK RIDING See the beaches of Connemara from horseback on a trek with the Cleggan Beach Riding Centre, Clegan, Co. Galway (www.clegganridingcentre.com; \bigcirc 095/44746). The center offers beach and mountain treks, the most popular being a 3-hour ride to Omey Island at low tide. Or explore with Connemara and Coast Trails, the Aille Cross Equestrian Centre, Loughrea, Co. Galway (www.connemara-trails.com; \bigcirc 091/843-968). Rides are for experienced and beginning riders alike. Expect to pay from around €25 to €50 per person per hour.

CONNEMARA pony TREKKING

The sturdy yet elegant Connemara pony is the only horse breed native to Ireland, though it has received an infusion of Spanish blood over the centuries. Often raised in tiny fields with limestone pastures, the ponies are known for their stamina and gentleness, which make them ideal for amateur riders and young people. Born and bred to traverse the region's rugged terrain, they are adept at scaling short, steep hills and delicately picking their way along rocky shores.

Because much of the countryside is well off the beaten track, pony trekking is actually a fantastic way to cover ground. It gets you off the busy roads and out into the countryside, even onto the white-sand beaches near Roundstone and elsewhere along the coast. The Aille Cross Equestrian Centre near Loughrea (www.connemara-trails.com; © 091/843-968) can set you up with guided treks for all levels of ability.

KAYAKING Kayaking excursions on the Killary Fiord are available at **Delphi Adventure Resort**, Leenane, Co. Galway (www.delphiadventureresort.com; © 095/42208).

WALKING Connemara National Park $\star\star\star\star$ (see p. 399) has excellent walking trails, some of which lead up the sides of the Twelve Bens. You can get maps at the park's visitor center. From the town of Leenane, there's an exhilarating 4km walk to the picturesque Aasleagh Waterfall (Eas Liath) northeast of the Killary Fiord's harbor. A 2- to 3-hour walk around the fiord follows the Green Road, a sheep track that was once the primary route from the Renvyle Peninsula to Leenane, passing a ghost town (a village abandoned after the Famine), where the fields rise at a devilishly steep slope from ruined cottages clustered at the water's edge.

WATERSPORTS AND ADVENTURE SPORTS The **Delphi Adventure Resort**, Leenane, Co. Galway (www.delphiadventureresort.com; © 095/42208) offers courses in kayaking, windsurfing, and raft building, as well as mountaineering, abseiling, hiking, and archery. Everything is reasonably priced, and the atmosphere is laid-back and friendly. Another nearby option, Little Killary Adventure Company, Leenane, Co. Galway (www.killaryadventure.com; © 095/43411), will take you on Hobie Cat sailing trips, or guided excursions by kayak or water skis. They also lead hill and coastal walking tours, rock-climbing expeditions, and more.

Where to Stay in Connemara

EXPENSIVE

Abbeyglen Castle ****** This grey stone fortress perched on a low hill might look stern and unforgiving from a distance, but inside it's all welcoming charm. It has an overall ambiance of slightly faded nobility, with roomy lounges where chairs are grouped around warming fireplaces and huge windows overlook the grounds. At night, guests gather in the piano bar to chat over brandies. Guest rooms are spacious, with four-poster beds and floral fabrics. The staff is friendly and happy to arrange fishing trips, packed lunches, and to give you tips on local sights. Dinners are convivial and chatty, and the food is delicious, and all sourced locally. This is how castles should be.

Sky Rd., Clifden, Co. Galway. www.abbeyglen.ie. Ø 095/21201. 45 units. €90-€190 double. Rates include full breakfast. Closed early

Jan to Feb. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; Jacuzzi; outdoor pool; sauna; spa; tennis court, Wi-Fi (free).

Ballynahinch Castle ** At the side of glass-like Owenmore River, near the foot of Ben Lettery, this gabled manor house looks too good to be true. It's a postcard setting, perfect in almost every way. The 16th-century building, once the seat of the O'Flaherty chieftains, is now a casually elegant hotel. Lounges have towering ceilings and warming fireplaces. Guest rooms are just modern enough, in muted shades of cream and toast; many have fireplaces—all have orthopedic mattresses. The river is known for its trout and salmon, and your catch can be weighed up each evening in the wood-paneled Fishermen's Bar. Dinner in the beautiful Owenmore Restaurant is a highlight of any stay.

Recess, Co. Galway. www.ballynahinch-castle.com. \bigcirc 095/31006. 40 units. \in 150– \in 340 double. Rates include full breakfast. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; babysitting; limited room service; tennis courts, Wi-Fi (free).

Currarevagh House \star This elegant Italianate manor house, built in 1842, sits just outside tiny Oughterard, at the edge of the clear blue waters of Lough Corrib. The house is a perfect retreat—its spacious lounges have fires crackling at the hearth, ideal for relaxing on a rainy day. Rooms are large, with floral curtains, and beds are comfortable. Meals in the pink-hued dining room are excellent, and often feature the day's catch.

Oughterard, Co. Galway. www.currarevagh.com. **Ø 091/552-312.** 12 units. €160 double. Rates include full breakfast. Amenities: Restaurant, bar, Wi-Fi (free).

Delphi Lodge *** This vine-covered, 18th-century country house on a 1,000-acre lakefront estate, is one of Ireland's best small hotels. This is a fishermen's paradise—and everything is arranged to make fishing easy. Boats, ghillies, licenses—are all taken care of. If you don't fish, you can spend the day hiking the gorgeous grounds. Afterward, relax by the fire in the cozy library with a sherry from the honor bar. Or you could try your hand at a game in the snooker bar. Dinners here are an event, eaten at a long dining table to encourage conversation.

The Delphi Estate and Fishery, Leenane, Co. Galway. www.delphilodge.ie. \bigcirc 095/42222. 12 units. \bigcirc 230– \bigcirc 350 double. Rates include full Irish breakfast. Closed Christmas and New Year's holidays. Amenities: Restaurant (guests only); honor bar; Wi-Fi (free).



Family suite at the Delphi Lodge.

Dolphin Beach House *** A beautifully restored early-20th-century homestead, Dolphin Beach House has awe-inspiring views of the bay at Clifden. The guest rooms are huge and light-filled, with handmade wood beds and high ceilings. The dining room looks out across acres of green fields, giving way to the azure sea beyond. Delicious evening meals are served here, such as local lamb or a catch of the day. The vegetables for the table are grown in the house's own organic garden. Fearghus Foyle is an easy, charming host and also a passionate environmentalist; the house is almost entirely powered by renewable energy sources. Check the website for good midweek discount deals. *Note:* Dinner must be booked in advance, before you arrive.

Lower Sky Rd., Clifden, Co. Galway. www.dolphinbeachhouse.com. \bigcirc 095/21204. 4 units. \in 130– \in 180. No children under 12. Free parking. Breakfast included. 3 course dinner \in 40. Amenities: Restaurant; Wi-Fi (free).

MODERATE

The Anglers Return \star Surrounded by beautiful gardens, this lovely, artsy retreat was built as a hunting lodge in the 19th century; today it's run with great charm by Lynn Hill, a talented artist. Bedrooms are simple and modestly sized, furnished with antiques. The views over the grounds and nearby river are gorgeous. The only downside is that none of the rooms have private bathrooms—you have to use one of two bathrooms located down the corridor, although robes are thoughtfully

provided. Dinners can be provided upon request. Guests are free to wander the gardens, which are practically an attraction by themselves. Those wanting more seclusion, and a touch of adventure, may want to rent a yurt on the grounds. The Anglers Return doesn't accept credit cards; it's cash or check only around here.

Toombeola, Roundstone, Co. Galway. www.anglersreturn.com. Ø 095/21204. 3 units. €110 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Closed Dec–Jan. Amenities: Restaurant; guest lounge; Wi-Fi (free).

Renvyle House ** This grand old house on the rocky edge of the Atlantic Ocean seems truly in the middle of nowhere, although it is near Connemara National Park. Still, it's worth the journey, and not just for these breathtaking wind-swept views. There are miles of pristine Irish wilderness to explore around it. The poet W. B. Yeats honeymooned here when it was a family home. Winston Churchill was also a regular guest. Lounges are sprawling and wood-floored, warmed by open fires. Guest rooms vary in size and decor, some are grand and spacious, others are small and cozy. Most have tasteful, masculine decor. The in-house restaurant offers divine, European-inspired Irish cooking. Renvyle, Co. Galway. www.renvyle.com. @ 095/43511. 65 units. $\in 100-\notin 200$ double. Rates include full Irish breakfast. Closed Jan–Feb

15. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; 9-hole golf course; outdoor pool; 2 tennis courts; Wi-Fi (free).

INEXPENSIVE

Doonmore Hotel ★ This waterfront hotel might not be fancy, but the views are extraordinary—from every window you see stunning vistas of the sea and High Island. Guest rooms are quite basic, but families will be pleased to find the spacious units with children's bunk beds. Rooms in the modern extension are furnished with pine furniture, and flooded with light. Older rooms in the main house are a little worn but still pleasant. Staff are cheerful, and the restaurant offers good, unpretentious cooking Inishbofin Island, Co. Galway. www.doonmorehotel.com. @ 095/45804. 25 units. \in 80– \in 100 double. Rates include full breakfast. Closed Nov–Mar. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; Wi-Fi (free).

Errisbeg Lodge \star This mountainside lodge near the little town of Roundstone feels more isolated than it is. Tucked away between the wild countryside and the ocean, its setting is glorious, and makes for wonderful, windy walks down to the sandy beach. Guest rooms are simply decorated with pine furniture and floral bedding. All have exquisite mountain or ocean views. This is not a five-star hotel by any means, but the hosts are very friendly and the scenery is breathtaking.

Just over 1.6km (1 mile) outside of Roundstone on Clifden Rd., Roundstone, Co. Galway. www.errisbeglodge.com. **Ø** 095/35807. 5 units. €90–€100 double. Rates include full breakfast. No credit cards. Closed Dec–Jan. Amenities: Smoke-free rooms; Wi-Fi (free).

GONE TO THE bogs

If you spend enough time in Ireland, you'll get used to the strong, smoky smell of burning turf—dried bricks of peat taken from bogs. Fully a third of the Connemara countryside is classified as bog, and these stark and beautiful boglands—formed over 2,500 years ago —have long been an important source of fuel. (During the Iron Age the Celts also found other use for the bogs, using them to store perishable foods such as butter.) Although no longer the lifeline it once was, cutting and drying turf is still an integral part of the rhythm of the seasons in Connemara.

Cutting requires a special tool, a spade called a *slane*, which slices the turf into bricks about 46cm (18 in.) long. The bricks are first spread out flat to dry, and then stacked in pyramids for farther drying.

You can always tell when turf is burning in a home's fireplace—the smoke coming out of the chimney is blue and sweet-scented. It's such a quintessentially Irish smell, it may provoke feelings of intense nostalgia among those who grow to love it. Regrettably the bricks are a little too bulky to make good souvenirs, but you may find turf-scented incense and candles in craft stores.

Where to Dine in Connemara

O'Dowd's ** SEAFOOD There's not much room in this tiny pub in Roundstone, which means you'll be fighting for space with dozens of hungry locals. But trust them, for they know exactly what they're here for: extremely good, fresh seafood, simple and beautifully prepared. There's nothing complicated about the menu, and that's part of the appeal—Connemara salmon or seafood au gratin, served with boiled potatoes or fries, or perhaps a simple lamb stew to keep carnivores happy. Try the delicious chowder if it's on offer. Needless to say, booking is advisable.

Roundstone, Co. Galway. www.odowdsseafoodbar.com. **Ø 095/35809.** Main courses €14–€22. Mon–Sat 10am–midnight; Sun noon–11pm (food served until about 9:30pm summer, 9pm winter).

Station House Restaurant \star MODERN CONTINENTAL Locals flock to this restaurant, hidden away in the courtyard at the rear of the Clifden Station House Hotel. The draw is the imaginative cooking that manages to infuse even the simplest dish with zest and originality. The chef loves to chargrill and smoke, in dishes like a blackened turbot, served with smoked oysters and grilled mushrooms. More casual dining is available in the adjacent bar.

At the rear of the Station House Hotel, on the N59, Clifden, Co. Galway. www.clifdenstationhouse.com. **© 095/21699.** Reservations recommended. Main courses €16–€24. Wed–Sun 6:30–9:30pm. Closed Oct–Apr.

The Steam Café \star CAFE This cute and simple little cafe is one of the best places in Clifden for lunch. The menu isn't fancy, but it's all good—wraps, sandwiches, light meals, and daily specials, all made with quality ingredients. The salads come from the cafe's own organic vegetable garden. The soups are particularly tasty, with ever-changing daily specials—you may find minestrone, tomato and herb, or even carrot and orange. They also do tasty cakes and desserts—great to wash down the excellent coffee. The Steam Café is in the Station House Hotel, which is on the main N59 road, in Clifden town center.

Station House Hotel Courtyard, off N59 (Galway Rd.), Clifden, Co. Galway. **Ø 095/30600.** Main courses €4–€12. Mon–Sat 10am– 5:30pm. Closed Sun.



The Irish Midlands are the country's flatlands. This is horse country, all soft green grass and sprawling fields, veined with long, winding rivers and picturesque, slow-moving streams. It might not have the glamour of Cork, Kerry, or Galway, but there is more to this region than immediately meets the eye. If you know where to look, you can find real gems—like the romantic medieval castles at Charleville and Birr, or the atmospheric ancient monastic site at Clonmacnoise, and the surprisingly little-known (and really very old indeed) Corlea Trackway.

There is a lot of history here. This region was where, in the late 17th century, a fateful battle for supremacy took place between two English kings: the Protestant William III and the Catholic King James II. William won, thus cementing the hold of a Protestant establishment in Ireland for centuries to come. The lavishly high-tech museum at Athlone Castle is the best of several in the region that tell this important story.

There's much to discover, and much to enjoy, in the Irish middle.

ESSENTIALS

Arriving

BY CAR By far the best way to get to and around the Midlands is by car. Although Athlone is easy to reach by public transportation from Galway or Dublin, you're still best off with a car in order to see the smaller towns and remote sites. Major roads that lead to this area are the main Galway-Dublin road (N6) from points east and west, N62 from the south, and N55 and N61 from the north. You can also boat through the region along the Shannon River, which cuts a swath through the area.

BY BUS Bus Éireann (www.buseireann.ie; © 061/313333) runs hourly buses from the main bus station in Galway City to Athlone (about 90 min.) and several buses a day to Birr (around 4 hr.). From the main bus station in Dublin, buses also go to Athlone every hour (2 hr. journey time), and a handful of times a day to Birr (3–4 hr.).

BY TRAIN Irish Rail operates direct trains from Galway to Athlone Station, Southern Station Road (**© 090/647-3300**) every 1 to 2 hours; the journey takes 90 minutes. From Dublin trains go to Athlone about every hour; the journey also takes 90 minutes.

A Note on Listings

Officially the Midlands region covers the counties of Laois, Longford, Offaly, and Westmeath; we've included a couple of sights in the far eastern part of County Galway as well, due to their close proximity. Attractions in this region are widely spread out—hiring a car is the only real way you'll be able to see the Midlands' best sights. Therefore we've decided to present them as one list, not split up by county, assuming that travelers will pick and choose according to their interests.

[FastFACTS] THE MIDLANDS

ATMs/Banks In Athlone, a Bank of Ireland is at 31 Church St. (© 090/647-5111. In Birr you can use the Ulster Bank ATM inside the Londis convenience store on Townsend St. (© 057/9121250). In Abbeyleix try the Bank of Ireland on Main St. ©

057/873-1212). And in Tullamore, a branch of AIB is at 5 William St. (@ 057/932-1514).

Dentists In the first instance you should ask your hotel or B&B to contact a dentist for you. Alternatively, in Athlone, you could try **Ballantyne Dental Practise** on Garden Vale (© 090/647-5387); in Birr, there's Catherine Barry, the Green (© 057/912-0488).

Doctors For medical emergencies dial © 999. For non-emergencies, your hotel should call you a doctor. Otherwise, in Athlone contact **Dr. Patrick O'Meara** on Garden Vale (© 090/647-2172); in Birr, try **Dr. PJ McAuliffe** on Elm Park (© 057/912-1356). Tullamore has the **Harbour Street Medical Centre** on Harbour St. (© 057/935-1225); and in Abbeyleix, try **Dr. John Madden** on Main St. (© 057/873-1772).

Emergencies For police, fire, or other emergencies, dial @ 999.

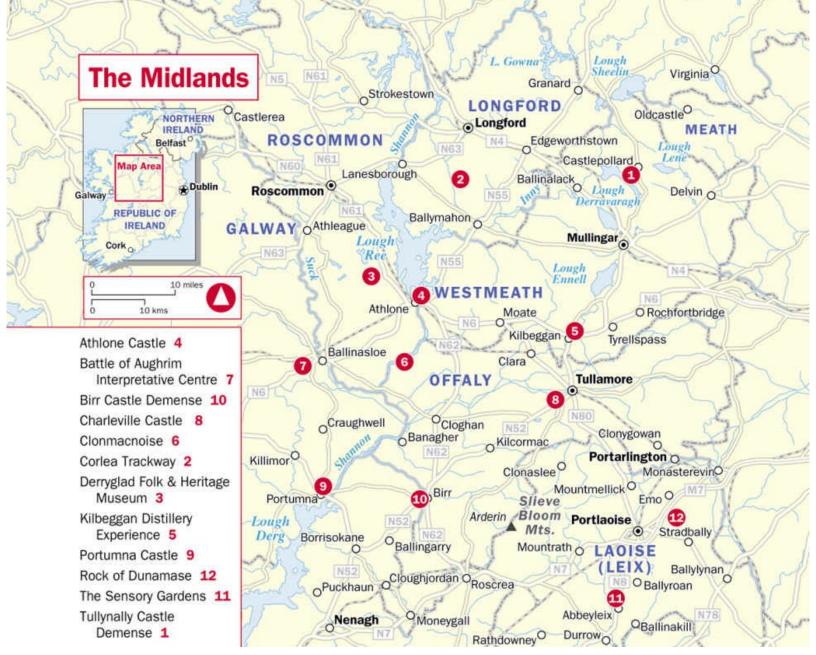
Internet Access Even out in the boondocks, most—though not all—hotels now have internet access of one kind of another. Alternatively, if you need to get online in Athlone, stop by the **Netcafé** at 1 Paynes Lane, Irishtown (© 090/647-8888), on the south side of the town.

Pharmacies In Athlone, there's Naylor's Pharmacy at 23 Pearse St. (© 090/649-2259); in Birr, Fox's Pharmacy on O'Connell St. (© 057/912-0166); in Tullamore, Fahey's on Patrick St. (© 057/932-1540) and in Abbeyleix, Frank O'Donnell at the Medical Hall on Main St. (© 057/873-1294)

Taxis In the countryside, the best way to get a cab is nearly always to ask your B&B or restaurant to call you one. Alternatively, in Athlone you could try Dial-a-Cab (© 090/649-3030) or Athlone Cabs (© 090/647-4400); in Birr, call PL Dolan (© 057/912-0006); in Tullamore, Tullamore Taxis (© 087/996-2264); and in Abbeyleix, Coffs Cabs (© 087/224-9587).

EXPLORING THE MIDLANDS

As Eastern Galway segues smoothly into Offaly and Westmeath, the rugged countryside becomes a bit softer and greener, heading inland. This is farming country, and pastures stretch as far as the eye can see, punctuated by historic sites and small farming communities. The region's most appealing town of any size—although with a population of just over 15,500, it's hardly a teeming metropolis—is **Athlone** (*Baile Átha Luain*), on the River Shannon. It's a vibrant place where brightly painted buildings house interesting craft stores and boutiques. It's also a perfect place to situate yourself for exploring the area, with its excellent small hotels and charming restaurants and nightlife. Farther south along the Shannon, the early Christian settlement of **Clonmacnoise** (*Cluain Mhic Nóis*) occupies a beautiful riverside meadow with its stone chapels and mysterious round towers. Farther along, and turning south, **Banagher** (*Beannchar na Sionna*) is a sleepy working town with a picturesque harbor on the Shannon. The town of **Birr** (*Biorra*), known for its magnificent and historic gardens, is south of Banagher, with the Slieve Bloom Mountains rising to its east; the N52 angles northeast from Birr, passing through the county towns of **Tullamore** (County Offaly) and **Mullingar** (Westmeath).



Athlone Castle ****** CASTLE Built in 1210 for King John of England, this mighty stone fortress sits on the edge of the Shannon atop the ruins of an earlier fort built in 1129 as the seat of the chiefs of Connaught. Besieged for almost 6 months in 1641, the castle was attacked again in 1690 and finally fell in 1691 after an intense bombardment by forces sent by William of Orange. The fall of Athlone was a key event in the war that would cement the Protestant establishment in Ireland and ensure British rule, all the way up to the War of Independence in the 1920s. (The Dutch military commander who took the town, Godard van Glinkel, was rewarded for his efforts with the earldom of Athlone.) Three centuries later, the castle underwent a multimillion-euro renovation in 2012; it now houses eight separate galleries on the history of Athlone, particularly the 1690-91 siege, with plenty of hightech wizardry. The castle's original medieval walls have been preserved, as have two large cannons dating from the reign of George II and a pair of 25cm (10-in.) mortars cast in 1856.

Athlone, Co. Westmeath. \bigcirc 090/644-2130. Admission \in 8 adults; \in 6 seniors and students; \in 4 children 14 and under; \in 20 families. Thurs–Sat 11am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm. On the riverbank, signposted from all directions.



Athlone and the Shannon River in County Westmeath.

Battle of Aughrim Interpretative Centre ★ BATTLEFIELD About midway between Galway City and Athlone, just off the M5 motorway, lies this interesting little museum and interpretive center. The Battle of Aughrim wasn't the most famous, nor arguably the most important of the war between Protestant King William and Catholic King James—but it was the decisive one, with the final defeat of the so-called Jacobite forces of James II, thus ending the prospect of a Catholic Ireland for almost two and a half centuries. The center does a competent job of telling the story through displays and exhibits, plus the obligatory visitor center film.

Galway-Dublin Rd. (N6), Aughrim, near. Ballinasloe, Co. Galway. \bigcirc **090/967-3939.** Admission \in 5 adults; \in 4 seniors and students; \in 3 children 11 and under; \in 12 families. May–early Sept Tues–Sat 10:30am–4pm, Sun 2–5pm. Closed early Sept–Apr.

Birr Castle Demesne $\star\star$ GARDENS The magnificent 90-room, 17th-century castle stands amid gorgeous, sprawling gardens, beautifully designed into a kind of wonderland. The great house is still lived in by the family that has owned it for centuries, so it is only open during very limited hours in May, July and August—if you happen to be here during those months, it's worth a visit. But the real reason to visit Birr Castle is to see the extraordinary grounds, which are open year round. The demesne (estate) of the Parsons family, now the earls of Rosse, wraps around a peaceful lake and stretches over miles of pastures and wild woodland. There's much to discover, beautiful topiaries, huge box hedges, a lovely wrought iron bridge, and even a steampunk-style, 19th-century, two-storytall telescope (see "The Great Telescope," p. 416). There's a charming tea shop for lunch or a snack, and a play area for kids.

Birr, Co. Offaly. www.birrcastle.com. \bigcirc 057/912-0336. Check website for house tour schedule. Admission €9 adults; €7.50 seniors, students and children13–17; €5 children 5–12; children 4 and under free; €25 families. Mid-Mar–late Oct daily 9am–6pm; late Oct–mid-Mar daily 10am–4pm. Take N52 37km (23 miles) southwest of Tullamore.



Birr Castle in the town of Birr in County Offaly.

THE great TELESCOPE

At noble **Birr Castle** $\star\star$ (see p 415), one of the key attractions is not the historic castle itself, nor the beautiful grounds, but a surprisingly engaging exhibition on 19th century science. William Parsons, the 3rd Earl of Birr, was a scientist and astronomer, obsessed with discovering all he could about the night sky. Under his leadership, Birr Castle became an unlikely hub of research into astronomy, photography, and botany. One of his inventions was an enormous telescope. Now known as the Great Telescope, when it was built in 1845, it was called (somewhat sarcastically) the "Leviathan of Parsonstown." Until the 20th century, this was the largest telescope in the world.

The huge astronomical machine may resemble a medieval siege engine, but the key thing about it was that it worked. Using it, Parsons discovered and documented numerous nebulae, some of which were later determined to be hitherto unknown galaxies. He found and named the Crab Nebula, among others. He also discovered that certain galaxies were shaped like spirals. Birr Castle was the only place in the world where the phenomenon could be observed until 1914, when new, more advanced telescopes were developed.

To this day, the Great Telescope is kept in full working order, and demonstrations of its power are held regularly in summer. If you want to witness one of these displays for yourself, call ahead to check times.

Charleville Castle ** CASTLE Now, *this* is a castle. Designed in 1798 by Francis Johnston, this spooky, crenellated Gothic Revival masterpiece took 12 years to build. Today it's considered one of the best of Ireland's early 19th-century castles, and those who believe in such things say it is haunted. (It featured on the TV show *Ghost Hunters* in 2008.) It has fine limestone walls and plenty of towers, turrets, and battlements. Inside is spectacular plasterwork and hand-carved stairways, as well as secret passageways and dungeons. Charleville is run by volunteers, so opening times can be a little unpredictable. Tours run every day in the summer, and there are occasional night tours—but always call ahead, particularly if you're planning to visit in the off season. Prices are a little on the high side, but the money is very obviously needed for ongoing restoration work. The fact that the staff, so dedicated and enthusiastic, is all unpaid, makes paying that little bit extra a lot easier to justify.

Off Birr Rd. (N52), Tullamore, Co. Offaly. www.charlevillecastle.ie. \bigcirc 087/766-4110 or 057/932-3040. Guided tour \in 16 adults; \in 8 students age 17–18; \in 4 children 6–16; free for children 5 and under. Apr–Aug tours daily 1–5:30pm. At other times of year tours by appointment.

Clonmacnoise *** RELIGIOUS SITE/RUINS Resting somberly on the east bank of the Shannon, this is one of Ireland's most profound ancient sites. St. Ciaran founded the monastic community of Clonmacnoise in 548 at the crucial intersection of the Shannon and the Dublin-Galway land route, and it soon became one of Europe's great centers of learning and culture. For nearly 1,000 years, Clonmacnoise flourished under the patronage of Irish chiefs. The last high king, Rory O'Connor, was buried here in 1198. Clonmacnoise was raided repeatedly by native chiefs, Danes, and Anglo-Normans, until it was finally destroyed by English troops in 1552. Previously the monks always had something to rebuild, but this time the English carried away everything—down to the roofs, the doors, even the panes from the windows. By the time they'd finished, according to a report written by a monk from that time, "There was not left a bell, small or large, an image or an altar, or a book, or a gem, or even glass in a window, from the wall of the church out, which was not carried off." Today you can see what was left of the cathedral, a castle, eight churches, two round towers, three sculpted high crosses, and more than 200 monumental slabs, including some stones on which the old carvings can still be seen with thoughtful messages in ancient Celtic writing saying things like, "A prayer for Daniel."

On R357, 6.5km (4 miles) north of Shannonbridge, Co. Offaly. \bigcirc 090/967-4195. Admission \in 6 adults; \in 4 seniors; \in 2 students and children; \in 14 families. Mid-Mar–May, Sept–Oct daily 10am–6pm; June–Aug daily 9am–6:30pm; Nov to mid-Mar daily 10am–5:30pm.

Corlea Trackway ** ANCIENT SITE Low-key though it may be, this is one of those places that makes you stand back and marvel at just how *old* Ireland is. A modern interpretive center, situated in a bog, contains what at first glance looks like an elevated wooden platform made of planks nailed onto rails, like a boardwalk through a marsh or swamp. It is, in fact, an excavated wooden trackway that has been carbon dated to the year 148 _{B.C.} Roughly 18m (59 ft.) of original track has been uncovered so far and can be seen on a (free) guided tour. The center also contains an exhibition and a film to put the whole thing into context. A replica version crosses a starkly beautiful section of bog, roughly where the rest of the track is believed to be buried. The weird thing is that the modern version really doesn't look all that different. Was the track built merely as a bridge over the bog, or did it have some religious significance—perhaps enabling people to reach a part of the bog once considered sacred for some long-forgotten reason? Archaeologists disagree, but it's fascinating to contemplate the possibility.

Kenagh, Co. Longford. www.heritageireland.ie. **© 043/332-2386.** Free admission. Apr–Sept daily 10am–6pm. Last tour 1 hr. before closing; last admission 45 min. before closing.



Clonmacnoise, an early Christian settlement north of Shannonbridge in County Offaly.

castlepalooza MUSIC & ARTS FESTIVAL

Haunted it may or may not be, but Charleville Castle (p. 416) certainly comes to life in early August, when the delightfully laidback and bohemian **Castle palooza** takes over the grounds. The 3-day festival—which won the award for "best small festival in Europe" in 2009, 10, and 11—attracts indie and alternative bands from Ireland and beyond. There are also arts workshops, film screenings, spoken word performances, and the like. Camping is available on site during the festival. For more information, and to book tickets, visit **www.castle palooza.com**.

Derryglad Folk & Heritage Museum \star MUSEUM This rather sweet little museum just outside Athlone is a highly concentrated dose of mid-20th century nostalgia. You walk through a series of recreated businesses, each little building jam-packed with memorabilia and antiques—a "medical hall" (drugstore), grocery store, hardware store—and a few farmer's crofts. Also intriguing is the **McCormack Photography Room,** which preserves the collection of a real photography studio that operated in Athlone from 1948 until 2002. As well as antique cameras and developing equipment, it displays photographs from the decades the shop was in operation. Museum guides could hardly be more keen to impart their encyclopedic knowledge.

Curraghboy, Co. Roscommon (13.8km/8½ miles northwest of Athlone on R362). www.derrygladfolkmuseum.com. **Ø** 090/648-8192. Admission €5 adults; €4.50 seniors and students; €3.50 children. May–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–6pm. Closed Oct–Apr.

The Kilbeggan Distillery \star FACTORY TOUR The oldest *licensed* distillery in Ireland, Kilbeggan has been producing whiskey here since 1757. Well, almost—it closed in 1957, and was virtually derelict for 25 years, until the local people revived it as a smalltime distillery and museum. Full production resumed here in the late 2000s, using partly traditional methods, including a two-century-old copper still—thought to be the oldest still in day-to-day use anywhere in the world—and oak mash tuns. (They also have a working waterwheel and a steam-powered engine, although these are mostly for show.) Unlike most distilleries, you can wander around yourself, or choose one of the guided tours. The silver medal tour (€13, at 10am and 3pm daily/2:30pm Nov to Mar) includes a tasting of three whiskeys (or, if you prefer, samples to take home). The gold medal tour (€25, at 1pm daily/12:30pm Nov to Mar) allows you to meet the distillers themselves and take part in a four-whiskey masterclass tasting. True enthusiasts can opt for the Connoisseur Experience, which includes lunch and the chance to bottle your own whiskey. It costs €75 per person and is only available on certain dates; call or go online for schedule.

On N6, east of Athlone, Kilbeggan, Co. Westmeath. www.kilbeggandistillery.com. \bigcirc 057/933-2134. Self-guided tour \in 8; guided tours \in 13– \in 25. No children on tours. Apr–Oct daily 9am–6pm; Nov–Mar daily 10am–4pm.

A somber SORT OF GRANDEUR: STROKESTOWN PARK

For nearly four centuries, from 1600 to 1979, Strokestown **Park House** (www.strokestownpark.ie; **© 071/963-3013**) was the seat of the Pakenham-Mahon family. King Charles II granted the vast estate, which stretches for miles in every direction, to Nicholas Mahon after the Restoration in appreciation of his support of the House of Stewart during the bloody English Civil War. It was quite a reward. The original house, completed in 1697, was considered to be too small and unimposing by Nicholas's grandson, Thomas, who hired Richard Cassels (also known as Richard Castle) to build him something bigger and more impressive. The result is this 45-room Palladian mansion.

The north wing houses Ireland's last existing galleried kitchen (where the lady of the house could observe the culinary activity without being part of it). The south wing is an elaborate vaulted stable so magnificent that it has been described as an "equine cathedral."

These days Strokestown is also the permanent home of the **Irish National Famine Museum**, one of the country's very best museums devoted to that deadly period in Irish history. It sets out the terrible mixture of natural disaster and shocking cruelty of the British establishment that led to the deaths of around a million people and the emigration of a million more. Exhibits include letters penned by some of the tenants of Strokestown during the Famine years.

The reasoning behind this somber but incongruous pairing of historic attractions becomes clearer when you understand a little more of the history behind the grand Strokestown estate—particularly the behavior of one man, Major Denis Mahon, who was the landlord at Strokestown during the 1840s. When the potato blight struck, and famine started to spread, Mahon and his land agents could have done many things to help the hundreds of starving peasants who lived and worked on the property, but instead they evicted them as soon as it became clear they would not be able to pay their rent. He even went so far as to charter ships to send them away from Ireland. In 1847, Major Mahon was shot to death near Strokestown, and two men were hastily (and dubiously) convicted of the crime. But it seems clear that many hungry people had motives.

Strokestown Park is on the main Dublin-Castlebar Road (N5), in Strokestown, County Roscommon. It's about 77km (41 miles) south of Sligo Town. Admission costs \in 13.50 adults, \in 12 seniors and students, \in 16 children, and \in 28.50 families. It's open from mid-March to October daily from 10:30am to 5:30pm, and November to mid-March daily from 10:30am to 4pm. The house can only be seen on a guided tour, at noon, 2:30 and 4:30pm (2:30pm only during the winter season).

Portumna Castle and Forest Park ** CASTLE/PARK Built in 1609 by Earl Richard Burke, this massive, noble structure on the northern shores of Lough Derg is a particularly fine manor house. Had it not been gutted by fire in 1826, who knows what billionaire might own it now? The fire spared much of the impressive exterior, including its Dutch-style decorative gables and rows of stone mullioned windows; the ground floor is open to the public, and contains exhibits on the history of the castle, and the so-called "Flight of the Wild Geese," when the Jacobite forces of James II fled Ireland in defeat. The grounds contain a restored walled kitchen garden and a willow maze. The castle is within the beautiful, 560-hectare (1,383-acre) expanse of **Portumna Forest Park.** It offers trails and signposted walks, plus viewing points, picnic areas, and the remains of a 13th-century Cistercian abbey. Admission to the Forest Park is free.

Off N65, Portumna, Co. Galway. \bigcirc 090/974-1658. Castle \notin 4 adults; \notin 3 seniors; \notin 2 children and students; \notin 10 families. Free admission to gardens. Apr to mid-Oct daily 9:30am–6pm; mid-late Oct Sat–Sun 9am–5pm. Last admission 45 min. before closing.



Portumna Castle, built in 1609 by Earl Richard Burke on the shores of Lough Derg in County Galway.

THE slieve bloom MOUNTAINS

Linking Counties Laois and Offaly, this lush and gentle mountain range is great hillwalking territory—its tallest peak is just 527m (1,729 ft.), which clocks in at about the same as the 44th tallest in the Wicklow Mountains (see chapter 5). The mountains also have the great advantage of being decidedly under-visited, so you're likely to find peace and solitude a lot easier to come by.

The park has several looped hiking trails, including several around **Lough Boora**; one of them has its own sculpture trail. Another takes you through the tiny but charming village of **Clonaslee**, and up to the **Rickets Rock waterfall**. Several trained guides live locally and will offer their services if you'd prefer to be taken around by an expert; a full list with contact details is available at **www.slievebloom.ie** (click "Walking" then "Walking Guides").

The terrain also lends itself particularly well to horseback riding; the **Birr Equestrian Centre**, Kingsborough House, Birr, County Offaly (www.birrequestrian.ie; **@ 087/244-5545**) organizes regular treks and special trips.

Several castles lie within the boundaries of the Slieves, including **Charleville** $\star\star$ (see p. 416) and **Portumna** $\star\star$ (see p. 420). For more information visit **www.slievebloom.ie**.

The Rock of Dunamase \star RUINS There isn't much left of the castle that once stood atop this rocky outcrop overlooking a valley near the town of Portlaoise; however, what remains is an artful and quite striking sight. The ruins were once Dunamase Castle (though nobody really calls it that), built sometime during the 12th century. It clearly didn't last long, however; records indicate that it was a total ruin by as early as 1350. A much earlier fort is believed to have stood on the same site. A few arched gateways survive intact, and the scattered remains of walls and turrets give a good idea of

how impressive a sight it must once have been. The stunning view from among the ruins, over rolling green fields toward the Slieve Mountains in the distance, is worth the visit alone. Unfortunately the Rock isn't signposted from the main road; to get there, follow these directions. Leave Portlaoise on N80, heading in the direction of Carlow. Shortly after crossing over the main M7 motorway, just outside the town limits, you'll pass some large green industrial sheds. Approximately 1.8km (just over 1 mile) after this you will come to some scattered houses, with a turning on the left, next to a triangular patch of lawn and a telegraph pole. Take this turning; you will start to see the Rock on the hill to your left in about 0.5km (550 yds.).

Off of N80 (Portlaoise-Carlow Rd.), about 9km/51/2 miles east of Portlaoise, Co. Laois. Free admission. Daily dawn-dusk.

The Sensory Gardens \star GARDENS On the grounds of a convent in the town of Abbeyleix, not far from the border between counties Laois and Kilkenny, these gardens were designed by people with learning difficulties. They are intended to be not only accessible but also stimulating to disabled visitors. Plants are chosen for their particularly strong effect on the senses, whether it be for their vibrant colors, powerful scent, or tactile appeal. Touches like wind chimes here and there, and even an innovative "humming stone," make this an ingenious and pleasant place to wander.

At Dove House, Main St., Abbeyleix, Co. Laois. © 057/873-1325. Free admission. June–Sept Mon–Fri 9am–4pm, Sat–Sun and public holidays 2–6pm; Oct–May Mon–Fri 9am–4pm; Bank Holiday Mon only 2–6pm.

Tullynally Castle Demense \star CASTLE/GARDENS A turreted and towered Gothic Revival manor, this creamy white castle home is dazzling. It has been the home of the Pakenham family, the earls of Longford, since 1655. Frustratingly, given its inviting, fairytale-like exterior, the building itself is only open to pre-booked groups of 20 or more. However, the 12-hectare (30-acre) grounds are an attraction in themselves. Highlights include a large kitchen garden, where the grass is kept short by grazing llamas; forest trails and a riverside walk; and an idyllic path leading to a Victorian grotto. Tullynally is near Lough Derravaragh, a tranquil spot featured in the legendary Irish tale *The Children of Lir*. Check the website for events listings, including classical concerts—the only way you're likely to get inside the castle without being part of a large group.

About 32km (20 miles) east of Longford and 21km (13 miles) north of Mullingar, off the main Dublin-Sligo Rd. (N4), Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath. www.tullynallycastle.com. \bigcirc 044/966-1159. Gardens \in 6 adults; \in 3 children; \in 16 families. Castle only open for pre-booked group tours—call in advance for information. Garden Apr–May, Sept Sat–Sun and public holidays 11am–5pm; June–Aug Thurs–Sun and public holidays 11am–5pm.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

BOATING The following companies rent cabin cruisers, usually for a minimum of 1 week, along this section of the Shannon: Athlone Cruisers, Jolly Mariner Marina, Athlone, County Westmeath (@

090/647-2892); and **Silverline Cruisers,** The Marina, Banagher, County Offaly (www.silverlinecruisers.com; \bigcirc **057/915-1112**). Crafts range from four to six berths; range from around €700 to €3,600 per week in high season.

leprechauns: YOU'RE DOING IT ALL WRONG

For better or worse, leprechauns have long been a symbol of Ireland in the popular imagination worldwide. Usually portrayed as little green creatures, grinning broadly, they are absurd, cartoonish figures, with which we've all grown up.

Originally, though, they were something much different. The word "leprechaun" came from the Irish *leath bhrógan*, meaning "shoemaker." And in early folklore, leprechauns were often depicted as cobblers by trade. Though they were elven, mischievous creatures, they weren't evil exactly—just prone to the occasional malicious practical joke.

In those days, different regions of Ireland had their own versions of the Leprechaun folklore, although there were a few elements of common ground. One of those was the leprechaun's clothing. Originally, all leprechauns were portrayed as wearing *red* coats, not the green you see today. The green coats came much later in the 20th century, invented presumably by foreigners.

Where that pot of gold came from, though, is anybody's guess.

Today, leprechauns have much less whimsical connotations in Irish society. The description is used by the Irish to describe the crass side of the tourism industry (with good reason—the Ring of Kerry really does have "Leprechaun Crossing" signs). And on an even less pleasant note, it's used by some Northern Irish Unionists as a term of abuse for the Gaelic language.

So just bear this in mind when you consider buying that figurine of a leprechaun ironing an Irish flag. There is more to the myth than yellow hearts and green clovers.

CYCLING Bikes can be rented from **D.B.** Cycles & Babyland, Unit 3, Magazine Road, Athlone, County Westmeath (www.dbcycles.ie; © 090/649-2280), for €15 per day or €50 per week.

GOLF Birr Golf Club, The Glens, Birr, County Offaly (www.birrgolfclub.ie; © 057/912-0082), is an 18-hole course on 45 hectares (111 acres) of parkland countryside; greens fees are €20

In the Athlone area, the 18-hole Athlone Golf Club, Hodson Bay, Athlone, County Westmeath (www.athlonegolfclub.ie; © 090/649-2073), charges greens fees of €30 to €35; and the 18-hole championship Mount Temple Golf Club, Moate, County Westmeath (www.mounttemplegolfclub.com; © 090/648-1841), 8km (5 miles) east of Athlone, charges greens fees of €20 to €25. The Glasson Golf Hotel & Country Club, Glasson, County Westmeath (www.glassongolfhotel.ie; © 090/648-5120), is on the shores of Lough Ree, 10km (6¹/₄ miles) north of Athlone. Greens fees are €40 to €50.

Lovely parkland and woodland golfing in the Lough Derg area is offered at 18-hole clubs such as **Portumna Golf Club**, Ennis Road, Portumna, County Galway (www.portumnagolfclub.ie; @ 090/974-1059), with greens fees of $\in 20$ to $\in 25$.

HORSE RACING The horse racing runs from July to September at the Kilbeggan Racecourse, Loughnagore, Kilbeggan, County Westmeath (www.kilbegganraces.com; \bigcirc 057/933-2176), off the main Mullingar road (N52), 1.6km (1 mile) from town. Tickets cost \notin 12 adults, \notin 10 seniors and students, \notin 20 families (2 adults with children age 15 or under), free for children 15 and under.

WALKING The **Slieve Bloom Mountains** (see box p. 421) contain several excellent several looped walking paths and trails.

WHERE TO STAY IN THE MIDLANDS

Athlone, on the southern tip of Lough Rea and almost half way between Galway and Dublin, makes a natural base from which to explore the Midlands region. It has a couple of modern chain hotels, although it seems a shame to come all this way and stay in one when you could be waking up to a home-cooked breakfast in a sweet little Irish farmhouse instead. Although the Midlands are by no means the richest region in the country for interesting hotels and B&Bs, some real standouts are to be

found scattered around the countryside.

Moderate

Viewmount House ** Tranquil, elegant gardens await at this lovely country house B&B just outside Longford. Bedrooms are done in an appealingly old-fashioned style, with antique wood furniture and plenty of space. Some have little sitting areas and roll-top tubs in the bathrooms. Viewmount also has a deserved reputation for being one of the best places to eat in the area; the VM Restaurant serves superb modern Irish cuisine, and it is worth the splurge at \in 53 for four courses. Check the website for special offers, including good midweek dinner, bed and breakfast discounts. Dublin Rd., Longford, Co. Longford. www.viewmounthouse.com. **@** 043/334-1919. 12 units. \in 130 double; \in 160 suite. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Restaurant; Wi-Fi (free).

Wineport Lodge ******* This romantic, modern hotel overlooking Lough Rea is a truly relaxing getaway. The contemporary bedrooms have plenty of space, and balconies with views of the Lough—great for watching the glassy waters turn orange as the sun goes down. The hotel spa is surprisingly good value for a place like this; you could choose from a simple aromatherapy bath for \notin 40, or a deeply relaxing full-body hot stone massage for \notin 100. It should come as no surprise that the restaurant is equally excellent. Good value dinner and bed and breakfast packages are available.

Glasson, Athlone, Co. Westmeath. www.wineport.ie. **© 090/643-9010.** 30 units. €88–€196 double; €126–€260 suite. Free parking. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free); restaurant; bar; room service; spa.

Inexpensive

Bastion $\star\star$ This delightful B&B is run by the lovely Anthony and Vinny McCay, who have converted an old Athlone townhouse into a chic, rather bohemian getaway. The decor fills the place with light and cheer, from the whitewashed walls and polished wood floors in the bedrooms, to the sophisticated furniture and slightly Moroccan-style accent pieces strewn here and there. Breakfasts are plentiful and healthy, with a buffet laid out with home-baked bread, fruit, and other welcome alternatives to the ubiquitous full Irish. Two minor downsides: Two of the bedrooms have shared bathrooms, and those with mobility problems should be sure to ask for a room on the lower floors—there are quite a few stairs to climb.

2 Bastion St., Athlone, Co. Westmeath. www.thebastion.net. **© 090/649-4954.** 7 units. €55–€80 double. No parking (street parking nearby). Breakfast not included in lower rates. **Amenities:** Wi-Fi (free).

Emmett House \star A corner terrace house with a cozy, authentic interior, Emmett House is a satisfyingly traditional B&B. Bedrooms are a bit of a mixture; some nicely reference the 18th-century origins of the house, with antique-style furniture (including a beautiful four poster in one room), but others are rather more plain and modern. They're a decent enough size, though (given their age) and everything is spotlessly clean. Breakfasts are tasty and filling, and the welcome from host Maureen is genuine and friendly.

Emmett Square, Birr, Co. Offaly. www.emmethouse.com. **© 057/916-9885.** 4 units. €70–€100 double. No parking (street parking nearby). Breakfast included. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Hodson Bay Hotel ** The deep blue waters of Hodson Bay stretch out before this modern spa hotel just outside Athlone. Views of the bay are stunning, which somewhat makes up for what the guest rooms lack in character, with their rather bland, corporate look. (Needless to say, you should ask for a room on the bay side.) Rooms in the "Retreat" wing are better designed, but also more expensive. The spa is excellent, with a huge list of reasonably-priced treatments—a 50-minute facial costs around \notin 75, while even the most expensive massage offered, which involves two massage

therapists working at the same time, is $\in 160$. There are two good restaurants and a pub on site, and the center of Athlone is only about a 7km (4¹/₂-mile) cab ride. Check the website for package deals and special offers.

Siginposted off N61, 7km northwest of Athlone, Co. Westmeath. www.hodsonbayhotel.com. **Ø 090/644-2000.** 176 units. €73–€156 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; room service; spa; swimming pool; Wi-Fi (free).

WHERE TO DINE IN THE MIDLANDS

Most small towns in this area have little in the way of restaurant life. In some villages, the only place in town making food at all is the pub. But **Athlone** has a reasonably vibrant restaurant scene, with some sophisticated restaurants and coffee shops to choose from. Along with the choices below, see the hotels listed above, as most have excellent restaurants.

Beans & Leaves \star CAFE This cheerful cafe/deli is a great place to know when you're after a quick, tasty, and healthy lunch in Athlone. In addition to excellent sandwiches, they also do tasty light meals—fishcakes, seafood chowder, or perhaps a steaming hot plate of chicken curry. Desserts are well worth checking out.

Lloyds Lane, Athlone, Co. Westmeath. **Ø 090/643-3534.** Lunch main courses €5–€12. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; Sun 11am–5pm.

The Blue Apron $\star\star$ IRISH This great little bistro is in Tullamore, about 3.4km (2 miles) northeast of **Charleville Castle** $\star\star$ (see p. 416). Go for some scallops or a pear and Cashel blue-cheese salad to start, before choosing from honey-and-thyme-glazed duck breast or monkfish with red pepper coulis. The fixed-price Sunday lunch menu (€27 for three courses) is a great choice for a proper, full lunch, although don't expect to get much done afterward.

Harbour St., Tullamore, Co. Offaly. www.theblueapronrestaurant.ie. **© 057/936-0106.** Main courses €18–€24. Wed–Thurs 5:30– 9:30pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm; Sun 12:30–9pm. Set menus only Wed–Fri, Sun lunch.

The Coffee Club \star CAFE This busy, friendly cafe in Tullamore is a popular place with locals for lunch. They serve a huge range of sandwiches from their deli counter, plus delicious, healthy stir-fries (you choose the ingredients), salads, and other snacks. The upstairs dining room, lined with shelves full of secondhand books, is a quieter, more relaxed space. Appropriately enough, given the name, they also serve an extremely fine cup of coffee. They have live music—of a jazz-or-salsa variety—on Sundays from 2 until 4pm.

Harbour St., Tullamore, Co. Offaly. No phone. Main courses €5–€12. Mon–Sat 8am–6pm; Sun 10am–5pm.

The Gallic Kitchen \star BREAKFAST/BISTRO If you've come this far from Dublin, there's a chance you've already sampled the tasty pies, quiches and desserts on offer here—they started out running a stall at the Temple Bar Food Market (see p. 166), and it's still a popular feature every Saturday. This is the main HQ, however, and it's a great spot for breakfast or a light lunch. Everything's fresh and homemade, and don't even think about leaving without trying a slice of cake or delicious sweet tart for dessert.

Main St., Abbeyleix, Co. Laois. www.gallickitchen.com. **Ø 086/605-8208.** Main courses €21–€29. Mon–Sat 10–6pm; Sun 11–6pm.

THE OLDEST pub IN IRELAND

The question of who gets to claim the title of Ireland's oldest pub is a vexed one, with several contenders battling it out to have their claim taken most seriously. The Brazen Head $\star\star\star$ in Dublin (see p. 170) has been serving customers since 1198, making it an off-cited candidate for the honor—although detractors would scoff that most of the building was replaced in the 17th century, thus disqualifying it from the honors.

The other big contender is **Sean's Bar** $\star\star$ on Main Street in Athlone (www.seansbar.lightholderproductions.com; **© 096/649-2358**). Records show that there has been a drinking establishment of some kind or another on this site since the quite astonishingly faraway date of A.D. 900. The fact that a small section of its walls is thought to be original further strengthens the claim—but again, the extent to which it can be considered the *same* pub is debatable.

The dispute was finally settled in the mid-2000s, when the *Guinness Book of Records* ruled in favor of Sean's. Presumably this means it's now acceptable to call it officially Ireland's oldest pub. And, although some of the decor is modern, the fact that you still have to duck low to get in the door gives it an *olde* feel. Still, to look at the place, you'd certainly never guess that it's been serving customers since half a millennium before Columbus sailed to America.

Hatters Bistro ** BISTRO Black and white portraits of movie stars adorn the walls of this friendly little bistro in the center of Athlone. The menu doesn't present too many surprises, but it's all done very well—honey-glazed roast pork, Irish lamb, or maybe cod filet with traditional champ mash. For dessert, try the Toblerone cheesecake—it's made with a brand of Swiss chocolate bar, popular here since the '70s. The set menu is a pretty good deal at \in 22 for two courses (served all night Mon to Thurs, or until 6:30pm on Fri and Sat).

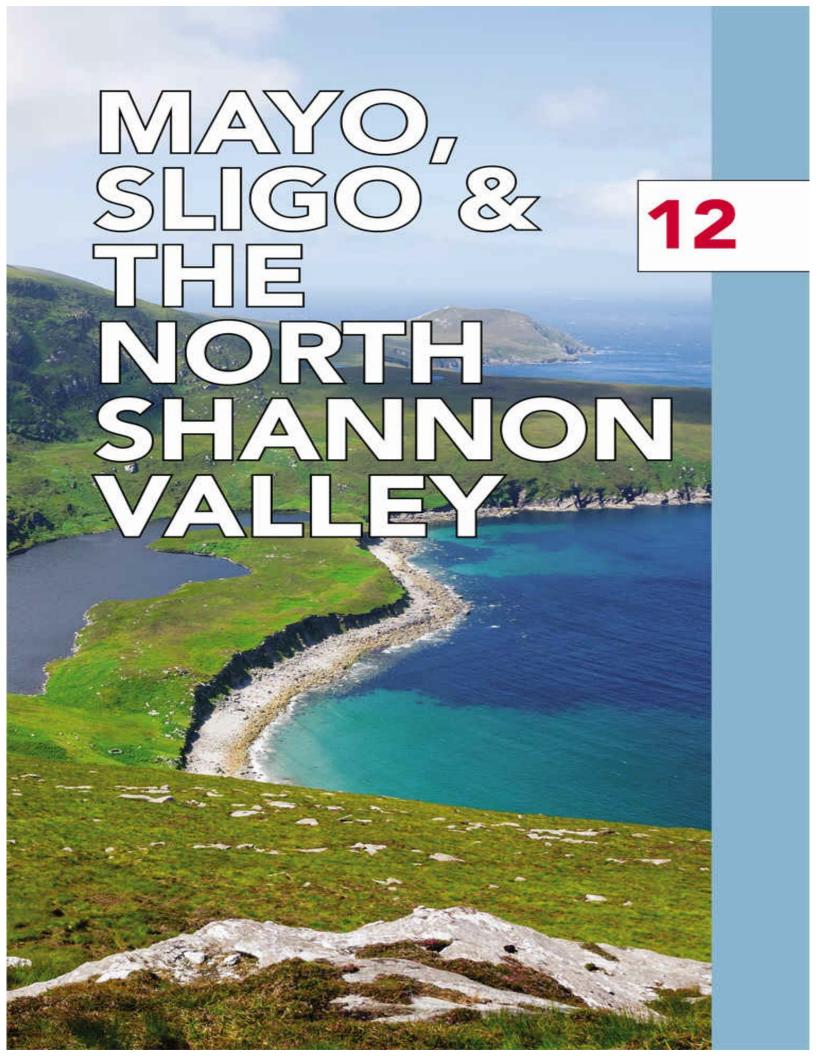
Strand St., Athlone, Co. Westmeath. www.hatterslane.ie. **Ø 090/647-3077.** Main courses €19–€28. Mon–Sat 5:30–10pm. Closed Sun.

The Old Fort ** IRISH/INTERNATIONAL Talk about a unique site for a restaurant: a converted artillery fortification, constructed to guard against a potential French invasion in the early 19th century. The building has been cleverly restored, with slightly wry touches like lighting sconces in the dining room shaped like old-fashioned rifles (the effect is subtler than it sounds). The menu keeps things simple, with plenty of traditional flavors; a starter of crab claws or calamari, perhaps, followed by roast duck with honey and clove sauce, or a simple but delicious steak with pepper cream sauce. A simpler, more international set menu (€20–€25) goes right along with the a la carte options.

Shannonbridge, Co. Roscommon. **© 090/967-4973.** Main courses €21–€29. Wed–Sat 5–9pm; Sun 12:30–4pm. Closed Nov–Feb.

Thyme *** MODERN IRISH Offering fine dining without being overly fussy or formal, this excellent bistro is one of the best places to eat in Athlone. Local ingredients feature heavily on the imaginative bistro-style menu; for starters, you may be offered Fivemiletown goat cheese in phyllo pastry or smoked haddock croquettes, then maybe a local rib-eye served with peppercorn sauce, or some beautifully presented duck breast with flowering sprouts. Several dishes are gluten-free. The "value menu," served until 6pm on Friday and Saturday and all night the rest of the week, offers similar dishes at a very reasonable \in 24 for two courses, or \in 29 with dessert. You should try to make reservations, especially on weekends.

Costume Place, Athlone, Co. Westmeath. www.thymerestaurant.ie. **Ø 090/647-8850.** Main courses €15–€26. Mon–Sat 5–10pm; Sun noon–8pm.



The strikingly beautiful landscape of Galway segues into the strikingly beautiful landscape of southern Mayo without any fanfare. Like Galway, Mayo is a land of dramatic scenery, with rocky cliffs plunging down into the opaque blue waters of the icy sea. If you head farther north, you'll reach the smooth pastures of County Sligo, the classic landscape that inspired the iconic Irish poet William Butler Yeats. The main appeal here is not its towns, which tend to be functional farm communities, but the countryside itself. Though the region is dotted with fairy-tale castles and mysterious prehistoric sites, its biggest gift to the visitor is tranquility.

ESSENTIALS

Arriving

BY BUS Bus Éireann runs daily bus service to Sligo Town from Dublin, Galway, and other points including Derry in Northern Ireland. It provides daily service to major towns in Mayo. The bus station in Sligo is on Lord Edward Street.

BY TRAIN Trains from Dublin and other major points arrive daily at **Westport** in Mayo, and **Sligo Town** in Sligo. The train station in Westport is on Altamont Street; about a 10-minute walk from the town center; in Sligo it's on Lord Edward Street, next to the bus station.

BY CAR Four major roads lead to Sligo: N4 from Dublin and the east, N17 from Galway and the south, N15 from Donegal to the north, and N16 from Northern Ireland.

BY PLANE Ireland West Airport Knock in Charlestown, County Mayo (www.knockairport.com; © 094/936-8100) is becoming quite a popular hub for budget airlines from the U.K. Aer Lingus (www.aerlingus.com; © 081/836-5000) or Ryanair (www.ryanair.com; © 0871/246-0000 in the U.K. or 152/044-4004) run daily scheduled flights from London, Liverpool, Edinburgh, and Bristol. Flybe (www.flybe.com; © 087/1700-2000 in the U.K. or 0044/1392-683-152) also offers daily flights from Manchester and a few flights per week from Birmingham. There are no flights to the airport from other points within Ireland.

[FastFACTS] MAYO & SLIGO

ATMs/Banks In Westport, a branch of AIB is on Shop Street (098/25466). In Ballina, a Bank of Ireland is on Pearse Street (© 096/21144). In Sligo Town, try the AIB on Stephen Street (© 071/914-2157).

Dentists For dental emergencies, your hotel should contact a dentist for you. Otherwise, in Westport try Dr. Richard Lee Kin on Upper James Street (© 098/26611). In Sligo Town, contact Dr. Brendan Flanagan on Wine St. (© 091/916-0953).

Doctors For medical emergencies dial © 999. For non-emergencies, your hotel should call you a doctor. Otherwise, in Westport there's the Westport Medical Clinic, Market Lane (© 098/27500); in Ballina, there's the Moyview Family Practise on Dillon Terrace (© 095/22933). In Sligo Town the Medicentre is on Barrack Street (© 071/914-2550).

Emergencies For police, fire, or other emergencies, dial @ 999.

Internet Access In Westport, you can get online at the Mayo County Library on the Crescent (© 098/25747). In Sligo Town try Café En Line at Cairy Court (© 071/914-4892).

Pharmacies In Westport, look for Treacy's on James Street (© 098/25474). In Ballina, Quinn's Chemist is on Pearse Street (©

096/21365). Sligo Town has a branch of Boots on O'Connell Street (© 071/914-9445).

Post Offices The main post office in Westport is on North Mall (© 098/27210); in Ballina, Bury Street (© 096/21798); and in Sligo Town, Castle Street (© 071/914-3078).

Taxis If you need a cab home from a restaurant, the management should be able to call one for you—particularly in rural areas, where taxi firms can be few and far between. Otherwise, in Ballina you could try the Ballina Taxi Company (© 087/295-8787). In Westport, there's AA Taxis (© 087/237-7070); in Sligo Town, there's Ace Cabs (© 071/914-4444).

COUNTY MAYO

For experienced Ireland travelers, Mayo is a kind of Galway Lite—its rugged coastal scenery is similar to that of Galway, but it has less of the traffic and tourist overload from which Galway suffers in the summer. This is peaceful, pleasant Ireland, with striking seascapes and inland scenery that ranges from lush and green to stark, desert-like, and mountainous. It's an unpredictable place, where the terrain changes at the turn of a steering wheel. This region was hit so hard by the Great Famine that, in some ways, it's only now recovering. Starvation and emigration emptied it then, and that emptiness is still noticeable.

For some, the county's most familiar history is cinematic. The village of **Cong** was the setting for the 1951 John Ford film *The Quiet Man*, starring John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara, a connection that Cong has embraced whole-heartedly. Among Mayo's other attractions are the mysterious 5,000-year-old settlement at **Céide Fields**, the religious shrine at **Knock**, and some of Europe's best fishing waters at **Lough Conn, Lough Mask**, and the **River Moy. Ballina** (*Béal an Átha*), Mayo's largest town, calls itself the home of the Irish salmon. The resort town of **Westport** is perhaps a better touring base. Once a major port, it was designed by the famed architect Richard Castle (who created Powerscourt House [see p. 183] and Russborough House [see p. 185] among many others) with a tree-lined mall, rows of Georgian buildings, and an octagonal central mall.



Evening in Ballina.

Visitor Information

The main tourist information center for County Mayo is the **Westport Tourist Office**, Bridge Street, Westport (www.mayo.ie; © 098/25711). Other offices are on Pearse Street, Ballina (© 096/72800) and in the Old Courthouse in the center of Cong (© 094/954-6542).

Exploring County Mayo

Because it's a rural county with no major cities or many large towns, County Mayo feels a bit like a place without a center. Towns like Castlebar, Claremorris, Westport, and Ballinrobe in the southern part of the county, and Ballina in the northern reaches, make good places to stop, refill the tank, and have lunch, but they offer little to make you linger. The county's attractions lie in the countryside, and in smaller communities like Foxford, Ballycastle, Louisburgh, and Newport.



County Mayo's loveliest town, Westport (*Cathair na Mairt*) \star , nestles on the shore of Clew Bay. The bleak and starkly beautiful coast of Clew Bay makes for a scenic drive west to Achill Island (*An Caol*) (see p. 441), or you can catch a ferry to the bay's Clare Island $\star\star$, once the home of Mayo's legendary "Pirate Queen," Grace O'Malley (see p. 435). Southeast of Westport, Croagh Patrick, a 750m (2,460-ft.) mountain, dominates the views of western Mayo for miles. St. Patrick is said to have spent the 40 days of Lent praying here in the year 441. To commemorate that, on the last Sunday of July, thousands of Irish people make a pilgrimage to the site, which has become known as St. Patrick's Holy Mountain.

If you drive inland from Westport to Castlebar, the road north leads past the clear, mountain-ringed waters of Lough Cullin and Lough Conn and eventually to Ballina (*Béal an Átha*). A dramatic coastal drive runs along the R314 from Ballina to Downpatrick Head, passing through the secluded harbor village of Killala (*Cill Alaidh* or *Cill Ála*). Outside Killala on the road R314, several ruined friaries are worth a stop, particularly Moyne Abbey \star (see p. 440) and Rosserk Abbey \star (see p. 442).



Croagh Patrick.

IN & AROUND WESTPORT

Ballintubber Abbey ** CHURCH This abbey is a real survivor—one of only a few Irish churches in continuous use for almost 800 years. Founded in 1216 by Cathal O'Connor, king of Connaught, it has endured fires, numerous attacks, illnesses, and anti-Catholic pogroms. Although Oliver Cromwell's forces thoroughly dismantled the abbey—they even carried off its roof in 1653 in an effort to finally suppress it—clerics continued discreetly conducting religious rites. Today it's an impressive church, with 13th-century windows on the right side of the nave and a doorway dating to the 15th century. It was completely restored in 1966. Guided tours are available weekdays from 10am to 5pm; there's no charge but donations of €4 per person are requested. The **Celtic Furrow** visitor center further illuminates the abbey's troubled and fascinating history, as part of a wider examination of spiritual life in Ireland dating back 5,000 years.

Off the main Galway-Castlebar Rd. (N84), about 21.5km (13¹/₂ miles) east of Westport, Ballintubber, Co. Mayo. www.ballintubberabbey.ie. © 094/903-0934. Free admission; donations requested. Abbey: daily 9am-midnight. Celtic Furrow: June-Aug daily 10:30am-5pm.

Clare Island $\star\star$ ISLAND Floating about 5km (3 miles) off the Mayo coast, just beyond Clew Bay, Clare Island is a place of unspoiled splendor. Inhabited for 5,000 years and once quite populous—1,700 people lived there in the early 19th century—Clare is now home to only about 150 year-round

islanders, plus perhaps as many sheep. But the island is best known as the haunt of Grace O'Malley, the "Pirate Queen," who controlled the coastal waters 400 years ago (see above). O'Malley's modest castle and the partially restored Cistercian abbey where she is buried are among the island's few attractions. The rest of the draw is its remote natural beauty. Two ferry services operate out of Roonagh Harbour, 29km (18 miles) south of Westport: **O'Malley's Ferry Service** (www.omalleyferries.com; © **098/25045**); and **Clare Island Ferries** (www.clareislandferry.com; © **098/23737**). The round-trip fare for the 15-minute journey is around €15 to €20. Co. Mayo. www.clareisland.info.

local hero: GRACE O'MALLEY, THE PIRATE QUEEN

By all accounts, Grace O'Malley—aka the "Pirate Queen"—was a woman ahead of her time. Born in 1530 on **Clare Island** $\star\star$ (see p. 434), she grew up to be an adventurer, pirate, gambler, mercenary, traitor, chieftain, noblewoman, and general badass. And while she is remembered now with affection, at the time she was feared and despised in equal measure.

Even as a child, Grace was fiercely independent. When her mother refused to let her sail with her father, she cut off her hair and dressed in boys' clothing. Her father called her "Grainne Mhaol," or "Bald Grace," later shortened to Granuaile (pronounced Grawnya-wayl), a nickname she'd carry all her life.

At 16, Grace married Donal O'Flaherty, second in line to the O'Flaherty clan chieftain, who ruled all of Connacht. Her career as a pirate began a few years later when the city of Galway, one of the largest trading posts in northern Europe, refused to do business with the O'Flahertys. Grace used her fleet of fast galleys to waylay slower vessels on their way into Galway Harbour. She then offered safe passage for a fee in lieu of pillaging the ships.

She is most fondly remembered for refusing to trade her lands in return for an English title, a common practice of the day.



Grace O'Malley, the "Pirate Queen" of Galway, known as a hero and defender of the Gaelic way of life.

When the English captured her sons in 1593, she went to London to try to secure their release. In an extraordinary turn of events, she actually secured a meeting with Queen Elizabeth herself. History records that the two women got on quite well (although legend has it that Grace initially tried to smuggle a knife in with her, in case things went differently). A deal was struck; Elizabeth agreed to release Grace's sons and to return some captured lands, if Grace would agree to renounce piracy. This she did and returned to Ireland triumphantly.

The truce did not last, however. She got her sons back, but not her property. So Grace took up piracy again and continued her legendary seafaring career until her death from natural causes in 1600.

Granuaile Centre \star MUSEUM This small but rather charming museum is devoted to a particularly cool local hero: Grace O'Malley, also known as "the Pirate Queen"—or, in Gaelic, *Granuaile* (pronounced Graw-nya-*wayl*). To call Grace's life story colorful would be an understatement. Today

she is feted as a defender of the rights of the people of Mayo as much as for being a ruthless pirate. But the pirate stuff is inevitably more fun. The center is in a former church building and has some engaging exhibits that tell the story of her life, plus a few more exhibits on the history of the area in general. It's engaging if you're interested in the subject, but the slightly out-of-the-way location means that the opening times can be unpredictable, so it's best to call ahead before making the journey. For more on this extraordinary woman, see box above.

Church St., Louisburgh, Co. Mayo. \bigcirc 098/66341. Admission \notin 4 adults; \notin 2 seniors and students; children free. Mon–Fri 10am–4pm. Louisburgh is 21km (13 miles) west of Westport on R334; Church St. is near the center of the village.

The National Museum of Ireland: Country Life $\star\star$ MUSEUM The countryside outpost of Ireland's multi-site national museum (the others are all in Dublin, see chapter 4), this one specializes in Irish life, trade, culture, and tradition since the mid-19th century. Permanent exhibitions deal with folklore; the natural environment and how local communities have relied on it for survival; political and social upheaval, particularly in the years preceding the Great Famine; traditional trades and crafts; and the changing life of the Irish people at home and at work. They also have a thoughtful program of changing exhibitions. Like all the National Museum sites, entry is completely free.

Signposted from N5, Turlough Park, about 8km (5 miles) east of Castlebar, Co. Mayo. www.museum.ie. 🖉 094/903-1755. Free admission. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 2–5pm. Closed Mon.

Westport House and Pirate Adventure Park ** HISTORIC HOUSE/THEME PARK At the edge of the town of Westport, this late-18th-century residence is the home of Lord Altamont, the Marquess of Sligo and a descendant, it is said, of Pirate Queen Grace O'Malley (witness the bronze statue of her on the grounds). The work of Richard Cassels and James Wyatt, the house has a graceful staircase of ornate white Sicilian marble, unusual Art Nouveau glass and carvings, family heirlooms, and silver. The grandeur of the residence is undeniable, but purists might be put off by the fact that the sprawling gardens are very much a commercial enterprise these days, and home to the **Pirate Adventure Park.** Kids, however, will be delighted by the log ride, the swinging pirate ship, swanshaped pedal boats on the lake, giant bouncy castle, and a child-size train tooting its way through the gardens. Probably because of that, prices are quite high (and a few attractions, such as the Pirate's Den play area for young children, cost extra). Opening times can vary in winter, so call ahead if you're visiting in the quieter months.

The Westport Demense, Westport, Co. Mayo. www.westporthouse.ie. \bigcirc 098/27766. House, Gardens and Pirate Park: &21 adults; &19 seniors and students; &19 students; &19 students; &17 children; &60–&75 families. House and Gardens only: &13 adults; &10 seniors and students; &6.50 children. Grounds only (does not include adventure park): &adults; &2 children. Pirate's Den play area: &7 children 3 and over; &3.50 children 2 and under. Pitch and Putt Golf: &7. June Wed–Fri 10am–3pm; Sat–Sun noon–6pm. July–Aug daily 11am–6pm. Also over 2 week Easter school holidays daily 11am–6pm; first weekend in May (May Bank Holiday) Fri–Mon 11am–6pm and 1 week October school holidays daily 1–5pm. Nov–Mar Sat–Sun 10am–4pm.



Westport House in County Mayo.

IN & AROUND BALLINA

Céide Fields ** ANCIENT SITE In a breathtaking setting above huge chalk cliffs that plunge hundreds of feet down into a deep blue sea, an ancient people once lived, worked, and buried their dead here. However, nobody knew this until the 1930s, when a local farmer noticed the stones in his fields were piled in strange patterns. More than 40 years later, his archaeologist son explored the discovery further. Under the turf, he found Stone Age fields, megalithic tombs, and the foundations of a village. Standing amid it now, you can see a pattern of farm fields as they were laid out 5,000 years ago (predating the Egyptian pyramids). Preserved for millennia beneath the bog, the site is both fascinating and inscrutable. To a casual observer, it's little more than piles of stones, but the visitor center makes it meaningful in a series of displays, films, and tours. The pyramid-shaped center itself is designed to fit in with the dramatic surroundings—you can see the building from miles away. It also contains a cafeteria, which comes as a relief because this site is 20 hilly, rocky kilometers (12 miles) of winding roads from anywhere.

On R314, 8km (5 miles) west of Ballycastle, Co. Mayo. \bigcirc 096/43325. Admission \notin 4 adults; \notin 3.50 seniors; \notin 2 students and children; \notin 10 families. Apr–May, Oct daily 10am–5pm; June–Sept daily 10am–6pm; last tour 1 hr. before closing. Closed Nov–Mar. Céide Fields is about 34km (21 miles) northwest of Ballina.

WHEN THE GOLDEN AGE OF hollywood CAME TO MAYO

When director John Ford descended on the sweet little town of **Cong**, County Mayo, to make his classic 1951 film *The Quiet Man*, starring John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara, the town's profile skyrocketed. Tourists were soon visiting in the tens of thousands, and Cong was transformed.

But what's really surprising is that visitors still flock here on Quiet Man pilgrimages, even though the film is well over half a century old, and Cong merrily continues to hang its hat on its brief brush with stardust. The **Quiet Man Museum**, Circular Road (www.quietman-cong.com/cong-museum; **© 094/954-6089**) is a charming little thatched cottage that has been transformed into an exact replica of John Wayne's house in the movie, right down to extraordinary efforts to match exactly the right furniture. From April to October, it's open daily from 10am to 4pm. Admission costs \in 5 adults, \in 4 seniors, students and children, and \in 15 families. They usually run tours of the village every day at 11am, and other times if demand is high—call to check.

Just around the corner on Abbey Street are the ruins of **Cong Abbey**. Founded in 623, it was rebuilt in the 12th century, then comprehensively destroyed by Henry VIII in the 1540s. The ruins are an open site, which you can wander at leisure—but even here there's a reminder of this town's love affair with an old Hollywood movie. The **Quiet Man Statue**, a full-size bronze of Maureen O'Hara being whisked off her feet by John Wayne, was unveiled just outside the abbey in 2013. Since then it's become an almost obligatory focal point for souvenir selfies.

However, the countless fans Cong has attracted over the years haven't always treated the town with respect. The actual cottage used as John Wayne's house in the movie is little more than a pile of rocks now, having been gradually torn apart over the years by heartless souvenir hunters, wanting to take home a piece of cinema history. The museum will tell you where it is if you really want to see for yourself. Just don't be one of those people.

Aside from the Quiet Man, Cong is most famous as the location of **Ashford Castle ******. Built in the 13th century, it is one of Ireland's biggest and most complete medieval castles. Unfortunately (unless palatial luxury is within your price range), it is now a super-exclusive hotel and resort (see p. 444), and there are no public tours. However, there's nothing to stop you driving up and having a wander around the grounds. And if you want to spend a little more time here on a slightly more realistic budget, consider the more modest splurge of dinner at **Wilde's ***** (p. 447), an outstanding restaurant in the former estate keeper's house. Cong is roughly half way between Galway and Westport, on R344, R345 and R346.

Enniscoe Gardens \star GARDENS Part of the huge Enniscoe estate—which also includes the **Mayo North Heritage Centre** \star (see p. 440) and where you can stay in the charming manor house (**Enniscoe House** $\star\star$, see p. 445)—these beautiful gardens comprise woods, parkland, and part of Lough Conn. One of the highlights is an 18th-century walled garden that has been restored to the layout it had in the estate's Victorian heyday.

On Lough Conn, about 3.2km (2 miles) south of Crossmolina, off R315, Enniscoe, Castlehill, Ballina, Co. Mayo. www.northmayogenealogy.com/gardens. \bigcirc 096/31809. Gardens: \in 6 adults; \in 5 seniors and students; \in 2 children; \in 12 families. Combined ticket with museum: \in 10 adults; \in 6 seniors; \in 3 students and children; \in 17 families. Apr–Oct Mon–Fri 11am–5pm; Sat–Sun and public holidays 1:30–5pm.

Errew Abbey \star RELIGIOUS SITE This atmospheric, ruined 13th-century Augustinian church sits on a tiny peninsula in Lough Conn. The cloister is well preserved, as is the chancel with altar and piscina, a stone basin used for disposing of the water used during Mass. An oratory of massive stone walls in fields adjacent to the abbey stands on the site of a church founded in the 6th century. It's known locally by the marvellous, tongue-twistery name *Templenagalliaghdoo*, which means "Church of the Black Nun."

Nr. Crossmolina, Co. Mayo. No phone. Free admission (open site). Crossmolina is about 11.7km ($7\frac{1}{3}$ miles) west of Ballina. Signposted about 3.2km (2 miles) south of Crossmolina on the Castlebar Rd., then 5km (3 miles) down a side road.

Foxford Woollen Mills Visitor Centre ★ FACTORY TOUR This popular Irish brand of knitwear and tweed was founded by a nun, Mother Agnes Morragh Bernard, in the late 19th century. Mother Agnes's idea was to build a new local industry to try to ameliorate the effects of the Great Famine by

providing employment to locals. Ever since then the mill has thrived producing rugs, clothing, and the like. Not only did her scheme help to stave off poverty for the local workforce, but the brand became hugely successful in Ireland and beyond. You can tour the mills, and visit the on-site museum that tells the story in detail. The free guided tour, available April to November, leaves every 20 minutes and takes 45 minutes or so; alternatively you can borrow a self-guided multimedia version that takes around an hour to complete. (Be aware that the actual working mills stop for the weekend at noon on Friday; although you can still take a tour, the mills won't be working.) Also on site are two art galleries, a jewelry workshop, a restaurant, and of course a gift shop, where you can stock up on the stylish products themselves.

St. Joseph's Place, Foxford, Co. Mayo. www.foxfordwoollenmills.com/working-mills.php. **© 094/925-6104.** Free admission. Centre: Mon–Sat 10am–6pm; Sun noon–6pm. Tours: Apr–Nov Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm. Foxford is 16km (10 miles) south of Ballina on N26.

Mayo North Heritage Centre \star GENEALOGY CENTER This is the ideal place to start if you're in the region checking out your roots. The extensive records available to view here include church registers (Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, and others); registers of births, marriages, and deaths; estate and probate records; property leases and rent rolls; school registers; emigrant rolls; and census records. Research fees, with their expert genealogists, range from €30 for a basic search (best suited to those who are just starting out with their research, or don't already know much about their family tree), up to a full history report, which cost anything from €150 up and take several weeks to finish, the results being sent to you on completion. The on-site museum displays a somewhat random collection of historic farm equipment and household items from the early- to mid-20th century. The **Enniscoe Gardens** \star (see p. 439) are directly next door and combined tickets are available.

On Lough Conn, about 3.2km (2 miles) south of Crossmolina, R315, Enniscoe, Castlehill, Ballina, Co. Mayo. www.northmayogenealogy.com/heritage-centre--museum. **(20096/31809.** Museum: \notin 6 adults; \notin 3 seniors; \notin 2 students and children; \notin 8 families. Combined ticket with museum: \notin 10 adults; \notin 6 seniors; \notin 3 students and children; \notin 17 families. Mon–Fri 9:30am–4pm.

Moyne Abbey \star RELIGIOUS SITE/RUINS Established in the mid-1400s and destroyed by Richard Bingham, the English governor of Connaught in the 16th century, Moyne Abbey is an atmospheric ruin between Killala and Ballina. Parts of the exterior are relatively complete, although the roof is completely gone. The closer you get, the more of a ruin you realize it is. The tower looks quite well preserved from a distance—until you look to the upper level, that is, where the whole structure looks like it's been snapped off by a giant hand. Moyne Abbey is a peaceful place, and looking through its moldering old windows, or over a misty carpet of green fields, you can fully understand why the monks chose this spot.

On R314 between Killala and Ballina. No phone. Free admission (open site).

National Shrine of Our Lady of Knock and the Church of the Apparition ★ SHRINE Ireland's version of Lourdes, Our Lady of Knock draws pilgrims (mostly Irish Catholic) in droves. It all dates from a day in August 1879 when two young local girls said they saw Joseph, Mary, and St. John standing in bright light in front of the southern tower of the parish church. Soon, 13 other witnesses claimed to have seen the same thing, and the Church declared it a miracle. Before long, miracles were occurring fast and furious, as sick and lame visitors claimed to be healed after visits to the church. Knock came to the world's attention in 1979, when Pope John Paul II visited the shrine. During Novena week in August (marking the anniversary of the miracle) there are special twice-daily ceremonies and other commemorative events. There's not much to the town of Knock on the whole— it sits unspectacularly at the intersection of the N17 and R323 roads—but it's filled with increasingly

large, modern religious structures, including a huge circular basilica that seats 7,000 and contains artifacts or furnishings from every county in Ireland. The grounds also hold a folk museum (with a few letters relating to the original testimonies) and a religious bookshop.

On the N17 Galway Rd., Knock, Co. Mayo. www.knock-shrine.ie. \bigcirc 094/938-8100. Free admission to shrine. Museum \notin adults; \notin 3 seniors and children age 5 and over; \notin 3.50 students; children 4 and under free. Shrine and grounds: daily 8am–6pm or later. Museum: daily 10am–6pm. Knock is about 44km (27¹/₃ miles) southeast of Ballina, 30km (18¹/₂ miles) east of Castlebar.

A TRIP TO achill island

The rugged, bog-filled, sparsely populated coast of counties Mayo and Sligo makes for scenic drives to secluded outposts. Leading the list is **Achill Island**, a heather-filled slip of land with sandy beaches and spectacular views of waves crashing against rocky cliffs.

Once you've crossed the bridge from the mainland, follow a winding road across the island to the little town of Keel, a trip that requires patience but rewards you with a camera full of photos. About 5.7km $(3\frac{1}{2} \text{ miles})$ west of **Keel**, you'll find the secluded Blue Flag beach of **Keem Bay** (it was once a major fishing ground—basking shark were caught here commercially up until the 1950s—but no more). You can reach the bay along a small cliff-top road, which passes by cliff faces containing rich seams of glittering amethyst. Apparently it's not uncommon to find chunks of the stuff lying loose after heavy rainfall.

Speaking of remarkable finds: Hidden on the slopes of **Mount Slievemore**, Achill's tallest mountain, are the remains of an **abandoned village**. The hundred or so crumbling stone cottages of the nameless ghost town date back to sometime around the 12th century. It was deserted during the Great Famine, although some cottages are known to have been in occasional use until the very early years of the 20th century, a traditional practice known as "booleying"—seasonal occupation by farming communities, which continued here long after it had died out in the rest of Ireland. Mount Slievemore is between Keel and Doogort, in the central northeastern part of Achill Island.

At Kildavnet, between Derreen and Coughmore, in the southeastern corner of the island, you'll find **Granuaile's Tower**. This impressive 15th-century tower house was owned by Grace O'Malley, the "Pirate Queen," who caused all manner of havoc for the English around these parts in the 16th century (see box p. 435). There's not a great deal to see, but it's a stunning spot to admire. Nearby **Kildavnet Church** is thought by some archaeologists to date from the 8th century.

To get to the Achill Island bridge, take N59 heading northwest out of Westport, then join R319, signposted to Achill. The drive from Westport to the crossing is about 42km (26 miles) and should take around 40 minutes. Once you're on Achill Island, Keel is about another 14km (8²/₃ miles) down the same road.

Rosserk Abbey \star RELIGIOUS SITE/RUINS About 3km (2 miles) from Moyne Abbey (see p. 440), Rosserk Abbey, sitting at the edge of the River Rosserk, is in many ways its twin. Both are evocative ruins, built at the same time, and destroyed at the same time by Bingham's troops. Rosserk Abbey, however, is today in much better shape than Moyne. Its chapel windows are well preserved. You can climb a winding stone stair to look out across the bay. The piscina of the church (once used for washing altar vessels) is still here, carved with angels, and on its lower-left-hand column is a delightful detail: a tiny, elegant carving of a round tower that recalls its 23m-tall (75-ft.) counterpart in nearby Killala.

On R314 between Killala and Ballina. Signposted. No phone. Free admission (open site).

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

FISHING The waters of the River Moy and loughs Carrowmore, Conn, and Cullin are known for good fishing, particularly for salmon and trout. To arrange a day's fishing, contact Cloonamoyne Fishery \star , Castlehill, near Crossmolina, Ballina (www.cloonamoynefishery.com; © 096/51156 or 087/314-8449). The fishery rents fully equipped boats and tackle, teaches fly-casting, and provides transport to and from all fishing: for brown trout on loughs Conn and Cullin; for salmon on loughs Beltra, Furnace, and Feeagh; and for salmon and sea trout on the rivers Moy and Deel. Daily rates are

€30 for a rowboat, €60 for a boat with engine, and €120 for a boat with engine and *ghillie* (guide).

Obtain a permit and state fishing license at the Mayo Angling Advice Centre, at the Tiernan Bros. fishing tackle shop, Upper Main Street, Foxford, Co. Mayo (www.tiernanbrothers.8k.com; © 094/945-6731). It also offers a range of services, including boat hire and ghillies.

For fishing tackle, try **Kingfisher Bates**, Pier Road, Enniscrone, Co. Mayo (© 096/36733), or the **Ballina Angling Centre**, Unit 55, Ridge Pool Road, Ballina, Co. Mayo (© 096/21850). On Achill Island, get fishing tackle at **Supervalu Supermarket**, Achill Sound (© 098/45211). Also a good place to stock up on supplies, it's the smallish white-and-red building on the right, immediately after the bridge crossing from the mainland.

walk this way: **PORTACLOY**

The region to the east of the Mullet peninsula has a spectacular array of sheer sea cliffs and rugged, craggy islands. The small, secluded beach at **Portacloy**, 14km ($8\frac{2}{3}$ miles) north of Glenamoy on the R314, is a good starting point for a dramatic walk. On a sunny day, its aquamarine waters and fine-grained white sand recall the Mediterranean more than the North Atlantic. At its western edge is a concrete quay. From here, head north up the steep green slopes of the nearest hill. The sea views from here are breathtaking. Don't be too distracted by the fantastic view or adorable little sheep—the boggy slopes on which you are walking end precipitously at an unmarked cliff edge. The walk is therefore *not* recommended for children, and should not be undertaken in bad weather. Exercise caution and resist the urge to try to get a better view of the mysterious sea caves or to reach the outermost extent of the coast's promontories. Instead, use the farmer's fence as a guide and head west toward the striking profile of **Benwee Head**, about 2.4km ($1\frac{1}{2}$ miles) away. This will give you gorgeous views of blue sea and rocky countryside. Return the same way to finish with a swim in the chilly, tranquil waters of Portacloy.

GOLF County Mayo's 18-hole golf courses include a par-71 inland course at Castlebar Golf Club, Rocklands, Castlebar, Co. Mayo (www.castlebargolfclub.ie; © 094/902-1649), with greens fees of around $\in 25 \cdot \in 45$. They sometimes run special deals that include a meal at the clubhouse for very little extra, especially out of season. The par-73 championship course at Westport Golf Club, Co. Mayo (www.westportgolfclub.ie; © 098/28262), charges greens fees of around $\in 30$ to $\in 50$ weekends, with discounts if you book three days in advance. On the shores of Clew Bay, this challenging and scenic course winds around the slopes of Croagh Patrick Mountain.

HORSEBACK RIDING One of the best riding centers in the West is Drummindoo Stud & Equestrian Centre, Knockranny, Westport, Co. Mayo (www.drummindoo.com; © 098/25616).

KAYAKING Courses for adults and children are at the **Atlantic Adventure Centre**, in Lecanvey, just outside of Westport, Co. Mayo (www.atlanticadventurecentre.com; © 098/64806). Most of the kayaking is done at the Blue Flag beaches at Old Head, Bertra, and Carramore. Very reasonable accommodations rates are available for campers. The adventure center has all you need for a wide range of activities, from canoeing to rock climbing. Call for details.

WINDSURFING & OTHER WATERSPORTS The constant wind off the Atlantic Ocean means that Achill Island is ideal for windsurfing, hang gliding, or any activities that involve a breeze. If you want to try it out, get in touch with the Achill Outdoor Education Centre—"a chill outdoor," get it?—on R319, between Cashel and Bunacurry (www.achilloutdoor.com; © 098/47253). They also do plenty more outdoor activities, including powerboating, raft building and body boarding. For other options, you can also try the Atlantic Adventure Centre (see above).

Where to Stay in County Mayo

This region of Ireland is not the most abundant ground when it comes to top-notch places to stay. Even the major towns have only a smattering of decent B&Bs and small hotels. However, some gems are to be found in the deepest reaches of the countryside. It takes effort to get to these places, but the journey will be worth it.

EXPENSIVE

Ashford Castle ******* This extraordinary, fairytale-like castle has entertained plenty of famous guests over the years—Grace Kelly, Ronald Regan, Brad Pitt, Pierce Brosnan, and Tony Blair to name just a few. It also has a list of awards and commendations as long as your arm, including best hotel in Ireland, and third best in Europe overall, from *Condé Naste Traveller* in 2012. If you've got a spare couple of hundred euro burning a hole in your wallet, you too can join the ranks of its illustrious fans. Ashford Castle was built in the 13th century and still looks every inch the palatial abode, thanks to the suits of armor and priceless antiques lining the walls and the huge four-poster beds filling the sumptuous guest rooms. The grounds are stunning—the castle overlooks Lough Corrib, and there are acres of forest and landscaped gardens. A luxurious range of spa treatments is on hand to soothe and pamper guests. The restaurant is as excellent as you'd expect (don't even think about dressing down), although a less formal eatery is on the grounds too. Hotel experiences in Ireland don't come much more splurge-y than this. Check the website for special deals, especially in the off season.

On R346, on the eastern approach to Cong, Co. Mayo. www.ashford.ie. \bigcirc 094/954-6003. 83 units. \notin 360– \notin 596 double; \notin 600– \notin 1000 staterooms; \notin 1200– \notin 1820 suite. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: 2 restaurants; bar; gym; massage treatments; estate sports including golf, fishing and clay pigeon shooting; Wi-Fi (free).



Ashford Castle.

Enniscoe House $\star\star$ Flanked by Mount Nephin on one side and the shimmering waters of Lough Conn on the other, Enniscoe is a stunningly restored mid-18th-century mansion. Very little has been significantly altered from the original structure, so the place is overflowing with wonderful period details (one room even has its original silk wallpaper). Bedrooms are spacious with big windows and antique half-tester beds. Bathrooms are modern and elegantly designed. Susan Kellett and her son, DJ, run the place with a natural flair for hospitality. Susan is a great cook too; make sure you book one of her excellent dinners. The grounds are big, and with enough to do that you could spend a day here without ever stepping back into the outside world, should you wish. They're open to the public, with a cafe and even a **Heritage Centre** \star (see p. 440), complete with a local history museum, a genealogical service, and a small antiques shop. The Enniscoe estate also has a couple of self-catering cottages available if you want even more privacy.

Castlehill, Ballina, Co. Mayo. www.enniscoe.com. Ø 096/31112. 6 units. €200–€280 double. Dinner €50. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Guest lounge, Wi-Fi (free) in public areas.

MODERATE

The Bervie $\star\star\star$ Overlooking the Atlantic Ocean on Achill Island, reached by bridge across Achill Sound, the Bervie is an inspiring place to stay. Husband-and-wife hosts John and Elizabeth

Barrett spent years lovingly restoring the building. Elizabeth actually grew up in this house; it's been a B&B since the 1930s, although today it's a far more sophisticated place than she remembers from her childhood. Guest rooms are large and spacious, with well-chosen furniture (most of it made locally) and tasteful art. Some rooms directly overlook the sea—and what a view! You can see some of the other islands dotted around the bay from some rooms, while others have a dramatic view of cliffs. Light pours in from huge windows, and the whispering of the waves soothes you off to a restful sleep. Elizabeth's home-cooked breakfasts are to die for, and after years of being advance notice-only, the outstanding dinners are now a permanent fixture. Think roast lamb served with Madeira jus or rib-eye steak with onion marmalade and blue cheese mushrooms—all with excellent use of local ingredients. There's a reasonably priced wine list too.

The Strand, Keel, Achill, Co. Mayo. www.bervie-guesthouse-achill.com. \bigcirc 098/43114. 14 units. \in 110– \in 130 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Dinner \in 45. Amenities:: Restaurant; Wi-Fi (free). Take N59 to Achill Island, then follow R319 to Keel. The Bervie is signposted from the edge of the village.

Windmill Cottages ****** Your host, Pierre Blezat, so fell for the charms of County Mayo when he first visited, that he left his native France to run Windmill Cottage as a B&B. He restored the small complex of farm buildings personally, and each displays a personal touch. The effect is like a series of cozy, modern country cabins with exposed pine walls, modern art, and contemporary furniture. The cottages are a stone's throw (literally) from the sea, with views of the water and distant mountains. The breakfast room takes full advantage of the view and sometimes doubles as a dining room in the evenings, where Pierre serves delicious French-Irish meals that must be booked in advance (\in 32 per person, including a pre-dinner drink). Pierre can also arrange a chauffeur service to Westport train station for \in 15; transfers from farther afield are possible too.

Carraholly, about 2 km (1¼ miles) west of Westport Golf Club, Co. Mayo. www.windmill-cottage.com. **Ø** 098/56006. 6 units. €110– €150 double. Dinner €30. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Bike hire; Wi-Fi (free). Closed Oct–Mar.

Where to Dine in County Mayo

An Port Mor ****** SEAFOOD/MODERN IRISH This multi-award winning restaurant in Westport specializes in seafood. Local catches dominate the menu, so you could easily find Clew Bay crab cakes and scallops, or blue trout (yes, *blue*) from Curran served with tarragon and canola. The seafood is excellent, but it's not all that's on offer—expect to find a juicy sirloin served with red onion marmalade, and local lamb. Everything is impeccably presented, and the atmosphere in the cheerful dining room is relaxed. Service is excellent too.

Bridge St., Westport, Co. Mayo. www.anportmor.com. **© 098/26730.** Main courses €15–€28. Tues–Sun 6pm–midnight.

Bayside Bistro \star BISTRO There aren't many restaurants in Keel, the main town on little Achill Island, but this place is a cheerful and reasonably inexpensive option. You might start with stir-fried squid with sweet chili, then try the duck in cranberry and red wine, or steak with garlic butter and fries. There's always a wide selection of daily seafood specials, too. Lunches are simpler—salads, ciabatta sandwiches, crostini (grilled bread with assorted toppings), or a plate of fish tacos.

On R319, Keel, Achill Island, Co. Mayo (next to the general store and post office in the center of the village). www.baysidebistro.ie. **Ø** 098/43798. Main courses €15–€20. Daily noon–10pm.

Dillons Bar and Grill \star GRILL This friendly, bustling eatery tucked away in a courtyard is a great find. Hugely popular with locals for its welcoming atmosphere and sizeable portions, it's a warm and relaxing place to enjoy a casual meal of unpretentious food at reasonable prices. The restaurant itself is spacious, in what seems to be an old warehouse, with high, hammered copper ceilings. But the hearty food is the main attraction. Locals swear by the grilled sirloin steak, but there's also chicken

breast with black pudding stuffing, a rich seafood pie topped with buttery mashed potatoes, and mouthwatering fish and chips. If you're lucky, there might be traditional music later on—you wouldn't be the first to come for dinner and stay for a dance or two.

The Helm \star SEAFOOD/BISTRO This relaxed bar-restaurant specializes in local seafood. Portions are huge—tackle the delicious fisherman's platter only if very hungry. Main dishes include steaks, rack of lamb, and pork chops, in addition to the fishy options. Creamy seafood chowder is a particular specialty. Lunch service is heartier and more traditional, with Irish stew alongside lasagna and chips. Desserts are all comfort food like pies, crumbles, and even jelly and ice cream. The Helm is also a B&B with a few self-catering apartments available too.

The Harbour, Westport, Co. Mayo. www.thehelm.ie. **© 098/26398.** Main courses €19–€23. Daily 8am–about midnight. Food served until about 9:30pm.

The Hungry Monk \star CAFE "We don't do fast food" says the blackboard on the wall at this friendly cafe. "We do fresh wholesome Irish food as quick as we can!" That sums it up, really. The Hungry Monk is just the kind of place you want to break up a long day's sightseeing: simple cooking, light lunches and snacks, served in a cozy, cottage atmosphere. The lunch menu consists mostly of tasty sandwiches and salads, creatively prepared with local ingredients. Or you could just linger over a cup of coffee and a sweet, such as the delicious cheesecake. The Hungry Monk doesn't serve dinner, but snacks and light meals are served until late afternoon.

Abbey St., Cong, Co. Mayo. **Ø 094/954-5842.** Main courses €4–€12. Mon–Sat 9:30am–6pm; Sun 10am–5pm.

Wilde's at Lisloughrey Lodge ******* MODERN IRISH If, like the other 99% of us, you can't quite swing a night at Ashford Castle ******* (see p. 444), then you might find this a more viable alternative to getting a slice of that Irish upper crust glamour. Lisloughrey was once home to the estate managers of Ashford, but now it's run as a boutique hotel with a fantastic restaurant. Wilde's is overseen by Jonathan Keane, an up-and-coming star of the Irish culinary world. His modern Irish cooking is deliciously inventive; just a glance at the menu is enough to give you an idea of his celebratory approach to food. For "Act I" (no mere "appetizers" or "entrees" here), try a croquette of goat cheeses, or some wild duck with sweet and sour pineapple; then how about some lamb served with seaweed sausage, or confit salmon with orange gel? Leave room for a dessert (sorry, "finale") of seasonal berry pudding, or an exceedingly chocolatey chocolate fondant. The dining room has a fantastic view of Lough Corrib. If you want to spend the night, doubles start at around $\in 120$.

On the grounds of Ashford Castle, Cong, Co. Mayo. www.lisloughreylodge.com. **②** 094/954-5400. Main courses €21–€31. Mar–Oct Mon–Sat 6:30–9pm; Sun 1–3:30pm, 6:30–9pm. Nov–Feb Wed–Sat 6:30–9pm, Sun 1–3:30pm, 6:30–9pm.

COUNTY SLIGO

County Sligo is known for its extraordinary concentration of ancient burial grounds and pre-Christian sites, most of which are in easy reach of the county capital, **Sligo Town.** Chief among these are the Stone Age cemeteries at **Carrowmore** and **Carrowkeel**, but just driving down the country lanes, you can't help spotting a *dolmen* (ancient stone table) in some pasture or other, with sheep or ponies grazing casually around it. Thanks to the impressive energy of the County Sligo tourism offices, however, this bucolic countryside has above all else been labelled "Yeats Country." Although he was born in Dublin, the great Irish poet W. B. Yeats spent so much time in County Sligo that it became a part of him, and he a part of it—literally, as he is buried here. As you'll quickly discover, every hill, cottage, vale, and lake around here seems to bear a plaque indicating its relation to the poet or his

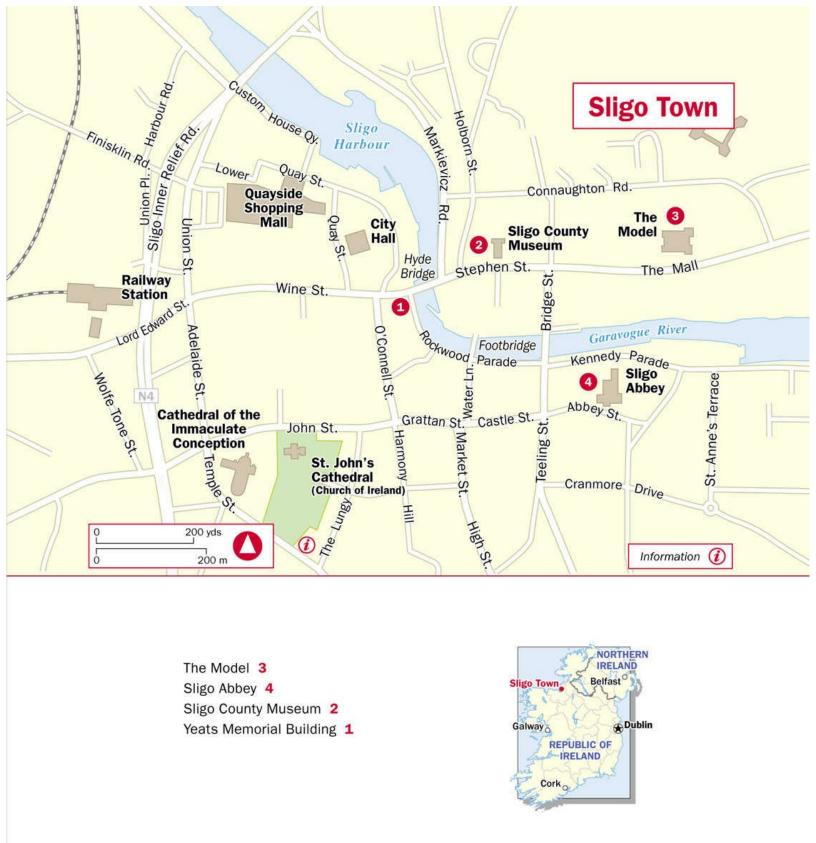
works.

Visitor Information

The **Sligo Tourist Office** is on the ground floor of the Bank Building, O'Connell Street, Sligo Town (www.sligotourism.ie; © 071/916-1201).

Exploring Sligo Town

Sligo Town (pop. 20,000) is a small farm town on Sligo Bay, bisected by the River Garavogue and surrounded on three sides by mountains, the most famous of which are Ben Bulben to the north and Knocknarea to the south. A gray and somber place, with a mix of historic and less interesting modern architecture, Sligo has undergone something of a renaissance in recent years. From a visitor's perspective, the focus of this has been Sligo's new "Left Bank," where cafes and restaurants spill onto the waterfront promenade whenever weather permits. Most of its commercial district is on the river's south bank. **O'Connell Street** is the main north-south artery, while the main east-west thoroughfare is **Stephen Street**, which becomes Wine Street and then Lord Edward Street. Three bridges span the river; the **Douglas Hyde Bridge**, named for Ireland's first president, is the main link between the two sides.



The Model ** MUSEUM/CULTURAL CENTER One of Ireland's most renowned contemporary art museums, the Model houses an impressive collection of paintings and other visual art. It includes probably the best collection of works by Jack B. Yeats (1871–1957) outside the **National Gallery **** in Dublin (see p. 104). Brother of William, Jack was one of the foremost Irish painters of the 20th century. Other luminaries of the Irish art world represented here include Louis le Brocquy (1916–2012), an extraordinary figurative painter; and the portraitist Estella Solomons (1882–1968). The museum's program of temporary and special exhibitions is varied and imaginative. The Model is also

a venue for live music and film screenings. Check the website for up-to-date listings.

The Mall, Sligo Town. www.themodel.ie. \bigcirc 071/914-1405. Free admission to exhibitions; tickets to other events free to around \in 25 (most around \in 10). Tues–Wed, Fri–Sat 10am–5:30pm; Thurs 10am–8pm; Sun noon–5pm. Closed Mon.

Sligo Abbey \star RELIGIOUS SITE/RUIN Founded as a Dominican house in 1252 by Maurice Fitzgerald, Earl of Kildare, Sligo Abbey was the center of early Sligo Town. It thrived for centuries and flourished in medieval times when it was the burial place of the chiefs and earls of Sligo. But, as with other affluent religious settlements, the abbey was under constant attack, and it was finally destroyed in 1641. Much restoration work has been done in recent years, and the cloisters contain outstanding examples of stone carving; the 15th-century altar is one of few intact medieval altars in Ireland.

Abbey St., Sligo Town. www.heritageireland.ie. \bigcirc 071/914-6406. Admission \notin 4 adults; \notin 3 seniors; \notin 2 students and children; \notin 10 families. Apr to mid-Oct daily 10am-6pm; last admission 45 min. before closing.

Sligo County Museum \star MUSEUM This museum in the center of Sligo Town presents a good overview of the county's history, from ancient times to the present day. The most interesting sections cover the region's extraordinary prehistoric heritage, including a couple of ancient artifacts. (Sligo is, after all, where you'll find the world's oldest building by some measures—see the listing for Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery on p. 452.) The other standout sections are devoted to two of Sligo's most famous residents: the poet W. B. Yeats, whose mother was from Sligo and whose affinity with the county drastically influenced his work; and Constance Markievicz, an aristocrat who grew up in Sligo and went on to become a prominent Irish revolutionary.

Stephen St., Sligo Town. © 071/914-2212. Free admission. Tues-Sat 10am-noon, 2-4:30pm. Closed Oct-May.

Yeats Memorial Building \star MUSEUM Located in a distinctive red-and-white townhouse building on the Douglas Hyde Bridge, this engaging little museum, art gallery, and heritage center acts as a kind of focal point for the W. B. Yeats-related attractions in County Sligo. Exhibitions focus on the life and work of the great poet, and the 19th- and 20th-century literary canon of which he was a major part. The center also has an art gallery, featuring work by contemporary artists, many of them Sligobased; courses, workshops, and lectures during the summer months; and Lily's & Lolly's Café \star (see p. 461).

Douglas Hyde Bridge, Sligo Town. www.yeats-sligo.com. @ 071/914-2693. Free admission. Mon-Fri 10am-5pm; Sat 10am-2pm.

local hero: CONSTANCE MARKIEVICZ

Aristocrat, suffragette, revolutionary, and politician, Constance Markievicz (1868–1927) was one of the most influential Irish women of the 20th century and a key figure in the country's struggle for independence from Britain.

Born in London to Anglo-Irish gentry, Constance became aware of the realities of life for the poor in Ireland at an early age. Her father, Sir Henry Gore-Booth, owned Lissadell House, a great estate in County Sligo. Unlike many landowners of the time, he was widely loved by his tenants; during an outbreak of famine when Constance was eleven, he provided them with life-saving food relief.

In 1900 Constance married a Polish count, Casimir Markievicz (1874–1932) and the two settled in Dublin. By this time she was actively involved in the fight for women's suffrage. It wasn't long until she began to move in revolutionary circles too. (One story has it that she was finally persuaded to join Sinn Fein, the political party set up in 1905 to fight for independence, after discovering a collection of rousing pamphlets left behind at a remote country cottage.)

In 1914 her revolutionary career began in earnest when she joined the Irish Citizens Army. She became known for her leading role in gun-running missions, alongside Douglas Hyde (1860–1949), who would later become the first President of Ireland. During the Easter Rising of 1916 she literally manned barricades in St. Stephen's Green, Dublin, engaging in gunfights with British soldiers.



Constance Markievicz.

After the Rising was put down, Markievicz, along with many of her fellow revolutionaries, was sentenced to death. However the court commuted her sentence to life in prison because she was a woman. In a withering comeback, she shot back from the dock, "I wish you had the decency to shoot me."

In the end Markievicz served only a year in prison, including solitary confinement at the notorious **Kilmainham Gaol** $\star\star\star$ (see p. 103), although she to be jailed again for sedition. It was while serving a sentence in 1918 that she learned she had become the first woman elected to the British Parliament. She refused to take her seat and was later elected to the Irish Dáil.

Following the War of Independence, Markievicz was to achieve another political first for women, when she was appointed Minister for Labor in the new Irish government—the first woman in Europe to serve at Cabinet level.

Side Trips from Sligo Town

The area around Sligo Town is known for its ancient burial grounds and pagan sites, some dating from the Stone Age. These include the vast Neolithic cemetery **Carrowmore**, the atmospheric hilltop cairn grave of **Knocknarea**, and the haunting Neolithic mountaintop cemetery of **Carrowkeel**. Some lesser sites are also open to the public, but most are not. The Irish are passionate about property rights, so don't go clambering over a fence for a better photo without getting permission first.

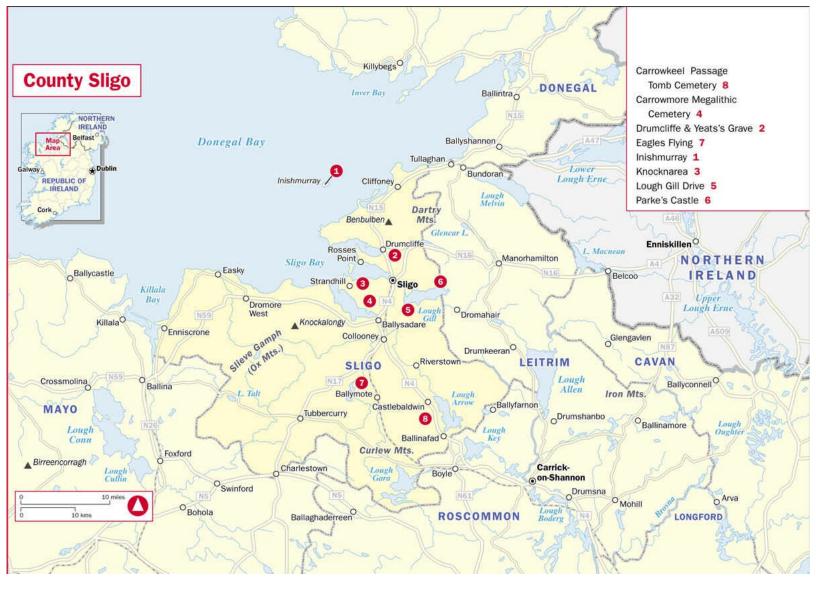
At the foot of Knocknarea is the delightful resort area of **Strandhill**, 8km (5 miles) from Sligo Town. Stretching into Sligo Bay, Strandhill has a sand dune beach and a patch of land nearby called Coney Island, which is usually credited as the namesake of New York's amusement park. Across the bay is another resort, **Rosses Point**.

Carrowkeel Passage Tomb Cemetery $\star\star$ ANCIENT SITE Atop a hill overlooking Lough Arrow, this ancient passage tomb cemetery is impressive, isolated, and frequently empty. Its 14 cairns, dolmens, and stone circles date from the Stone Age (ca. 5000 B.C.), and it's easy to feel that history, standing among the cold, ageless rocks. The tombs face Carrowmore below and are aligned with the summer solstice. The walk uphill from the parking lot takes about 20 minutes, so be ready to get a little exercise. It's worth the effort. This is a simple site—no visitor center, no tea shop, no admission fee—nothing but ancient mystery.

Signposted on N4 between Sligo Town and Boyle, Co. Sligo. No phone. Free admission (open site).

Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery $\star\star\star$ ANCIENT SITE This is one of the great sacred landscapes of the ancient world. At the center of the Coolera Peninsula sits a massive passage grave that once had a Stonehenge-like stone circle of its own. Encircling that were as many as 200 additional stone circles and passage graves arranged in an intricate and mysterious design. Over the years, some of the stones have been moved; more than 60 circles and passage graves still exist, although the site spreads out so far that many of them are in adjacent farmland. Look for your first dolmen in a paddock next to the road about a mile before you reach the site. The dolmens were the actual graves, once covered in stones and earth. Some of these sites are open to visitors, and you can get a map to them from the visitor center. (Not all are, however; be careful not to trespass on private land). On the main site, the oldest tomb is thought to date from around 3,700 _{B.C.}—making it one of the oldest pieces of freestanding stone architecture in the world. From Carrowmore, you can see the hilltop cairn grave of **Knocknarea** \star in the distance (see facing page). The visitor center has good exhibits and guided tours.

Carrowmore, Co. Sligo. www.heritageireland.ie. \bigcirc 071/916-1534. Admission \notin 4 adults; \notin 3 seniors; \notin 2 students and children; \notin 10 families. Apr to mid-Oct daily 10am–6pm. Closed mid-Oct to Mar. Follow signs from Woodville Rd. heading west out of Sligo Town, or from R292 at Ransboro.





Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery in Sligo.

Eagles Flying ** AVIARY Some of the biggest birds of prey in the world are displayed at this aviary and educational center near Ballymote. Eagles, vultures, owls, and falcons take part in an hour-long flying show daily at 11am and 3pm—outside or in a purpose-built arena. Most of the awe-inspiring birds who live at the center can be handled by visitors (under close supervision, of course). For young children who prefer their animals a little less intimidating, there's also a petting zoo, home to horses, hedgehogs, rabbits, chinchillas, and even raccoons (which are not native to Ireland but have slowly been spreading here as an invasive species since about 2011).

Ballymote, Co. Sligo. www.eaglesflying.com. \bigcirc 071/918-9310. Admission $\in 10$ adults; $\in 9$ students; $\in 6$ children 3–16; free for children 2 and under; $\in 30$ families (up to 4; additional children $\in 5$). No credit cards. Apr–early Nov daily 10:30am–12:30pm, 2:30–4:30pm.

Inishmurray $\star \star$ ISLAND/RUINS Northwest of Sligo Bay, this tiny, uninhabited island shelters an ancient past. The haunting ruins of St. Molaise, a 6th-century monastic settlement that was destroyed by the Vikings in 807, stands within its circular walls. You can still see the remains of several churches, beehive cells, altars, and an assemblage of "cursing stones" once used to bring ruin on those who presumably deserved it. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, however, Inishmurray harbored a different identity: A thriving, illicit trade in the distilling of moonshine whiskey. The last permanent residents left the island in 1948; their ruined houses can still be seen, battered by the island operated elements. Boat trips to the are by Inishmurray Island Trips

(www.inishmurrayislandtrips.com; © 087/254-0190) and Ewing's Sea Angling and Boat Charters (www.sligoboatcharters.com; © 086/891-3618). Expect to pay around €40 adults, €35 children, and you may need a minimum group size of four. Call or visit the website for details of sailing times. Northwest of Sligo Bay, 6km (3³/₄ miles) offshore. Ferries leave from Mullaghmore or Rosses Point.

a poetic soul: W. B. YEATS

One of Ireland's greatest and most beloved writers, William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) had Sligo in his soul.

The first of Ireland's four Nobel laureates, Yeats (pronounced "Yates") was a poet, playwright, and politician. He was at the forefront of the Celtic Revival, which celebrated and championed native Irish culture and heritage. His work drew heavily on the traditional folklore of Ireland, steeped in myth and imagination.

Yeats grew up amid Sligo's verdant hills and dales, now known (by the tourist board at least) as "Yeats Country." In fact, parts of the county's tourism industry seem to focus on little else. You can cruise Lough Gill while listening to a live recital of Yeats's poetry; follow Yeats trails and buy a hundred items of Yeats memorabilia; and visit dozens of his purported haunts—some reputedly still spooked by his ghost, and some of which have only tenuous connections with the man.

Yeats died in Menton, on the French Riviera, in 1939. Knowing he was ill, he stated, "If I die here, bury me up there on the mountain, and then after a year or so, dig me up and bring me privately to Sligo." True to his wishes, in 1948 his body was moved to Sligo and reinterred at **Drumcliffe Church**, where his great-grandfather had been a rector. Drumcliffe is a village about 10km (6¹/₂ miles) north of Sligo Town, on the N15 road. His grave is marked with a dark, modest stone just left of the church, alongside his young wife, Georgie Hyde-Lee (when they married in 1917, he was 52 and she was 23.) His epitaph, "Cast a cold eye on life, on death . . ." comes from his poem "Under Ben Bulben." While you're there, also check out the 11th-century high cross in the churchyard—its faded eastern side shows Christ, Daniel in the lions' den, Adam and Eve, and Cain murdering Abel. There's also a little visitor center and cafe on site.

Knocknarea \star ANCIENT SITE From the low vantage point of **Carrowmore** $\star\star\star\star$ (see p. 452), if you study the mountain ranges that ring the surrounding valley, you'll notice a stone cairn in the center of each one. (They're easy to spot—as any local schoolchild will tell you—due to their uncannily breast-like shape.) One of these is the unexcavated **Knocknarea**. Local legend has it that this is the grave of the "fairy queen" Queen Maeve—better known to most people these days as Queen Mab, the subject of one of the most famous speeches written by William Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet*. If you have the energy to make the relatively gentle 30-minute climb to the top, the views are extraordinary.

Knocknarea, about 6.4km (4 miles) west of Sligo, Co. Sligo. No phone. Free admission (open site). Signposted from small farm road between Cullenduff and Knocknarea, and from R292 heading south from Strandhill. Follow signs for mescan meadhbha chambered cairn.

Parke's Castle \star CASTLE On the north side of the Lough Gill Drive (see p. 457), just over the County Leitrim border, Parke's Castle stands out as a lone outpost amid the natural tableau of lake view and woodland scenery. Named after an English family that gained possession of it during the 1620 plantation of Leitrim (when land was confiscated from the Irish and given to favored English families), this castle was originally the stronghold of the O'Rourke clan, rulers of the Kingdom of Bréifne. Beautifully restored using Irish oak and traditional craftsmanship, it exemplifies the 17th-century fortified manor house. In the visitor center, informative exhibits and a splendid audio-visual show illustrate the history of the castle and the surrounding area.

On R286, 11.2km (7 miles) east of Sligo Town, Co. Leitrim. www.heritageireland.ie. \bigcirc 071/916-4149. Admission \in 3 adults; \in 2 seniors; \in 1 students and children; \in 8 families. Apr to mid-Sept daily 10am-6pm; last admission 45 min. before closing.



Parke's Castle.

Shopping

Sligo Town has some great little boutiques and independent local businesses. Most Sligo shops are open Monday to Saturday 9am to 6pm, and some may have extended hours during July and August.

THE lough gill DRIVE

An essential stop on Yeats Country pilgrimages is this beautiful lake, which figured prominently in the writings of W. B. Yeats. A well-signposted drive-yourself tour around the lake's perimeter covers 42km (26 miles) and takes less than an hour.

To start, head 1.6km (1 mile) south of Sligo Town and follow the signs for Lough Gill. Within 3.2km (2 miles) you'll be on the lower edge of the shoreline. Among the sites are **Parke's Castle** (see p. 456); **Dooney Rock**, with its own nature trail and lakeside walk (inspiration for the poem "Fiddler of Dooney"); the **Lake Isle of Innisfree**, made famous in poetry and song; and the **Hazelwood Sculpture Trail**, a unique forest walk along the shores of Lough Gill, with 13 wood sculptures.

At the lake's east end, you can branch off to visit **Dromahair**, a delightful village on the River Bonet. The road along Lough Gill's upper shore brings you back to the northern end of Sligo Town. Continue north on the main road (N15), and you'll see the graceful profile of **Ben Bulben** (519m/1,702 ft.), one of the Dartry Mountains, rising off to your right.

If you prefer to see all this beautiful scenery from the water itself, **Lough Gill Cruises** take you around Lough Gill and the Garavogue River aboard the 72-passenger *Wild Rose* waterbus as you listen to the poetry of Yeats. The boat departs from Parke's Castle (see facing page), daily from Easter to October, at 12:30 and 3:30pm. Tickets are $\in 15$ adults, $\notin 7.50$ children. Trips to Innisfree, sunset cruises, and dinner cruises are also scheduled. Call **© 071/916-4266** or visit www.roseofinnisfree.com for further information or booking.

The Cat & the Moon $\star\star$ Named after a Yeats poem, this is a great place to shop for Irish crafts and jewelry. They design their own silver rings and pendants with Celtic motifs. In addition, they stock an interesting range of art, ceramics, candles, and other handcrafts, which always seem to offer something in the way of unique finds and souvenirs. 4 Castle St., Sligo Town. www.thecatandthemoon.com. @071/914-3686.

Michael Quirke $\star\star$ Michael Quirke is a real Sligo character. He used to be a butcher, but got bored of it and decided to follow his real passion instead—woodcarving. Out went the meat and in came the artisan tools, as his shop was turned into a studio. Now he spends his time carving and selling exquisite statues, ornaments, and *objets d'art* out of Irish wood, with a particular focus on figures from Irish mythology. His carvings are quite affordable for the quality. Wine St., Sligo Town. **@** 071/914-2624.

Wehrly Bros. Ltd $\star\star$ The granddaddy of Sligo jewelry stores, this firm has been trading from behind its elegant black-and-gold storefront since 1875. They specialize in diamond rings, watches, and pearls, although there's a wide range of designer jewelry here. They also sell Waterford crystal. 3 O'Connell St., Sligo Town. www.wehrlybros.ie. © 071/914-2252.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

BEACHES Safe sandy beaches for walking, jogging, or swimming, and complete with promenades are at **Strandhill, Rosses Point,** and **Enniscrone** on the Sligo Bay coast.

CYCLING With its lakes and woodlands, Yeats Country is particularly good biking territory. To rent a bike, contact **Chain Driven Cycles**, 23 High Street, Sligo Town (www.chaindrivencycles.com; © 071/912-9008).

FISHING For fishing gear and tackle, see **Barton Smith**, Hyde Bridge, Sligo Town (www.bartonsmith.ie; © 071/914-2356). For boat rental, see **Kingfisher Bates**, Pier Road, Enniscrone (© 096/36733).

GOLF With its seascapes, mountain valleys, and lakesides, County Sligo is known for challenging golf courses. Leading the list is **County Sligo Golf Club**, Rosses Point Road, Rosses Point, Co. Sligo (www.countysligogolfclub.ie; © 071/917-7134), overlooking Sligo Bay under the shadow of Ben

Bulben mountain. It's an 18-hole, par-71 championship seaside links famed for its wild, natural terrain and constant winds. Greens fees range from around $\notin 125$ to $\notin 200$, depending on the number of holes and day of the week. They also have a much cheaper 9-hole links with fees of $\notin 25$ to $\notin 40$.

In the southwestern corner of the county, about 40km (25 miles) from Sligo Town and overlooking Sligo Bay, the **Enniscrone Golf Club**, Enniscrone, Co. Sligo (www.enniscronegolf.com; @ 096/36297) has two seaside courses, with rates ranging from $\in 25$ to $\notin 95$.

HORSEBACK RIDING An hour's or a day's riding on the beach, in the countryside, or over mountain trails can be arranged at **Sligo Riding Centre**, Carrowmore, Co. Sligo (www.sligoridingcentre.com; \bigcirc 087/230-4828), or at Woodlands Equestrian Centre, Loughill, near Ballymote, Co. Sligo (\bigcirc 071/918-4207). Rates average around \in 20 to \notin 45 per hour.

Where to Stay in County Sligo

As with County Mayo, the best places to stay in County Sligo are hidden in the countryside.

MODERATE

Sligo Park Hotel \star A pleasant little park surrounds this convenient, cheap-ish hotel in Sligo Town. Guest rooms are simply furnished in a contemporary style, with muted color schemes of gray and brown, and good-size bathrooms. One or two rooms could do with some TLC around the edges, though the public areas are sleek and well designed. Family rooms are a good value for money. This hotel won't win any awards for heart-of-Ireland atmosphere, but as a clean, modern base, it's a good option in a region that's short on choice. One word of caution: the hotel is also a popular venue for weddings and other events, so noise can sometimes be a problem on weekends. You might want to ask for a room as far away from the bar as possible.

Pearse Rd., Sligo Town. www.sligoparkhotel.com. **© 071/919-0400.** 136 units. €99–€159 double. Free parking. Breakfast not included in lower rates. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; room service; pool; Wi-Fi (free).

Temple House *** This is quite simply *the* place you need to try to stay in the northwest if you're after a truly unique and historic B&B experience. Temple House is not full of five-star extras, but you'll find it hard to beat for historical authenticity, beautiful surroundings, and sheer charm. The 1665 manor house has been restored, bit by painstaking bit, by the charming young custodians of the estate, Roderick and Helena Perceval. The place is dripping with history; once a thriving country estate, it fell slowly into near-ruin during the turbulent years of the 20th century. The huge guest rooms are packed with interesting antiques, yet have completely modern, recently renovated bathrooms. Nightly dinners are more akin to parties, with all guests seated around an enormous old table enjoying outstanding food. Breakfasts hit the spot too, with plenty of homemade treats. The beautiful grounds include a boating lake, a walled garden, and even a ruined Knights Templar castle. Supposedly there are a couple of resident ghosts roaming around, although they must be of a very Bacchanalian kind, with such a welcoming and convivial atmosphere as this. There is also a self-catering cottage on the grounds.

Ballymote, Ballinacarrow, Co. Sligo. www.templehouse.ie. **Ø 071/918-3329.** 6 units. €140–€180 double. Dinner €45. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free). Closed Dec–Mar. No dinner Sun.

INEXPENSIVE

The Glasshouse \star A solid, modern option in Sligo Town, The Glasshouse resembles a gleaming, modern ship from the outside and overlooks the River Garavogue. The public areas inside either look bold and funky or like an explosion in a kitsch factory, depending on your point of view: multicolored

circles on the carpet, misshapen blue sofas, and a bright orange signature color in the towering atrium. Bedrooms are a little more refined, with muted tones and modern art on the walls. There is an in-house restaurant, although you could certainly eat more cheaply in town. The appropriately named View Bar looks out over Sligo Town and has live music (if you are sensitive to noise, ask for a room away from the bar when you book). A few years ago, places like this were all but unheard-of in Sligo, and the Glasshouse offers a good alternative for those who want a decently priced, convenient, and contemporary place to stay.

Swan Point, Sligo Town. www.theglasshouse.ie. \bigcirc 071/919-4300. 116 units. \bigcirc 79– \bigcirc 129 double. \bigcirc 99– \bigcirc 149 suite. Free parking. Breakfast not included in lower rates. Amenities: Restaurant; 2 bars; room service; Internet (broadband/via TV).

Ross Farmhouse ** Not far from Carrowkeel (see p. 452), Ross Farmhouse is a restored 1880s cottage, surrounded by acres and acres of rolling farmland. The cheerful owners, Nicholas and Oriel Hill-Wilkinson, see this place as their pride and joy, and it shows in the gregarious welcome they give guests. Bedrooms are reasonably sized, with simple, unfussy furnishings. One is a family room, and another is fully accessible to wheelchairs. Downstairs are two lovely guest lounges, filled with antiques. An open peat fire warms the hearth in winter. Breakfasts are good, and they'll cook for you in the evenings if you book in advance (very reasonable at €35 per person; there's a good wine list too, or you can bring your own). In addition to all the countryside walks, ancient ruins, and sweet little towns you could wish for, the area also has some of the best horse riding in Ireland—ask if you'd like recommendations for local riding centers. *Note:* Not all bedrooms have a private bathroom, so specify when you book if you want one.

Riverstown, Co. Sligo. www.rossfarmhousesligo.com. **Ø** 071/916-5140. 6 units. €90 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free). Follow signs from Drumfin on N4 or Coola on R284.

Where to Dine In County Sligo

Coach Lane at Donaghy's Bar ** IRISH/INTERNATIONAL A very popular spot with Sligo residents, Coach Lane has two dining rooms: a bar, serving easy crowd pleasers such as burgers, fish and chips, and shepherd's pie; and a more upmarket, gastropub-style restaurant. Most ingredients are regionally sourced, and the seafood is particularly good here. The menu is divided into salad, pasta, meat, or seafood options, so after an appetizer of buffalo wings or salmon bowl of the delicious house chowder, you might tuck into a plate of scallops with garlic and anchovies, or a simple sirloin with Café de Paris butter.

1–2 Lord Edward St., Sligo Town. www.coachlane.ie. \bigcirc 071/916-2417. Main courses \notin 7– \notin 25. Bar food: daily 3–10pm. Restaurant: daily 5:30–10pm.

Eala Bhan \star INTERNATIONAL Local meats and seafood are featured at this popular brasserie in Sligo Town. The menu takes traditional brasserie classics and adds a light touch of creative flair—tender sirloin steak comes with chorizo mashed potatoes, while the lemon sole is balanced by a piquant fresh asparagus risotto and a rich champagne sauce. Three-course set menus are good value, and feature many dishes from the main menus. The early bird menu (served until 6:30 daily) is just \notin 20 for three courses. The lunch menu is almost as extensive as dinner, with a few lighter options such as poached chicken salad or seafood chowder.

Rockwood Parade, Sligo Town. www.ealabhan.ie. **Ø 071/914-5823.** Main courses €17–€25. Mon 5–9:30pm; Tues–Sat noon–3pm, 5–9:30pm; Sun 5–9:30pm.

Kate's Kitchen $\star\star$ DELI This great delicatessen has a large stock of gourmet foods, Irish cheese, fresh bread, scones, salads, chutneys, and other tasty items that just beg to be put together to make an elegant picnic or lunch on the go. They also sell bath products and a particularly nice range of

handmade chocolates—perfect for gifts, if you can keep yourself from raiding them before the journey home.

3 Castle St., Sligo Town. www.kateskitchen.ie. **© 071/914-3022.** Most items €4–€8. Mon–Sat 8:45am–6:15pm.

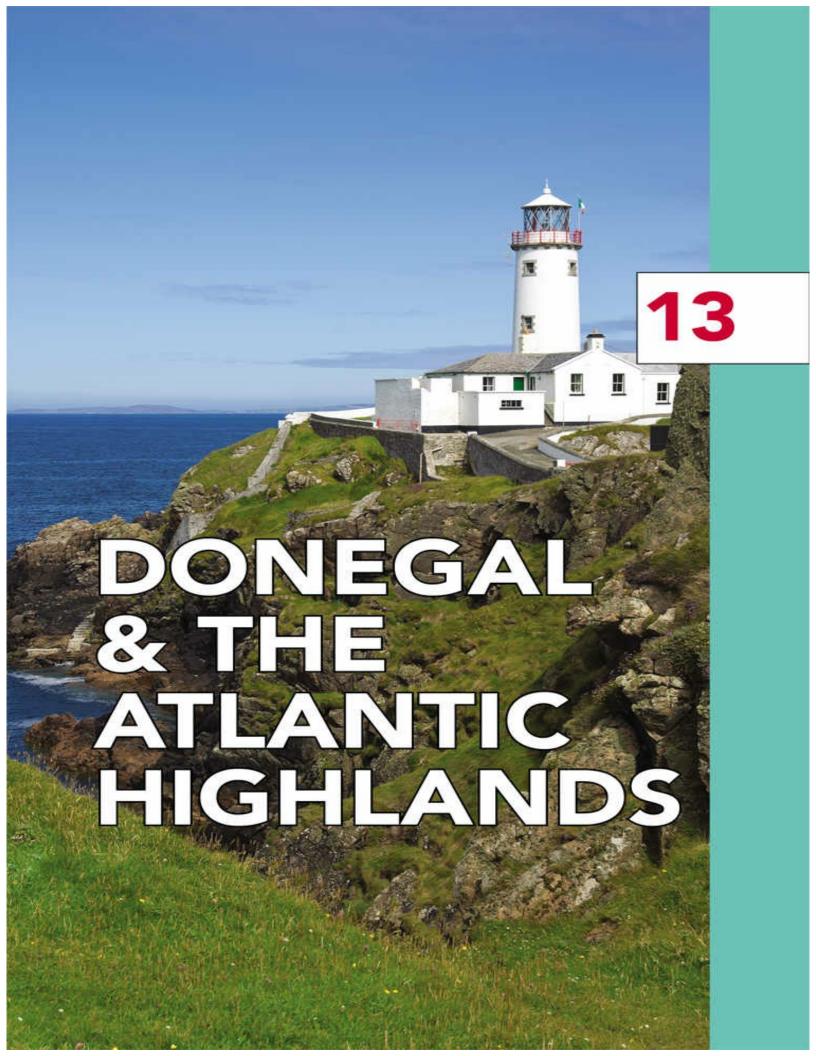
Lily's & Lolly's Café \star CAFE Handy for a quick and tasty lunch, this cheery cafe is at the Yeats Memorial Building \star (see p. 450). They serve reasonably priced wraps, panini, and light meals, in addition to homemade cakes and pies. The cafe is next to the Garavogue River, and you can sit outside on a sunny little terrace when the weather's fine.

At the Yeats Memorial Building, Douglas Hyde Bridge, Sligo Town. www.yeatssociety.com/lilys-and-lollys-cafe.html. **© 087/166-2266.** Sandwiches €4–€8. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat 10am–2pm.

Osta Café and Wine Bar $\star\star$ CAFE The owners of this sweet cafe overlooking the river in Sligo are big believers in the slow food and organic movements, and it's reflected in their delicious, healthful food that makes superb use of ingredients from small, local producers. There are usually only a few dishes on offer every day, but you're virtually guaranteed to find something properly, authentically Irish—boxty, perhaps, or omelets made from smoked Gubbeen cheese and potato. Soups are a specialty too. Even the sandwiches qualify as local, because they're made with deliciously fresh bread from a nearby bakery. In the early evening, the food switches to a simple but tasty tapas menu. Here's a real insider tip: A Gaelic speaking group meets here every Friday evening, so that might be a good time to drop by if you fancy eavesdropping on some of the language being used. Garavogue Weir, off Stephen St., Sligo Town. www.osta.ie. \bigcirc 071/914-4639. Main courses \notin 5– \notin 11. Mon–Wed 8am–7pm; Thurs–Sat 8am–8pm; Sun 9am–5pm.

Trá Bán ** MODERN IRISH/INTERNATIONAL Another fine place for steaks and seafood, Trá Bán is above a popular bar in Strandhill, a little seaside town about 8km (5 miles) west of Sligo. Crab cakes, chicken wings and "sea and shore" (an Irish variant on surf 'n' turf) are complimented with an occasional, more adventurous choice, like red snapper served with stir-fried vegetables and red pepper coulis, or black pudding lasagna. If you order a steak, try "reefing the beef" (their phrase, not ours) by adding a couple of garlic butter scallops on top. They also offer a special children's menu (three courses for \in 14). The atmosphere is relaxed and easygoing, with a cheery and efficient staff. Reservations are recommended, especially on weekends.

Above the Strand Bar, Strandhill, Co. Sligo. www.trabansligo.ie. **© 071/912-8402.** Main courses €17–€25. Tues–Sun 5–9:30pm. Closed Mon.



Lighthouse at Fanad Head, Donegal.

W hen the signs change into Gaelic, the landscape opens up into great sweeping views of rocky hills and barren shores, and a freezing mist blows off the sea, you know you've reached Donegal. The austere beauty of this county can be almost too bleak, but it is also unforgettable. On a sunny day, you can stand at the edge of the sea at Malin Head and, despite the sun, the sea spray will blow a chill right through you—it feels as if you're standing at the edge of the world.

County Donegal's natural wonders include the magnificent Slieve League cliffs and the remote beaches tucked into the bays and inlets of its sharply indented coast. The towns of Donegal are perhaps the least developed for tourism in Ireland; Donegal has some truly fantastic places to stay, but they tend to be hidden away within the mountainous roads and tiny seaside towns.

Few tourists make it this far. Buildings are made of cold stone and villages perch on the slopes of precipitous hillsides; road signs vary from cryptic to nonexistent. When you stop to take a wander, you can't help but worry whether the car's brakes will hold. But take the chance. You will spend half your time lost, but wherever you're headed, you'll get there eventually and not without a few adventures along the way. And the people in Donegal are as nice as can be—meeting them is worth the trip in itself.

ESSENTIALS

Arriving

BY BUS Bus Éireann (www.buseireann.ie: © 074/912-1309) operates daily bus service to Donegal Town from Dublin, Derry, Sligo, Galway, and other points.

BY TRAIN Trains in this part of the country are extremely scarce. Donegal Town no longer even has a train station.

BY CAR The only practical way to get around the remote attractions of County Donegal is by car. If you're driving from the south, Donegal is reached on N15 from Sligo or A46 or A47 from Northern Ireland; from the east and north, it's N15 and N56; from the west, N56 leads to Donegal Town.

BY PLANE Donegal Airport, Carrickfinn, near Letterkenny, Co. Donegal (www.donegalairport.ie; © 074/954-8284), also known as Carrickfinn Airport, is very slowly growing as a budget airline hub. Currently a couple of scheduled flights connect per day with Dublin, and about one flight per day with Glasgow in the U.K., all operated by Aer Lingus (www.aerlingus.com; © 1890/800-600).

[FastFACTS] COUNTY DONEGAL

ATMs/Banks Donegal Town's central shopping area—known as "The Diamond"—has branches of **Permanent TSB** and **AIB**. ATMs get seriously few and far between in the Donegal countryside, so get cash before you strike out into the boondocks.

Dentists For dental emergencies, your hotel should contact a dentist for you. Otherwise, in Donegal Town, try Dr. Brian McCaughey on Upper Main Street (© 074/972-3066).

Doctors For medical emergencies dial **Ø** 999. For non-emergencies, your hotel should call you a doctor. Otherwise, in Donegal Town, contact **Dr. Marie Drumgoole** on Waterloo Place (**Ø** 074/972-1364).

Emergencies For police, fire, or other emergencies, dial @ 999.

Pharmacies In Donegal Town check out Eske Pharmacy (© 071/972-2033) or McElwee Pharmacy (© 074/952-1032), both on Main Street.

Post Offices The main post office in Donegal Town is on Tirconaill Street (© 071/972-1030).

Taxis If you need a cab home from a restaurant or hotel, the management should call one for you—in rural areas, this is often the only reliable way of getting anywhere if you don't want to drive. Otherwise, in Donegal Town, call Quinn's Taxis (© 087/262-0670) or McNulty Taxis (© 087/256-1319).

DONEGAL TOWN & DONEGAL BAY

Overseen by a low, gloomy castle at the edge of the picturesque estuary of the River Eske on Donegal Bay, Donegal Town is a tiny burg, with just 2,500 residents. As recently as the 1940s, the town's triangular central mall (called "the Diamond"), set at the meeting point of the roads from Killybegs, Ballyshannon, and Ballybofey, was used as a market for trading livestock and goods. Today the marketing is done in the form of tweeds and tourist goods, as the Diamond is surrounded by little crafts shops and small hotels of variable quality. In the center stands an obelisk erected in memory of four 17th-century Irish clerics from the local abbey (see p. 467) who wrote *The Annals of the Four Masters*, the first recorded history of Gaelic Ireland.

Visitor Information

The **Donegal Discover Ireland Centre** is on the Quay, Donegal Town (© 074/972-1148). The seasonal Ardara Heritage Centre (© 074/954-1704) is on the main road through Ardara; it's closed from November to Easter.

Exploring Donegal Town

Donegal Bay Waterbus \star BOAT TOUR These guided 90-minute tours of Donegal Bay take place daily on a modern, two-deck boat. Points of interest along the way include the **Old Abbey** \star (see p. 467); **Seal Island**, home to a colony of about 200 noisy seals; and **The Hassans**, a port from which many emigrants from the northern part of the country left for the New World. The guides are enthusiastic and knowledgeable; the only downside is that the commentary is non-stop, and guides have even been known to play the keyboard to fill in moments of silence. However, the views are wonderful. There's a bar on board, and seniors get free tea, coffee and bottled water (ask for a voucher when picking up your tickets). Sailing times are usually morning and afternoon or evening, but are dependent upon weather and the tides, so call ahead. Tickets can be obtained from the ticket office on Quay Street—it's the white and blue building next to Dom's Pier 1 Bar.

The Pier, Donegal Town. www.donegalbaywaterbus.com. \bigcirc 074/972-3666. Tour \notin 20 adults; \notin 12 students 17–23 (must have student ID); \notin 7 children 5–17; children 4 and under free. No credit cards. Closed Nov–Apr.

Donegal Castle \star CASTLE Built in the 15th century on the banks of the River Eske, this solid, gray-stone castle was once the chief stronghold for the O'Donnells, a powerful Donegal clan. In the 17th century, during the Plantation period, it was taken over by Sir Basil Brook, who added an extension with 10 gables, a large bay window, and smaller mullioned windows in Jacobean style. Much of the building has survived the centuries, and both the interior and exterior of the castle were beautifully restored in the 1990s. Guided tours are available every hour, included in the admission price.

Castle St., Donegal Town. www.heritageireland.ie. \bigcirc 074/972-2405. Admission €4 adults; €3 seniors; €2 students and children; €10 families. Easter to mid-Sept daily 10am–6pm; mid-Sept to Easter Thurs–Mon 9:30am–4:30pm; last admission 45 min. before closing.



Donegal Town.



Old Abbey \star RELIGIOUS SITE/RUINS Sitting in a peaceful spot on the quay in Donegal Town, where the River Eske meets Donegal Bay, this ruined Franciscan monastery was founded in 1474 by the first Red Hugh O'Donnell and his wife, Nuala O'Brien of Munster. It was generously endowed by the O'Donnell family and became an important center of religion and learning; records show that there was a great gathering of clergy and lay leaders here in 1539. It was from this friary that some scholars undertook to salvage old Gaelic manuscripts and compile *The Annals of the Four Masters* (1632–36). Enough remains of its glory—ruins of a church and a cloister—to give you an idea of how

magnificent it once was. The Quay, Donegal, Co. Donegal. Free admission (open site).

Exploring Around Donegal Bay

The coastline around Donegal Bay is wild and beautiful. Speeds much above 55kmph (35 mph) are dangerous, but that's just as well, because the spectacular views will cause you to stop again and again to take in the rolling hills, jagged mountains, bright green fields, and crashing seas.

Heading south from Donegal Town, there are few attractions besides the historic village of **Ballyshannon** (*Béal Átha Seanaidh*) and, inland, the pilgrimage site on the shore of **Lough Derg.** However, it's a magnet for sporty types, with fine beaches, outstanding golf courses, and some of the best surfing in Ireland.

To the north of Donegal Town, the coastal scenery is breathtaking. Follow the main road (N56) west out of Donegal Town for a slow, winding, but spectacularly scenic drive along the bay. You'll often see the distinctive thatched-roof cottages typical of this area—with rounded roofs held down by ropes (called sugans) fastened beneath the eaves to help the thatch resist the strong sea winds. Just before the fishing village of **Killybegs** (*Ceala Beaga*), the main N56 road swings inland; you'll continue on the coastal road, R263, through Killybegs to **Kilcar** (*Cill Chártha*), where you can pick up Donegal Tweeds at a bargain at Studio Donegal. Truly spectacular photo ops await at **Slieve League** (*Sliabh Liag*), with its perilously high sea cliffs crashing down into the waters below. (Take the turnoff for the Bunglass viewing point at Carrick.) A challenging hike along its ridge takes 4 or 5 hours, or you can choose to just gaze at the towering cliffs from a viewing spot. The traditional end of the west coast drive is the heritage site of **Glencolumbkille** (*Gleann Cholm Cille*), 48km (30 miles) from Donegal Town.

DONEGAL TOWN summer FESTIVAL

If you're heading this way in early July, check out **www.donegaltown.ie** for details of the town's laid-back annual **Summer Festival.** The program is an enthusiastic mixture of free concerts (from local bands that, in all probability, you've never heard of) and family-friendly fun and games. The festival lasts 4 days, with the biggest events scheduled over a weekend. And if you're heading this way later in the summer, you might be able to catch the **Donegal Food Festival.** Held over a weekend in late August, the festival brings together chefs, restaurateurs and artisan food providers from all over Ireland. Visit www.atasteofdonegal.com for more details.



Lough Eske castle in County Donegal.

To continue touring from Glencolumbkille, follow the signs directing you on the R230 to Ardara (Árd an Rátha). This is a breathtaking drive through **Glengesh Pass**, a narrow, sinuous, scenic roadway that rises to a height of 270m (886 ft.) before plunging in hairpin curves into the valley below to reach the village of **Ardara** (*Árd an Rátha*)—see the Atlantic Highlands, p. 478.

Ballyshannon (*Béal Átha Seanaidh*) $\star\star$ VILLAGE The first proper town you'll come to on a drive south of Donegal Town is this busy, pretty little town, built on a hill, with a 15th-century town center. Some claim (rather dubiously) that Ballyshannon is the oldest town in Ireland, in part because traces have been found of permanent settlements dating as far back as 4000 B.C. Ballyshannon is also the location of Abbey Mills (© 071/985-1260), a heritage center and craft store. Part of a ruined Cistercian abbey, the mill still has a working waterwheel. The store is a great place to stop for designer crafts. It's run by volunteers, so opening hours are sketchy—generally Monday to Saturday, 10am to 5pm, during the summer months only. Entry is free. While you're here, check out tiny Catsby Cave, about 50m (164 ft.) along the riverbank. During the years of British occupation, when Catholicism was outlawed (from the 16th until the mid-19th century), priests would give Mass here in secret. You can still see the remains of an altar, chiseled from the rock. Admission is free.

Ballyshannon is known for its lively pubs, many of which have reliably good traditional music never more so than during a weekend in late July or early August, when the streets come alive for the **Ballyshannon Folk Festival** (www.ballyshannonfolkfestival.com).

Tourism Office: The Bridge, Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal. © 071/982-2856. About22km (13½ miles) south of Donegal Town on N15.

IRISH only!

Although English is the day-to-day language spoken by the overwhelming majority of Irish people, there are places where you will hear a more ancient tongue being spoken: Gaelic, the Celtic language indigenous to these shores.

Only about 3% of Irish people speak Gaelic as their main language, although many more understand or can speak a little. As part of efforts to promote and preserve the language, there are certain regions where English is forbidden on official signage. These are known as **Gaeltacht**.

These areas are spread all over the country, but some of the biggest are in Donegal, Mayo, and Kerry. When you're driving around Gaeltract districts, all the road signs will be in Gaelic—even emergency signs and place names. This can get confusing pretty fast, so in this book we've included the Gaelic names as well as the English names for the places where you're likely to encounter it.

The Gaeltacht laws aren't without controversy. A few years ago, the government caused outrage when they forced Dingle to change its much-loved name to the entirely made-up Gaelic *An Daingean* (see p. 325). But one thing you won't have any problem with is communicating with locals. Nobody in Ireland speaks only Gaelic. In fact, despite the efforts to save the ancient tongue, there is a general feeling of pessimism about its chances for long-term survival—so if you do manage to hear Gaelic being used by native speakers, it's an experience you may want to savor.

Glencolumbkille (Gleann Cholm Cille) $\star\star$ HERITAGE SITE An extraordinarily beautiful outpost overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, Glencolumbkille is sited in a lush green valley, west of the dark boglands. It is said that St. Columba established a monastery here in the 6th century and gave his name to the glen (its Gaelic name—*Gleann Cholm Cille*—means "Glen of Columba's Church"). Today it's home to the **Glencolumbkille Folk Village**, a wonderful "living history" park and craft center, set up and maintained entirely by the local people. In a series of small, traditional cottages, the park tells the story of this remote community in an engaging way. Guided tours are available, or you can take it at your own pace. Don't leave without browsing the *sheebeen*—a little store selling traditional, local products, including wines made from unusual ingredients, such as seaweed. There are miniature playhouses to entertain the children, while a tearoom serves traditional Irish stews and *brútin* (a stew of hot milk and potatoes). Guinness cake is a house specialty.

R263, Glencolumbkille, Co. Donegal. www.gleanncholmcille.ie/folkvillage.htm. \bigcirc 074/973-0017. Admission \notin 4.50 adults; \notin 4 seniors and students; \notin 2.50 children 7–16; children 6 and under free; \notin 12 families. Easter–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–6pm; Sun noon–6pm. On R263, about 26km (16 miles) northwest of Killybegs.





In the 6th century, St. Columba established a monastery at Glencolumbkille.

Lough Derg ** NATURE SITE This beautiful island-dotted lake lies about 16km (10 miles) east of Donegal Town. Legend has it that St. Patrick spent 40 days and 40 nights fasting in a cavern at this secluded spot, and since then it has been revered as a place of penance and pilgrimage. From June 1st to August 15th, thousands of Irish Catholics take turns coming to Lough Derg to do penance for 3 days at a time, remaining awake and eating nothing but tea and toast. It's considered one of the most rigorous pilgrimages in all of Christendom.

Co. Donegal. Take R232 to Pettigo, then R233 for 8km (5 miles).

Slieve League ****** NATURE SITE It's surprising that these towering sea cliffs aren't better known, because they're almost three times the height of their far more feted southern cousins, the Cliffs of Moher (see p. 364), and arguably even more spectacular. Needless to say, given the remote location, they also get a tiny fraction of the visitors that the Cliffs of Moher attract. There's no snazzy visitor center, no handy parking, no guide ropes, and no admission fees—just the wild, ominous beauty of this rugged, far-flung outpost. Start at the Slieve League Cliffs Centre (www.slieveleaguecliffs.ie; **©** 074/973-9077) in Teelin, about $3 \text{km} (1\frac{2}{3} \text{ miles})$ southwest of Carrick. It's a friendly little visitor center, full of helpful information, with a very good cafe and a crafts store. Admission and parking are free. From here, there are two ways to see Slieve League—and rarely has the phrase "the easy way or the hard way" been more apposite. The walking path is a truly spectacular hike across

stunning countryside, about 10km (6¼ miles) in length, which takes between 4 and 5 hours. The summits of the Slieve League, rising almost 600m (1,968 ft.) above the sea, are often capped in clouds, and you shouldn't undertake the walk if there are high winds, or any danger at all of losing visibility along the way. In any case, this is only for the fearless and fit. And we *really* mean fearless; the high point (literally) is the frankly terrifying **One Man's Pass**, a footpath so narrow that it can only take one person at a time—and it's on top of the cliff, with a 450-metre (1500-ft.) drop on one side, and a perilously steep incline on the other. The less intrepid (or possibly just "sane") can take a shuttle bus from the visitor center up to the best viewing point. You won't be able to see the vista from the cliffs, but you'll get a great view *of* them. **Sliabh Liag Tours** (www.sliabhliagtours.ie; **© 087/671-1944**) also run a tour from Carrick, and can arrange to drop you off at the best (and more manageable) walking points on the way back. Tours are all customized; call for more information. Slieve League Centre: Teelin, Carrick, Co. Donegal (signposted from R263). www.slieveleaguecliffs.ie. **@ 074/973-9077.** Free admission. Mar–Nov daily 10:30am–5:30pm.



Hikers along the Slieve League, the country's most dramatic coastal walk.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

BEACHES Donegal Bay's beaches are wide, sandy, clean, and flat—ideal for walking. **Ballyshannon** has a good beach, but it gets crowded; **Rossnowlagh** and **Bundoran** are both better options. On the North Donegal Bay drive, **Glencolumbkille** has two fine beaches: One a flat, sandy beach at the end of Glencolumbkille village, where the R263 swings left; the other a tiny gem of a beach surrounded by a horseshoe of cliffs, accessible from the small road signposted to Malin More (off the R263) about 1.6km (1 mile) southwest of town.

CYCLING If you're very fit, the north side of Donegal Bay has great cycling roads—tremendously scenic but with some demanding climbs. One good but arduous route from Donegal Town follows the coast roads west to Glencolumbkille (day 1), continues north to Ardara and Dawros Head via Glengesh Pass (day 2), and then returns to Donegal (day 3). It takes in some of the most spectacular coastal scenery in Ireland along the way, but takes place on small winding roads that must be shared with cars. Rental bikes are available in Donegal Town from **Ted's Bike Shop** (www.tedsbikeshop.ie; \bigcirc 074/974-0774) on Killybegs Road, for around \in 15 per day.

FISHING Surrounded by waters that hold shark, skate, pollock, conger, cod, and mackerel, **Killybegs** is one of the most active centers on the northwest coast for commercial and sport sea fishing. **Brian McGilloway** (www.killybegsangling.com; **© 087/220-0982** or **©** 074/973-1181) operates full-day fishing expeditions on the 12m (39-ft.) MV *Meridian*, from Blackrock Pier. Prices are €450 per day, or €300 for a half day for up to 12 people; plus €10 per person for rod, reel, and tackle hire. Alternatively he'll take you on evening mackerel fishing trips for €30 per person (minimum group size is five). The daily schedule and departure times vary according to demand; reservations are required.

GOLF The Donegal Bay coast is home to two outstanding 18-hole championship seaside golf courses. Donegal Golf Club, Murvagh, Ballintra, Co. Donegal (www.donegalgolfclub.ie; \bigcirc 074/973-4054), is 5km (3 miles) north of Rossnowlagh and 11km (6³/₄ miles) south of Donegal Town. It's a par-73 course with greens fees of €70 weekdays, €80 weekends.

The Bundoran Golf Club, off the Sligo-Ballyshannon road (N15), Bundoran, Co. Donegal (www.bundorangolfclub.com; © 071/984-1302), is a par-69 course designed by Harry Vardon. The greens fees are around \in 55 weekdays, \in 64 weekends.

SURFING **Bundoran** is popular with surfers for its steady waves, and has hosted the European Surfing Championships. Rossnowlagh also has excellent surf and attracts lots of surfers. When the surf is up, you can rent boards and wet suits locally from around $\notin 5$ to $\notin 10$ per hour per item.

WALKING The peninsula to the west of Killybegs offers some of the most spectacular coastal scenery in Ireland, and much of it is accessible only from the sea or on foot. The grandeur of the **Slieve League** $\star\star$ cliffs (see p. 472) makes the hills popular with serious hikers, but only attempt them with a good map, hiking boots, and basic provisions. The best way to visit this natural monument is to hike from the Bunglass lookout point to Trabane Strand in Malin Beg, a few miles southwest of Glencolumbkille. This walk crosses the notorious "One Man's Pass," a vertigo-inducing narrow ridge with steep drops on both sides (see p. 473). The distance from Bunglass to Trabane Strand is 15km (9¹/₃ miles), and you will have to arrange a pickup at the end.

Another, lesser-known walk that is just as spectacular is the coastal walk between Glencolumbkille and the town of Maghera (not so much a town as a small cluster of houses). Glen Head, topped by a Martello tower, overlooks Glencolumbkille to the north. This walk begins with a climb to the tower and continues along the cliff face for 24km (15 miles), passing only one remote outpost of human habitation along the way, the tiny town of Port. For isolated sea splendor, this is one of the finest walks in Ireland, but only experienced walkers with adequate provisions should undertake it, and only in fine weather.

Where to Stay in Donegal Town & Donegal Bay

Ard Na Breátha ****** Beautifully converted into a comfortable, modern guesthouse, Ard Na Breátha sits on a working farm. Bedrooms are summery and spacious, with bright colors, polished wood floors, and antique-style iron frame beds in some rooms. Family rooms are only $\in 20$ to $\in 30$ more than standard doubles. The pleasant guest lounge has a fireplace and a little bar too. Evening meals are sophisticated while unashamedly traditional in style, with plenty of local and seasonal ingredients (many supplied from their own farm, of course). Pre-booking for dinner is essential. See p. 476 for more on the restaurant. The B&B is located right on the edge of Donegal Town, although the farm makes it feel quite rural, enhanced by views of the mountains in the distance.

Railway Park, Middle Drumrooske, Co. Donegal. www.ardnabreatha.com. **Ø** 074/972-2288. 6 units. €90–€120 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; Wi-Fi (free). Closed mid-Jan to mid-Feb.

Bruckless House ** Another impeccably converted farmhouse, but with a slightly older pedigree, this property was built in the mid-1700s. Your hosts, Joan and Clive Evans, are cultured and well-traveled sorts, and their house is full of art and antiques, most with a story attached. The gardens are beautiful and quite renowned locally. A walk down the main path, past flowerbeds and lawns, will take you down to the sea. Bedrooms are simple, but tastefully decorated, and guests can use the pleasantly old-fashioned drawing room. The former Gate Lodge to the house is available as a self-catering unit; it sleeps up to four and is a good value at between €250 and €450 per week, depending on the season.

On N56, Bruckless, Co. Donegal. www.bruckless.com. \bigcirc 074/973-7071. 4 units. \in 120 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free). Take N56 west 20 km (12¹/₂ miles) from Donegal Town; Bruckless House is the first driveway on the left after the Bruckless village sign. Closed Oct–Mar.

Creevy Pier Hotel \star The coastline in this part of Ireland isn't short of hotels and restaurants with magnificent views, but this one is up there with the best. The dining room looks straight out over Donegal Bay, framed by distant mountains. It's a magnificent spot from which to watch the sun go down. The Pier Restaurant is good, with plenty of local seafood options and welcoming service. The bar has live music most weekends in summer. Bedrooms are fairly basic, but pleasant and well equipped. Very good package deals are available, including 3-night midweek packages for seniors (including dinner on one night) for under $\in 100$. The only negative is it can sometimes get booked for weddings and pre-wedding parties, so you might want to check if any are planned over the dates you want to stay, to avoid any disruption.

Kildoney Glebe, Co. Donegal. www.creevy.ie. \bigcirc 071/985-8355. 10 units. \notin 110– \notin 125 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; Wi-Fi (free). About 7km (4½ miles) from Ballyshannon, signposted from R231 in Ballure,

Where to Dine in Donegal Town & Donegal Bay

Ard Na Breátha ****** MODERN IRISH The in-house restaurant at the lovely B&B of the same name (see p. 475) serves up excellent modern Irish cooking. The attractive, high-beamed dining room has a great view across rolling farmland to Donegal Town. The menu is seasonal, but depending on when you're visiting, you could be offered a starter of parsnip and apple soup or a warm goat-cheese tart, followed by chicken supreme (free-range, of course) or lamb shank with almonds and fresh ginger. The little bar outside the dining room is perfect for a pre-dinner drink or a nightcap while you take in the heady scent of the peat burning fire. Booking is essential.

Railway Park, Middle Drumrooske, Donegal, Co. Donegal. www.ardnabreatha.com. **© 074/972-2288.** Fixed-price menu (3 courses) €35. Daily 6–9:30pm. Closed mid-Jan to mid-Feb.

Blueberry Tea Room ★ CAFE A buttermilk-colored shopfront, adorned with little baskets of azaleas; twinkling fairy lights and walls filled with knick-knacks; and the friendliest owner in

Donegal—what more could you want from a small town cafe? If the answer's "tasty, simple lunches in huge portions," you're in luck there too. This simple, no-nonsense cafe serves tea, cake, and traditional Irish lunches. The homemade soups are a specialty (served with or without a toasted sandwich), or you could fill up on a hearty plate of roast lamb with turnips (rutabaga), or gammon (ham), and cabbage in a parsley sauce. They also have a little deli selling Irish cheese, breads, muffins, and other tasty treats to go. The only discernable snag is that they don't take credit cards. Castle St., Donegal Town. **© 074/972-2933.** Main courses €5–€12. Mon–Sat 9am–7pm. Closed Sun.



Pastries at the Blueberry Tea Room.

Smuggler's Creek Inn ★ SEAFOOD With a breathtakingly beautiful clifftop view of Donegal Bay, this mid-19th-century inn is a fantastic place to come and watch the sun setting over the Atlantic

Ocean. See if you can get a table outside or in the conservatory. You can order steaks, lamb shank, and the like, but the seafood is really what's best here—so go for the chowder, fresh hake in a cream sauce, oysters, salmon filet, or a seafood platter. There's always a catch of the day, and some vegetarian options too. Service can be slow, however, especially when it's busy.

Cliff Rd., Rossnowlagh, Co. Donegal. www.smugglerscreekinn.com. **Ø 071/985-2367.** Main courses €13–€25. Apr–Oct noon–5pm, 6–9:30pm; Nov–Mar Fri–Sun noon–5pm. 6–9:30pm

The Village Tavern $\star\star$ MODERN IRISH It's quite possible that you'll experience a sense of déjà vu when you approach the front door to this homely gastropub—the owners claim that it's been photographed several times for postcards, to convey a sense of "authentic Irishness." The place is cozy on the inside, and the food, which comes highly recommended by locals, is terrific. Although the menu is contemporary in style and presentation, there's a strong sense of tradition, too, so wild salmon with coconut-flavored risotto and a spicy piri piri chicken share the menu with fish and chips or a baked sole with lobster and langoustine butter. Until 5:30pm they serve a fantastically good value bar menu—try the Sambuca-infused local fish pie for just $\in 6$. There's also a great selection of craft beers on offer at the bar.

Lower Main St., Mountcharles (5km/3 miles west of Donegal Town), Co. Donegal. www.villagetavern.ie. \bigcirc 074/973-5622. Main courses \notin 13– \notin 24. Mon–Fri noon–9pm; Sat noon–9pm; Sun noon–7pm. Call ahead Oct–Apr. Food may not be served out of season, especially weekdays.

THE ATLANTIC HIGHLANDS

This is the most isolated part of Donegal, which is the most isolated county in Ireland, so it doesn't get much more rugged, exhilarating, and, well . . . *isolated* than this. At a certain point when you're driving through the highlands, the signs drop all pretense at bilingualism and switch entirely to Gaelic. This is disconcerting, because most maps are in English, and the Gaelic names and the English names of places may not even be distant relatives. It's disorienting—one minute you know exactly where you are and the next you haven't a clue. At that moment, which often occurs on a mountainside by a rushing stream amid rocky terrain where there's no space to pull the car over and stare more closely at the useless map, you're in the true Donegal. With its breathtaking coastal scenery, mountain ranges, and the lunar landscape of its rocky beaches, you could fill your camera's memory card here.

The best place to start a tour of Donegal's Atlantic Highlands is at Ardara (Árd an Rátha), an adorable village about 40km (25 miles) northwest of Donegal Town. From there, weave your way up the coast. This drive can take 4 hours or 4 days, depending on your schedule and interests. Our advice is to take your time. You may never come this way again, and you will want to remember every moment.

Exploring the Atlantic Highlands

Looking as if it were carved from stone, charming little **Ardara** is known for its exceptional tweed and wool creations. Astride a narrow river in a steep gulch, it is a pleasant place to stop, chat with the locals, and do a bit of shopping or maybe have a cup of tea in its small but useful **Heritage Centre** on the N56 main road through the village (open Easter to Sept). If you happen to arrive in June, you may catch the **Ardara Weavers Fair**, which has been going on since the 18th century, and features spectacular works in wool.

Heading north from Ardara, the N26 passes through the neat-as-a-pin little town of Glenties (Na

Gleanta) (where playwright Brian Friel set his play Dancing at Lughnasa), and eventually curves inland to the gorgeous **Glenveagh National Park** $\star\star\star$ (see p. 481) and **Mount Errigal**, Donegal's highest mountain. Just east of the park, the surprisingly good **Glebe House and Gallery** $\star\star$ (see p. 480) sits on lovely Lough Gartan.

However, it would be shame not to sample some scenic coastal detours along the way. The southernmost is on R261, taking in two pleasant resort towns—Naran (*An Fhearthainn*) and **Portnoo**—that are favorites with Irish families in the summer. At Dungloe, you can split off on the coastal R259 to visit an area known as **the Rosses**, a rock-strewn land punctuated by mountains, rivers, and glassy lakes. On this loop you'll pass **Burtonport** (*Ailt an Chorrain*), where, it's said, more salmon and lobster are landed than at any other port in the country. The next coastal loop heading north is on R257, swinging through Derrybeg and Gortahork. This is known as the **Bloody Foreland**, from the fact that its rocks take on a ruddy color when lit by the setting sun. If you can arrange to be driving through here at sunset on a clear day, you are in for a treat.



Dunlewey and the Errigal Mountains.

If you follow N56 to the top rim of Donegal, you'll find a series of small peninsulas like fingers jabbing out into the sea. West to east, they are **Horn Head** (*Corrán Binne*), with spectacular cliffs

towering 180m (590 ft.) above the ocean; **Rosguill** (*Ros Goill*); and the Fanad, jutting out between Mulroy Bay and the glassy waters of Lough Swilly. Each has its own driving circuit. Horn Head's clifftop drive is the most spectacular but also rather perilous; you may want to opt instead for Rosguill's scenic 16km (10-mile) Atlantic Drive, or, if you have more time, the Fanad's 73km (45mile) circuit. At the base of the Horn Head peninsula, pretty **Dunfanaghy** (*Dún Fionnachaidh*) has a great beach and a heritage center (see p. 480). Between Horn Head and Rosguill, **Doe Castle** (see p. 480) is well worth a stop. At the base of the Fanad, the tiny village of **Rathmelton** (*Ráth Mealtain*) is eminently photographic, with its gray Georgian warehouses reflected in the mirrorlike water of the lake. About 10 minutes' drive north of Rathmelton, on the coast of Lough Swilly, the village of **Rathmullan** (*Ráth Maoláin*) is an excellent stopping point, with an evocative ruined abbey, a beautiful stretch of flat, sandy beach, and a couple of good hotels (splurge on the **Rathmullan House** $\star \star \star$ if you can swing it—see p. 484).

Doe Castle \star CASTLE This little tower house is so complete, it looks as if you could move in today and set up well-fortified housekeeping. A battlement wall with round towers at the corners encloses the central tower; the view from the battlements across the bay is superb. Built in the early 16th century, the castle was extensively restored in the 18th century and inhabited until 1843. It's a lovely little place, surrounded on three sides by the waters of Sheep Haven Bay, and on the fourth by a moat carved into the bedrock that forms its foundation. If the entrance is locked, you can get the key from the caretaker in the house nearest the castle.

5.6km (3¹/₂ miles) off N56; turnoff signposted just south of Creeslough, Co. Donegal. Free admission. Daily dawn–dusk.

Dunfanaghy Workhouse \star MUSEUM This rather unassuming grey stone building was the scene of great hardship and fear in the 19th century, when it was one of around 100,000 workhouses set up to feed and house the poor during the Great Famine. Their approach was hardly altruistic, however; fearing that merely feeding people would engender a "something-for-nothing" culture in the poor, the authorities decreed that they should perform backbreaking labor in return for their bread. It's estimated that workhouses killed around a million people in Ireland. This particular one housed about 300 inmates. The museum does a good job of describing their daily lives, as well as providing a history of the Famine in this area. One exhibit focuses particularly on a local girl, "Wee Hannah" Herrity, who lived here and survived to tell the tale—which she did, in extensive conversation with a local biographer.

Just west of Dunfanaghy on N56, Co. Donegal. www.dunfanaghyworkhouse.ie. \bigcirc 074/913-6540. Admission \notin 4.50 adults; \notin 3.50 seniors, students and children; \notin 13 families. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm. Call to check opening times Oct–May; actual opening times off-season can be unpredictable.

Glebe House and Gallery ** ART MUSEUM What a surprise, in such a remote location, to find an art gallery as good as this. The early-19th-century house, on the shores of Lake Gartan, was once the home of the noted English painter Derek Hill (1916–2000). He donated the house, along with his personal art collection, to the Irish state in the 1980s. And it was quite a collection—highlights include paintings by Picasso, Renoir, Jack Yeats, and Oskar Kokoschka, along with rare Islamic and far Eastern art, and original William Morris prints. About 300 works are on display from the permanent collection, plus temporary and special exhibitions. The house itself is worth seeing too—a handsome Regency building, surrounded by pretty woods and gardens, stretching down to the Lough. The house can only be seen on a guided tour, and space is limited to 15 people at a time.

Church Hill, Co. Donegal. www.heritageireland.ie. \bigcirc 074/913-7071. Admission €3 adults; €2 seniors; €1 students and children; €8 families. Gallery only: Easter week daily 11am–6:30pm; June and Sept Sat–Thurs 11am–6:30pm; July–Aug daily 11am–6:30pm; last tour

1 hr. before closing. Grounds open year-round. Signposted from R251, about 17km (101/2 miles) northeast of Letterkenny.

Glenveagh National Park and Castle *** NATURE SITE/CASTLE This thickly wooded valley is pleasant now, but its history is dark. Nestling at its heart, **Glenveagh Castle** was originally the home of the infamously cruel landlord John George Adair, who evicted scores of struggling tenant farmers in the freezing winter of 1861, ostensibly because their presence on his estate was ruining his view. If the tale is true, it's divine justice that his estate now belongs to all of the people of Ireland. Today the fairy-tale setting includes woodlands, herds of red deer, alpine gardens, a sylvan lake, and the highest mountain in Donegal, Mount Errigal. There's a visitor center with a little shop, and a charming tearoom in the castle. You can also go on ranger-led walks of the park here for \in 10. Cars aren't allowed in the park past the visitor center, but a shuttle bus can take you from there straight up to the castle for \in 3 round-trip. Admission to the park is free, but there's a charge to visit the castle (guided tours only).

Visitor Centre and Castle: Church Hill, Co. Donegal (signposted from R251, 24.4km/15 miles northeast of Letterkenny). www.glenveaghnationalpark.ie. **© 076/100-2536.** Castle: €5 adults; €3 seniors; €2 students and children; €10 families. Daily 10am–5pm. Park: Mar–Oct daily 9am–6pm; Oct–Mar daily 9am–5pm; last admission 1 hr. before closing.



Once the home of a brutal English landlord, Glenveagh Castle and its luxe gardens now belong to the Irish people.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

BEACHES Several populated beaches spread around Dawros Head, including **Traighmore Strand** in Rossbeg, and the Blue Flag beaches in Portnoo and Navan. **Magheroarty**, near Falcarragh on the northern coast, has a breathtaking beach, unspoiled by crowds or development. The same goes for **Tramore** beach on the western side of Horn Head near Dunfanaghy; you have to hike a short distance, but the rewards are seclusion and miles of creamy sand. Other peaceful sandy beaches ideal for walking and jogging include **Carrigart**, **Downings**, **Marble Hill**, and **Port na Blagh**.

BIRD-WATCHING Horn Head, just north of Dunfanaghy, is a nesting site for many species of seabirds, including a huge population of razorbills.

FISHING The rivers and lakes in this area produce salmon, sea trout, and brown trout, and the coastal waters yield flounder, pollock, and cod. Fishing expeditions are offered by charter boats, fishing boats, and trawlers. For details, contact **Inland Fisheries Ireland**, Ballyshannon (www.fishinginireland.info; © 087/985-1435).

GOLF On the Rosguill peninsiula, one of Ireland's most challenging golf courses is the **Rosapenna Golf Club**, Atlantic Drive, Downings, Co. Donegal (www.rosapenna.ie; \bigcirc 074/915-5000), an 18hole championship seaside par-70 links course that was laid out in 1983 by Tom Morris of St. Andrews. It also has the newer Sandy Hills links, which was named the top course in the whole of Ireland and Britain by *Golf World* magazine in 2008. Greens fees are €90, but there's a €20 discount if you book your tee time online. They also offer a twilight rate of €50. Unusually for such a top club, prices do not rise on weekends. However, it's closed from October to March.

Other 18-hole courses in this part of Donegal are Dunfanaghy Golf Club, Dunfanaghy, Co. Donegal (www.dunfanaghygolfclub.com; © 074/913-6335), a seaside par-68 course with greens fees of €20 to €30; Narin & Portnoo Golf Club, Narin-Portnoo, Co. Donegal (www.narinportnoogolfclub.ie; © 074/954-5107), a par-69 seaside course with greens fees of €30 to €80; and on the Fanad peninsula, Portsalon Golf Club, Portsalon, Co. Donegal (www.portsalongolfclub.com; © 074/915-9459), a seaside par-69 course with greens fees of €40 to €50.

HORSEBACK RIDING Dunfanaghy Stables, Arnold's Hotel, Dunfanaghy, Co. Donegal (www.dunfanaghystables.com; \bigcirc 074/913-6208), specializes in trail riding on the surrounding beaches, dunes, and mountain trails. An hour's ride is around €35 adults, €30 children. Between May and September they also offer guided trail riding holidays, including meals and accommodations.

WALKING A section of the **Ulster Way** passes through Donegal between the towns of Falcarragh to the north and Pettigo to the south, on the border with Fermanagh. This trail traverses some remote and wild terrain, passing Mount Errigal and Glenveagh Park before heading south into the Blue Stack Mountains, so should not be undertaken without a good map, proper attire, and supplies.

There are some incredible walks on Horn Head, signposted off N56 just west of Dunfanaghy. Follow Horn Head Drive to the concrete lookout point. From here you can walk out to a ruined castle on the headland and continue south along a line of impressive quartzite sea cliffs that glitter in the sun as though covered with glass. This is a moderately difficult walk.

The Ards Forest Park, on a peninsula jutting into Sheep Haven Bay about 5.6km ($3\frac{1}{2}$ miles) south of Dunfanaghy on N56, has lots of signposted forest trails as well as an area of dunes along the water. You can buy a guidebook as you enter the park.

Where to Stay in the Atlantic Highlands

Arnold's Hotel \star This simple but pleasant hotel near the harbor in Dunfanaghy overlooks Sheep Haven Bay. The slightly garish interior decor won't win any design awards, but guest rooms are more restrained, with modern furniture and comfortable beds. Ask for a room with a view of the bay. The owners also run a horseback riding stables; week-long holiday packages, including accommodations and guided trail rides, are available. Check the website for details.

On N56, Dunfanaghy, Co. Donegal. www.arnoldshotel.com. \bigcirc 074/913-6208. 32 units. \in 114– \in 134 double. Free parking. Breakfast not included in lower rates. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; Wi-Fi (free).

Castle Grove Hotel ** Lancelot "Capability" Brown, the famous English landscaper who virtually invented landscape gardening in the 18th century, laid out the elegant grounds at this inviting white manor house. Inside the decor is avowedly traditional in style, with plenty of period detail and heritage paint colors. Rooms have antique furnishings (including a four-poster bed in one). All have views of the grounds. Breakfasts are outstanding, and the restaurant (see p. 484) is one of the best in the region. Check the website for dinner, bed and breakfast packages.

Ballymaleel, off Ramelton Rd., Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. www.castlegrove.com. \bigcirc 074/915-1118. 16 units. \bigcirc 130– \bigcirc 16 double; \bigcirc 220 suite. 2 night minimum on weekends. Breakfast included. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; access to nearby golf courses; tennis courts; Wi-Fi (free).

Rathmullan House ★★★ Right on the edge of Lough Swilly, this delightful mid-18th-century mansion is one of the best places to stay in the northwest. The public areas are warm and hospitable, with sumptuous period decor. Bedrooms are spacious and extremely comfortable; those in the modern extension lose nothing in terms of style and charm to the rooms in the older section of the house. Some have fireplaces and deep, antique-style bathtubs. Superior rooms have even more space, and family rooms can work out at just slightly more expensive than standard doubles. The house has a swimming pool, or you can just take a short stroll down to the beach of the Lough. The Cook and Gardener ★★★ restaurant is outstanding, and deserves its reputation as one of the best places to eat in Donegal (see below). Check the website for discounts and special rates—particularly outside the busiest times of year, when you can often find deals like dinner, bed and breakfast packages for around €115 per person—good value for a place like this.

On R247 (Chapel Rd.), Rathmullan, Co. Donegal. **Ø 074/915-8188.** www.rathmullanhouse.com. 32 units. €210–€260 double. Parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Restaurant; pool; Wi-Fi (free).

Where to Dine in the Atlantic Highlands

Castle Grove $\star\star$ IRISH This place has won plenty of awards over the years, and it's easy to see why—the food is superb, and a top recommendation if you're staying here or nearby. The seasonal menus present classic Irish flavors with a modern edge; goat-cheese brulee or lamb parcels to start, followed by peppered sea bream, lean duck breast with honey pesto, or maybe some roast local chicken with seasonal vegetables. **Castle Grove** $\star\star$ is also a very good hotel—see p. 483 for review.

Ballymaleel, off Ramelton Rd., Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. www.castlegrove.com. \bigcirc 074/915-1118. Main courses $\in 18 - \in 26$. Daily 6:30–9:30pm. No children 9 and under allowed after 7pm.

The Cook and Gardener *** IRISH It's entirely befitting that, as one of the very best hotels in Donegal, **Rathmullan House ***** (see above), would also have one of its best restaurants. Many of the ingredients have come no greater distance than the house's own gardens, and many of the rest haven't traveled all that much farther. You could start with beetroot cured salmon, served with crab hand-picked from Wards beach, then sample Greencastle hake with braised lentils, lemon and parsley, or Donegal lamb with thyme jus. Despite the quality, it's not the kind of place you have to sit

up ruler-straight the whole time either; in addition to fancier choices they also do a fine burger, and kids get their own menu too (although younger ones are expected to be done by 7pm).

At Rathmullan House hotel, on R247 (Chapel Rd.), Rathmullan, Co. Donegal. www.rathmullanhouse.com. **Ø** 074/915-8188. Main courses €18–€28. Sun–Thurs 7–8:45pm; Fri–Sat 7–9:15pm.

The Red Oven \star PIZZA Locals call this place, hidden in a courtyard behind Patsy Dan's Pub, the "Rusty Oven," and they throng here night after night for the gorgeous handmade pizzas, baked traditionally in a wood-fired oven. The atmosphere is very casual—it's a bit like eating in someone's cheerful living room. In the summer, dining happens outside, on the bohemian courtyard, beneath the trees. It's best to not be in a hurry, for the pizzas are made at a leisurely pace. But sometimes someone's playing guitar, and occasionally everyone sings and the mood is chill. Every pizza is good. The margarita is made with slow-roasted tomatoes and Irish mozzarella. The Sundance pairs spicy chorizo with caramelized onions. The pizza base is light as a feather, and there's homemade ice cream for dessert. Pull up a chair.

Off Market Square, Behind Patsy Dan's Pub, Dunfanaghy, Co. Donegal. No phone. No website. Main courses €8–€12. Mon–Sat 6–10pm.

Sheila's Coffee & Cream ★ CAFE This cozy cafe at the Ardara Heritage Centre (see p. 466) is a welcome find. Drop in for a fine cup of coffee and a restorative slice of cake, or a light lunch—soups, Irish stew, salads, and filling sandwiches. The bread is home-baked, and the ever-present Sheila herself is quite delightful. The cafe stays open until 9pm on Friday and Saturday in summer. Ardara Heritage Centre, Ardara, Co. Donegal. © 074/953-7905. Main courses €5–€12. June–Sept Mon–Thurs 10am–6pm; Fri–Sat 10am–9pm. Oct–May Mon–Sat 10am–6pm.

THE INISHOWEN PENINSULA

To an extent, driving around the northernmost point of Ireland is worth doing just so you can say you did. You stood on Malin Head and felt the icy mist come in on a wind that hit you like a fist, and you balanced yourself on the rocky edge of the country and looked out at the true north. You have felt the satisfaction that comes from knowing there is no farther to go.

There is, however, more to this land than that. Around the edges are ancient sites, beautiful beaches, and charming villages. At its center are gorgeous views, mountains, and quiet, vivid green pastures. If you are looking to get lost, this is a great place to do it—although (perhaps paradoxically, given its decided dearth of traffic) the Inishowen Peninsula circuit is very well signposted, with all directions clearly printed in English and Irish, miles and kilometers.

Exploring the Inishowen Peninsula

The Inishowen (Inis Eoghain) Peninsula reaches out from Lough Foyle to the east and Lough Swilly to the west toward Malin Head ******* (see p. 487), its farthest point. To make a loop around the peninsula, start on the shore of Lough Foyle in the bustling little town of Moville (*Bun an Phobail*), which is a good place to stock up on gas and picnic provisions. After a few miles of coastal road (R241), you'll drive through Greencastle (*An Cáisleá Nua*), site of the quirky Inishowen Maritime Museum and Planetarium ***** (see p. 487). From there, it's a short drive to the picturesque Inishowen Head (follow signs off the R241 onto a side road, follow that to its end, and walk the rest of the way to the headland.) It's a bit eerily isolated, but the views are stupendous—on clear days, you can see all the way to the Antrim Coast.

Returning to Greencastle, follow the coastal road north and then west for about 30 minutes to the

turnoff for Culdaff (*Cúil Dabhcha*), a sleepy waterfront village with a pretty beach. On its main street, the Clonca Church is a solid 17th-century structure with a fine carved high cross. From Culdaff, it's about a 20-minute drive west across the base of the headlands to the pretty town of Malin (*Málainn*), with its stone bridge and village green. From Malin, it's another 20-minute drive north on R242 to Malin Head (*Cionn Mhélanna*), a satisfyingly remote place at the end of the road.

Finding your way back to the main road, circle the top of the peninsula and head down the other side, through the beach town of **Ballylifflin** and around to the **Gap of Mamore**, a mountain pass that rises 240m (787 ft.), then slowly descends on a corkscrew path to sea level on the east shore of Lough Swilly. Busy **Buncrana** is an excellent place to rest and have a meal. About 11 km (7 miles) north of Buncrana is **Fort Dunree Military Museum **** (see below); about 16km (10 miles) south of Buncrana is the hilltop fort known as **Grianan of Aileach *** (see facing page).

After you've toured the Inishowen Peninsula, head south through Letterkenny (*Leitir Ceanainn;* pop. 5,000). The largest town in the county, it's on a hillside overlooking the River Swilly. There you can pick up N56, the main road, and drive to the twin towns of **Ballybofey** and **Stranorlar**. Change here to N15, which takes you to yet another scenic Donegal drive, the **Barnesmore Gap**, a vast open stretch through the Blue Stack Mountains, and on into Donegal Town.

Fort Dunree Military Museum $\star\star$ MUSEUM Rising precipitously from the cliffs beside Lough Swilly, this impressive-looking fort was constructed as a defensive lookout in case of a French invasion during the Napoleonic Wars. It later became part of Irish sea defenses in case of a German invasion during the First World War. Neither came, and today Dunree serves as an informative museum. Spread partly through subsurface bunkers, the exhibitions tell the history of the fort, and of the local area as a whole. It also serves as the starting point for scenic walks around Dunree Point along three recommended walking paths. The museum has a handy coffee shop overlooking the Lough. Signposted on the coast road north of Buncrana, Co. Donegal. www.dunree.pro.ie. © 074/936-1817. Admission ϵ 6.50 adults; ϵ 4.50 seniors and children. Mon–Sat 10:30am–6pm; Sun 1–6pm.

Grianan of Aileach \star ANCIENT SITE Built high atop a hill outside the village of Burt, this beautifully preserved ring fort can be seen from miles away, a crown made of stone. Experts think the existing structure was built in the 6th or 7th century A.D., although the site had already been used for many centuries by then. There's evidence it may have originally been a temple of the sun as long ago as 1700 B.C. From the mid-5th century A.D. to the early 12th century A.D., this was the seat of the kingdom of Aileach, home to the O'Neills, the chieftains of this area. The view from the top is spectacular. The waters of the two lakes—Lough Swilly and Lough Foyle—sparkle in the distance, and you can make out the shape of the entire peninsula. The round fort is made of stone without mortar; the walls are terraced, giving access to the top.

Signposted on the Buncrana to Derry Road, behind the town of Burt, Co. Donegal, Parking by the church at the base of the hill. Admission free. Open during daylight hours.

Inishowen Maritime Museum and Planetarium ★ MUSEUM/PLANETARIUM Overlooking Loch Foyle, this small but engaging museum packs all it can into the old coastguard building for the harbor town of Greencastle. It follows the town's maritime history from the Armadas of the 16th century, through emigration, to the modern-day lifeboat crews and their selflessly heroic work. In something of a contrast, there's also a planetarium, complete with recently renovated digital projection. Shows run on request during the winter (minimum group size is six), but more or less all day during summer— call to confirm times.

The Harbour, Greencastle, Co. Donegal. www.inishowenmaritime.com. © 074/938-1363. Museum only: €5 adults; €4 seniors and students; €3 children. Museum and planetarium: €10 adults; €8 seniors and students; €6 children. Easter-Sept Mon-Sat 9:30am-5:30pm, Sun noon-5:30pm; Oct-Easter Mon-Fri 9:15am-5:30pm. Last admission 30 min. before closing.

Malin Head (Cionn Mhélanna) ******* NATURE SITE Get this far, and you can say you've experienced Ireland more completely than all but a handful of visitors ever manage. On this stunning promontory, the road goes no farther, and the next stop west is New York. Even on a sunny day, the wind often howls and the temperature can be 10 degrees colder than it is just a few miles south. To reach Malin Head, take R242 north until it turns into a small, unnamed road. Following the few signs, meander past a small cluster of houses until you reach rocky Banba's Crown (Fiorcheann Éireann), the farthest point of the headland. Winds permitting, you can even wander down to the edge of the land and catch a glimpse of some old concrete huts built in World War II as lookout points. To the west of them is the dramatically named Hell's Hole, a natural land formation where waves crash deafeningly against the craggy shore. To the east, a path leads to a hermit's cave known as the Wee House of Malin. There's a little information board that explains all this-but you may be too busy gazing at the incredible view to notice.

Ballyhillin, Co. Donegal.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

BEACHES Ballyliffin, Buncrana, Greencastle, and Moville have safe, sandy beaches ideal for swimming or strolling.

BIRD-WATCHING Malin Head is a good site for watching migrating species in late autumn.

The Inishowen is a major center for golf in Ireland, and it has four 18-hole golf courses. Two GOLF are at the Ballyliffin Golf Club, Ballyliffin, Co. Donegal (www.ballyliffingolfclub.com; @ 074/937-**6119**). The "Old Links" is a par-71 course with greens fees of \in 50 to \in 80; the "Glashedy Links" course costs €50 to €100. The North West Golf Club, Fahan, Buncrana, Co. Donegal (www.northwestgolfclub.com; © 074/936-1027), founded in 1890, is a par-69 seaside course with greens fees of around €30 to €40. Greencastle Golf Course, Greencastle, Co. Donegal (www.greencastlegolfclub.com; @ 074/938-1013), is a par-69 parkland course with greens fees of around $\notin 25$ to $\notin 30$.

WATERSPORTS The Inishowen's long coastline, sandy beaches, and combination of open ocean and sheltered coves provide great opportunities for watersports. The northwest coast presents some of the most challenging surfing conditions in Europe. For general advice or specific information, contact the Irish Surfing Association, Easkey Surf and Information Centre in Easkey, Co. Sligo (© 096/49428).

Where to Stay on the Inishowen Peninsula

Ballyliffin Lodge $\star\star$ With impressive views of Malin Head $\star\star\star$ (see p. 487), this hotel is a relaxing place to stay. Bedrooms, which take full advantage of the gorgeous views, are nice and spacious, with muted, autumnal decor. The hotel can help organize plenty of activities, from horseback riding to surfing and golf. The in-house spa, Rock Crystal, provides a welcome respite at the end of a long day's travel, with prices that are a lot more reasonable than they would be in an equivalent place in a more visited part of the country. The in-house restaurant is good but pricey—a bowl of pasta with tomatoes and basil will set you back €16.

Shore Rd., Ballyliffin, Co. Donegal. www.ballyliffinlodge.com. Ø 074/937-8200. 40 units. €60-€216 double. Breakfast not included in lower rates. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; spa; gym; pool; Wi-Fi (free).

The Strand ★ Another place with views of Malin Head, this modest but friendly hotel also has

views of Pollan Strand, a 2-mile stretch of beach outside Ballyliffin. Accommodations aren't overly fancy, but they're modern and comfortable, with deep tubs in the bathrooms. Family rooms sleep up to four; one room is fully accessible for wheelchair users. The hotel often teams up with local golf courses to offer packages that include access to some of the area's most highly-rated links; check the website for those and other special deals.

Shore Rd., Ballyliffin, Co. Donegal. www.ballyliffinstrandhotel.com. **Ø** 074/937-6107. 21 units. €90–€110 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; Wi-Fi (free).

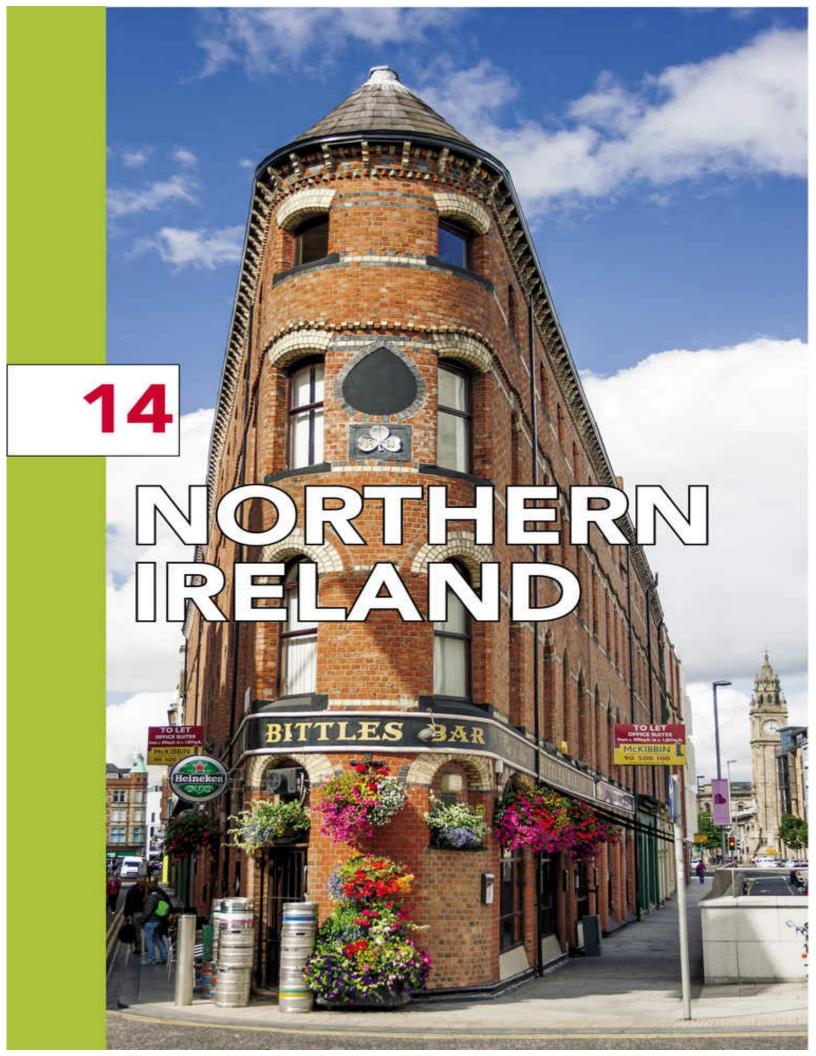
Where to Dine on the Inishowen Peninsula

The Drift Inn $\star\star$ IRISH/PUB FOOD You never quite know where you are with punning restaurant names, but this cheerful place in Buncrana can be forgiven a groan because of its top-quality pub food. There are plenty of names on the menu that you probably will have seen on signs while driving here, and that accounts for at least some of the freshness of the flavors too. You could opt for a slow roast lamb shank served with roast parsnips, or wild mushroom linguini. Disappointingly, they only serve food a few nights a week, although the pub itself is open daily. Buncrana is about 45 minutes south of Malin Head $\star\star\star$ (see p. 487).

Railway Rd., Buncrana, Co. Donegal. www.thedriftinn.ie. \bigcirc 074/936-1999. Main courses $\in 14-\in 20$. Thurs 5:30–8:30pm; Fri–Sat 1–9:15pm; Sun 1–8:30pm. Opening times can vary in winter; call to check.

Nancy's Barn \star CAFE With its red shutters and gray stone walls, this place looks so pretty from the outside on a sunny day, you may stop to take a picture and end up going inside for lunch out of curiosity. Fortunately, chances of disappointment are low—Nancy's serves fine sandwiches, toasties, salads, soups, and other light meals. They also bake their own cakes and scones.

On the main road through Ballyliffin, Co. Donegal. *©* 086/843-2897. Main courses €5–€13. Daily 10am–5pm.



Bittles Bar in Belfast.

The vibrant and beautiful six counties of Ireland still under British rule are all the more fascinating for their troubled history. Collectively they're known as Northern Ireland—although you'll hear terms such as "Ulster" and "the North" used interchangeably. This is a colorful, exciting region filled with lively towns and countryside of breathtaking beauty. Tourism numbers in Northern Ireland have increased greatly over the years since the peace agreement was signed in 1997, but it's still far less visited than the Republic. In some ways, that's its biggest selling point. You're likely to find yourself very welcome here—and, outside of the busy summer months, it's not uncommon to find yourself alone in the most spectacular places.

VISITING THE NORTH

Belfast and **Derry**, the North's only cities of any size, are both quite manageable and well worth visiting, with winding streets and grand historical monuments. But the main draw here is the magnificent countryside: the cool greens of the **Glens of Antrim**, the rugged **Mourne Mountains**, and the famously craggy coastline culminating in the extraordinary lunar **Giant's Causeway**. Driving through this region will reward you with breathtaking views and unexpected peace.

It's worth noting that, although the area is largely peaceful, the divisions remain deep. In the most intransigent communities, the lines of demarcation are as unshakable as they ever were. For that reason, it would be a unique visit that ignored politics entirely, whether it's the unforgiving murals in West Belfast or the strident graffiti that startles you in even the most bucolic village.

Is Northern Ireland Safe to Visit?

In short, **yes.** But you should still be aware. From a visitor's perspective, any violence here has always been remarkably contained. Belfast and Derry are safer for visitors than almost any comparable American city, and the Ulster countryside is idyllic and serene. Overall, Northern Ireland has one of the lowest crime rates in Europe. Nonetheless, you should follow these basic rules:

An Creagán Visitors' Centre 11 Andrew Jackson Cottage & U.S. Rangers Centre 41 Ards Peninsula 32 Armagh Astronomy Centre 17 Armagh County Museum 19 Beaghmore Stone Circles 12 Belleek Visitors Centre 5 Benburb Valley Park & Castle 15 Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge 46 Carrickfentus Castle 40 Carnlough 42 Castle Coole 6 Castle Espie Wetlands Centre 34 Castle Ward 30 Castlewellan Forest Park 25 Crom Estate 7 Cushendun 44 Devenish Island 4 Down Cathedral 28 Drum Manor Forest Park 13 Drumena Cashel 24 Dundrum Castle 26 Dunluce Castle 48 Enniskellen Castle 3 Florence Court 1 Giant's Causeway & Visitor Centre 49 Giant's Ring 37 The Glens of Antrim 43 Gortin Glen Forest Park 9 Greencastle Fort 20 Grey Abbey 33 Legananny Dolmen 27 Lough Neagh Discovery Centre 36 Marble Arch Caves 2 Mount Stewart House 39 Mourne Mountains 21 Navan Fort 16 Nendrum Monastic Site 35 Old Bushmills Distillery 47 Peatlands Park 14 Portaferry Castle 31 Silent Valley Mountain Park 22 Sperrin Heritage Centre 10 St. Patrick Centre/Down County Museum 29 St. Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral 18 St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Cathedral 18 Tollymore Forest Park 23 Torr Head Scenic Road 45 Rathlin Island Bird Sanctuary 50 Ulster Folk & Transport Museum 38 Ulster American Folk Park 8



CHOOSING sides: UNDERSTANDING NORTHERN IRELAND'S DIVISIONS

To understand Northern Ireland, you first must understand who is involved in the sectarian game. The battle between **Republicans** (those who believe the North should become part of the Republic of Ireland; also called Nationalists or "the Catholics," depending on who's talking), and the **Loyalists** (those who are loyal to the British crown and think the North should stay, as it is now, part of the United Kingdom; also called Unionists or "the Protestants") defines this region to this day. The problem is that both sides have splintered over the last decade, and so it's hard to keep up with who's who.

The Republicans are now divided among devotees of the IRA (the Irish Republican Army), the "Real" IRA (a splinter faction that branched off from the IRA), and Sinn Fein (also splintered from the IRA, and now its political face). Supporters for this side often have the green, white, and orange Irish flag hanging from their homes and businesses.

The Loyalists are divided among a variety of paramilitary groups, including the UDA (Ulster Defence Association), the UDF (Ulster Defence Force), and the UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force). Much of the violence in the last decade has been the result of turf wars between those Protestant groups. Supporters of that side often have the British Union Jack flag flying from their homes and businesses.

These days, many, though not all, of these groups are more involved in organized crime than political struggle, and all of them have sometimes been lumped together by pundits under the new term "Irish mafia." Such activities include drug dealing, importation and sales of illegal weaponry, and massive bank robberies (all of Northern Ireland's currency was withdrawn and reissued within 1 week after a 2005 bank heist of £22 million by a gang suspected to be connected with the IRA).

Most Irish people will tell you that they're sick of the lot of them—however, don't ask unless you know the person you're talking to really well. It's an extremely sensitive subject that should not be brought up casually. If you're really curious, take one of the superb **Black Taxi tours** $\star\star\star$ (see p. 503) and you can ask the brilliant and patient guides questions to your heart's content.

- Do not discuss the political situation with anyone you don't know well.
- Never get involved in political or religious arguments relating to Northern Ireland.
- Avoid venturing deep into the inner-city areas of Belfast without a guide.
- Always stay informed. Follow the news to keep abreast of current events and any likely trouble spots.

ESSENTIALS

Arriving

BY BUS Ulsterbus (www.translink.co.uk; © 028/9066-6630) runs buses from Dublin to Belfast and towns across Northern Ireland. From Dublin Airport, AirCoach (www.aircoach.ie; © 01/844-7118) runs a regular, non-stop service to Belfast. Round-trip tickets are £16. The journey time is just under 2 hours. In Belfast, the main bus station is Europa Bus Centre on Great Victoria Street.

BYTRAIN Belfast has two train stations: Great Victoria Street Station and Belfast Central Station on East Bridge Street. Contact Northern Ireland Railways (www.translink.co.uk; © 028/9066-6630) for tickets.

BY CAR Driving from Dublin to Belfast is easy; just go north up the M1 motorway. From Dublin airport the journey is about 90 minutes in good traffic. From Sligo Town take N16 and A4 west; from there it's 124 miles (200km), about $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

BY PLANE Belfast has two airports: Belfast International (www.belfastairport.com; © 028/9448-4848) and Belfast City Airport (www.belfastcityairport.com; © 028/9093-9093). United Airlines (www.united.com; © 1800/864-8331) runs one regular, direct flight to Belfast from North America. Aer Lingus (www.aerlingus.com; © 01/814-1111), British Airways (www.ba.com; © 189/0626-747 in Ireland, or 084/4493-0787 in the U.K.), and Easyjet (www.easyjet.com; © 084/3104-1000) operate regular scheduled flights from Britain to Belfast. You can fly direct to Belfast from several European cities.

[FastFACTS] NORTHERN IRELAND

ATMs/Banks ATMs aren't hard to come by in central Belfast; several banks are around Donegall Square, including Ulster Bank (© 028/9024-4112) and Bank of Ireland (© 028/9043-3420). In Enniskillen, Santander Bank, 4 Church St. (© 084/5765-4321) has an ATM. In Omagh, try HSBC, 1 Dublin Rd. (© 084/5740-4404). In Derry, try Santander on Shipquay St. (© 084/5765-4321).

Currency As part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland uses the **pound sterling**, not the euro. The cheapest way to get local currency is to use an ATM. The pound/euro exchange rate fluctuates as much as all major currencies, but in general it usually hovers around £0.70 to \in 1.

Dentists For dental emergencies, your hotel should contact a dentist for you. Otherwise, in Belfast contact Dublin Road Dental Practice, 23 Dublin Rd., BT2 7HB (© 028/9032-5345) or Lisburn Road Dental Clinic, 424 Lisburn Rd., BT9 6GN (© 028/9038-2262); in Derry, try Timber Quay Dental Practise, Timber Quay, BT48 7NR (© 028/7122-1098).

Doctors For medical emergencies dial **©** 999. For non-emergencies, your hotel should call you a doctor. Otherwise in Belfast, there's **Orme au Health Centre** (**©** 028/9032-6030); in Enniskillen, **Devenish Practise**, the Health Centre, Erne Rd., BT74 6NN); in Omagh, **Stule Medical Practise**, Mountjoy Rd., BT79 7BA (**©** 084/4477-3504); and in Derry, **Park Medical**, 49 Great James St., BT48 7DH (**©** 028/7137-8500).

Emergencies For police, fire, or other emergencies, dial @ 999.

Internet Access Free Wi-Fi is widely available in coffee shops, pubs, restaurants, and hotels throughout the region. In Belfast there's also Browsers Café, 77 Dublin Rd., BT2 7HF (© 028/9032-2272) and Abigail's, 140 Upper Lisburn Rd., BT10 0BG (© 028/9061-6825). In Derry try Café Connect, 49 Strand Rd., BT48 7BN (© 028/7137-2101).

Pharmacies Belfast has branches of Boots the Chemist at 35–47 Donegall Place, BT1 5AW (© 028/9024-2332) and Great Victoria St., BT2 7GN (© 028/9031-0530). In Omagh, try Bradley's Pharmacy, 84 Old Mountfield Rd., BT79 7ET © 028/8244-1373). In Enniskillen, look for Corry's Chemist, 15 Darling St., BT74 7DP (© 028/8167-1974). And in Derry, stop by the MediCare Pharmacy, 43 Great James St., BT48 7DF (© 028/7126-7004).

Post Offices Main branches in Belfast include 16-22 Bedford St., BT2 7FD and 12-14 Bridge St., BT1 1LS.

Taxis In Belfast you can catch a taxi at train stations, ports, airports, and the taxi stand in front of City Hall. Alternatively try Value Cabs (© 028/9080-9080), Courtesy Cabs (© 028/9002-9345), or Aldergrove Taxis (© 028/9433-0950). In Derry, taxi stands are at the Ulsterbus station, Foyle Street, and at the train station on Duke Street; alternatively call City Cabs (© 028/7126-4466) or Foyle Delta Cabs (© 028/7127-9999). In Enniskillen, try Diamond Cabs (© 028/6632-8484). In Omagh, try P&L Taxis (© 028/8224-1010). Out in the countryside, taxis are rarer—the best thing to do is ask for numbers from your hotel or at a pub. Most restaurants will call one for you.

BELFAST

Belfast is a lively, funky, and complicated town; a curious combination of faded grandeur and forward-looking optimism, complete with an artsy, edgy underbelly. Belfast boomed in the 19th century as prosperity flowed from its vast textile and shipbuilding industries. The 20th century was not so kind to the city, which spent many years in decline, but plenty of grand old Victorian buildings still reflect that time of wealth and power. Now the city's urban landscape is changing once again as the Titanic Quarter spurs development with sleek new museums and modern visitor attractions.

Visitor Information

The main tourist information center for the city is the **Belfast Welcome Centre** at 37 Donegall Place, BT1 5AD (www.visit-belfast.com; © 028/9024-6609). They can help book accommodations in the

city, and they also have a bureau de change and left luggage facility. Smaller visitor information points are at Belfast International Airport (© 028/9448-4677) and George Best Belfast City Airport (© 028/9093-5372).



Belfast's City Hall on Donegall Square.

City Layout

Small and easily traversed, central Belfast is best explored by **walking.** The main tourist districts are as follows.

CITY CENTER Spreads out from around the impressive, domed City Hall building and bustling Donegall Square. This is the best place for shopping, particularly along **Donegall Place**, which extends north from the square, onto **Royal Avenue**. Bedford Street, which travels south from the Donegall Square, becomes Dublin Road, which, in turn, becomes:

UNIVERSITY QUARTER The leafy area around Queen's University. This is where you'll find the Botanic Gardens, art galleries, and museums, as well as a buzzing nightlife scene.

CATHEDRAL QUARTER North of Donegall Square, surrounding Donegall Street. This area holds, as the name implies, the city's most important cathedrals, as well as many vast Victorian warehouses.

GOLDEN MILE The area around Great Victoria Street beyond Bradbury Place. It's considered the city's best address for restaurants and pubs, although it's a bit hyperbolically named. As one local

said to us, "It's not a mile and it's not golden. But it's nice enough."

TITANIC QUARTER A series of big commercial developments around Belfast Harbour, to the northeast of the city center. This is where you'll find many of the city's biggest new purpose-built attractions.

THE history **OF THE TROUBLES**

The strife in Northern Ireland can be traced back 800 years, to the 12th-century English invasion led by the Earl of Pembroke, known to all as "Strongbow." From then on, over centuries, the British waged a largely futile effort to make Ireland, and the Irish, British. Their tactics included outlawing the Irish language, banning Catholicism, and barring Catholics from land ownership. Finally, in the mid-1600s, Oliver Cromwell's New Model Army went for the more basic approach of total domination. Many Irish men, women, and children were killed. British families were brought over to take Irish land—essentially, physically replacing Irish Catholics with British Protestants. The descendants of those British settlers, generally speaking, form the Protestant population of Northern Ireland today.

After centuries of struggle, Ireland finally won independence of a sort from Britain in 1921. After much fighting, it was decided that the island would be divided. Twenty-six Irish counties would form an independent "Free State" (now the Republic of Ireland), while six counties in the Ulster province with predominantly Protestant populations would remain part of the United Kingdom, as Northern Ireland.

After the division, the British police and the government in Ulster were quite brutal toward the Catholic minority. Things came to a head in the late 1960s when the Catholic population began an intense civil rights campaign. Their marches and demonstrations were crushed by the authorities, sometimes with disproportionate levels of violence, thus setting the stage for the reemergence of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), a violent paramilitary group that had first appeared early in the 20th century. After the infamous "Bloody Sunday" massacre in 1971, when the British army opened fire on a peaceful protest in Derry (see p. 547), the IRA began a campaign of bombs targeted at civilians on the British mainland.

The struggle continued for decades, until a peace agreement was negotiated, under the leadership of US President Bill Clinton, in 1997. Although this agreement—the so-called "Good Friday Agreement"—didn't end all political and religious violence, it did change the atmosphere considerably. Despite sporadic incidents, the region remains at peace.

Getting Around

Metro (www.translink.co.uk; © 028/9066-6630) is the local bus service provider in Belfast. Buses depart from Donegall Square East, West, and North, plus Upper Queen Street, Wellington Place, Chichester Street, and Castle Street, and from bus stops throughout the city. An information kiosk is located on Donegall Square West, and you can download timetables from the website.

If you've brought a **car** into Belfast, it's best to leave it parked and take public transportation or walk around the city. If you must drive and want to park your car downtown, look for a blue p sign that shows a parking lot or a parking area. Belfast has a number of "control zones," indicated by a pink-and-yellow sign, where no parking is permitted. In general, on-street parking is limited to an area behind City Hall (south side), Belfast (St. Anne's) Cathedral (north side), and around Queen's University and Ulster Museum.



Giant's Causeway in North Antrim.

Taxis are available at all main rail stations, ports, and airports, and in front of City Hall. Most metered taxis are London-type black cabs with a yellow disk on the window. Other taxis may not have meters, so you should ask in advance what the fare to your destination will be.

Exploring Belfast

Belfast's wealthy past has left the city with some handsome industrial remnants. However, it's the more troubled, 20th-century Belfast that many visitors find most intriguing, and a **Black Taxi Tour** $\star\star\star$ (see p. 503) is a unique way to explore that history. Meanwhile, a whole new mini-industry has sprung up here with a tranche of attractions related to the most famous shipwreck in history. Because the SS Titanic was built in Belfast—a curious symbol of pride for natives of this city—shipwreck afiocionados (aka "Titanoraks") are being drawn by the bold new **Titanic Belfast** museum and the **Titanic Dock and Pump House** into the newly regenerated harbor district.

Belfast Botanic Gardens & Palm House ★ GARDENS Dating from 1828, these gardens were established by the Belfast Botanic and Horticultural Society. Ten years later, they gained a glass house, or conservatory, designed by noted Belfast architect Charles Lanyon. Now known as the Palm

House, this unique structure contains an excellent variety of tropical plants, including sugar cane, coffee, cinnamon, banana, aloe, ivory nut, rubber, bamboo, guava, and spindly birds of paradise. If the weather's fine, stroll in the outdoor rose gardens that date back to 1927. Festivals and other special events are occasionally held here; check local listings for details.

College Park, Botanic Avenue, Belfast, BT7 1LP. © 028/9031-4762. Free admission. Palm House and Tropical Ravine Apr–Sept Mon–Fri daily 1–5pm; Oct–Mar daily 1–4pm. Gardens daily 7:30am–sunset.



Belfast Botanic Gardens.

Belfast Castle \star CASTLE Northwest of downtown and 120m (394 ft.) above sea level stands Belfast Castle, its 80-hectare (198-acre) estate spreading down the slopes of Cave Hill. Dating from 1870, this was the family residence of the third marquis of Donegall, and it was built in the style of Britain's Balmoral castle. The outside is more interesting than the inside, which has been sadly modernized over the years and is now a popular wedding venue. The estate, though, is a lovely place to visit, offering sweeping views of Belfast and the lough. Its cellars contain a nifty Victorian arcade, a restaurant (open 11am–5pm Wed–Mon, and 11am–9pm Tues), and a shop selling antiques and crafts. According to legend, a white cat brough the castle residents luck, so look around for carvings featuring this much-loved feline. This is also the location of the **Cave Hill Country Park** $\star\star$ visitor center (see p. 504).

Signposted off Antrim Rd., 2¹/₂ miles (4km) north of the city center, Belfast, BT15 5GR. www.belfastcastle.co.uk. @ 028/9077-6925.

Free admission and parking. Mon-Sat 9am-10pm; Sun 9am-6pm.



VISITING NORTHERN IRELAND: f.a.q.

What's the border crossing like?

Aside from crossing a line on a map, there isn't one. Sometimes it's hard to know you've even moved from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland. The only immediate difference you are likely to notice is that the road signs change.

Will I need a passport?

You don't need a passport or a separate visa when crossing between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Is driving in Northern Ireland the same?

Broadly speaking, yes, but with one major difference: road signs in Northern Ireland show **miles**, not kilometers. Signs around the border usually show both. Don't forget to check that your travel insurance and any car-rental agreements are equally valid in Northern Ireland.

Does Northern Ireland use the euro?

No. The currency in Northern Ireland is the **British pound (sterling).** In practice, euros are accepted in some border areas, major tourist attractions, and hotels; however, you will almost always be given change in pounds. ATMs are the easiest and cheapest way to get currency.

What are those letters and numbers at the end of Northern Irish addresses?

They're British-style postcodes (zip codes). Postcodes are still in the process of being introduced to the Republic, but almost every address in Northern Ireland has one. This is actually a big advantage if you're driving, as it makes GPS navigation much easier. Where possible, we've included postcodes for all the listings in this chapter.

Any other tips?

Your mobile phone company will treat Northern Ireland as the U.K., so inform them in advance if you think you'll be crossing the border. This might avoid higher international roaming charges.

Belfast Cathedral \star CATHEDRAL The foundation stone on this monumental cathedral, also known as **St. Anne's**, was laid in 1899. It remained incomplete for more than a century; even now it still awaits a steeple. Crisscrossing architectural genres from Romanesque to Victorian to modern, the huge structure is more attractive inside than out. In the nave, the ceiling soars above black-and-white marble walls and stone floors, and elaborate stained-glass windows flood it with color on a sunny day. Carvings that represent life in Belfast top the 10 pillars. The cathedral's most impressive features are the delicate mosaic ceilings of the tympanum, and a baptistery constructed of thousands of pieces of glass.

Donegall St., Belfast, BT1 2HB. www.belfastcathedral.org. © 028/9032-8332. Free admission (£2 donation requested). Mon–Sat 8am–6pm; Sun 8–11am, 12:30–4pm.

Belfast Zoo \star ZOO In a picturesque mountain park on the slopes of Cave Hill just outside of town, overlooking the city, this zoo emphasizes conservation and education. Many rare species are bred here, including Hawaiian geese, lowland gorillas, red lechwe (a kind of antelope), sea bears, Barbary lions, and golden lion tamarins. The Rainforest House is a tropical environment filled with birds and jungle creatures. Special tours and events run all year. Most activity days are quite kid-oriented, although there are some more grown-up events too, such as all-day photography competitions. Check the website for up-to-date listings.

Antrim Rd., Belfast, BT36 7PN. www.belfastzoo.co.uk. **© 028/9077-6277.** Admission £8.50 adults; £4.25 seniors, students and children; £23 families. Apr–Sept Mon–Fri 10am–6pm; Sat–Sun 10am–7pm (last admission 5pm, animal houses close 6pm). Oct–Mar daily 10am–4pm (last admission 2:30pm, animal houses close 3:30pm).

Black Taxi Tour ******* TOUR For many years, Belfast was best known for its most conflicted neighborhoods, where in the 1970s and '80s protest and violence occurred daily. Peace has

(precariously) held on the Catholic Falls Road and its nearby parallel, the Protestant Shankill Road, for nearly 15 years, so it's finally safe to visit these once-troubled areas. A growing industry supports this new tourism initiative, with the Black Taxi Tour by far the best option. Tours are conducted in London-style cabs that take you through the neighborhoods, past the barbed wire, towering dividing walls, and partisan murals, as guides explain their significance. Drivers, who are all locals, are relaxed, patient, and unbiased, with a talent for explaining this complicated history to outsiders in an easy and engaging way. Tours aren't just limited to politics; the guides will also take you to see the Titanic shipyard and other parts of the city if you wish. Just ask when you book. The standard tour lasts about 90 minutes, and guides will pick you up and drop you off anywhere in the city. Belfast. www.belfasttours.com. **@ 028/9064-2264.** £25 for up to 2 passengers, then £10 for each additional passenger, up to 6 people.



Black Taxi Tours transport visitors safely through formerly troubled neighborhoods to see the Bogside Murals.

Cave Hill Country Park ** PARK Atop a 360m (1,181-ft.) basalt cliff, this park offers panoramic views, walking trails, and archaeological and historical sights. Its name derives from five small caves thought to have been Neolithic iron mines; several other ancient sites are scattered about the place, often unmarked. These include stone cairns, dolmens, and **McArt's Fort**—the remains of an ancient defensive hill fort in which Wolfe Tone and his fellow United Irishmen planned the 1798 rebellion. It's mostly gone now, but you can explore the ruins, which sit atop the park's most famous

viewpoint. The **Cave Hill Visitor Centre**, on the second floor of **Belfast Castle** \star (see p. 500), contains a diverting exhibition on the history of the park and the castle itself. You can also pick up maps of the park here. A great walk around the entire circuit of the park can be found on the website of Walk NI, a useful link set up to promote hiking in Northern Ireland. The route description, plus a handy map, can be downloaded from www.walkni.com/walks/79/cave-hill-country-park. It should be manageable for anyone of reasonable fitness, though it may be too challenging for children; ask for advice at the park visitor center before you set out.

Visitor Center: Belfast Castle, off Antrim Rd., 4 miles (6.5km) north of city center, Belfast, BT15 5GR. www.belfastcity.gov.uk/parksandopenspaces. © 028/9077-6925. Free admission. Visitor Center: Mon–Sat 9am–10pm; Sun 9am–5:30pm.

City Hall \star ARCHITECTURAL SITE This domed building of granite, marble, and stained glass dominates central Belfast, and stands as testament to the city's grand industrial past. Built in classical Renaissance style in 1906, it has white Portland stone walls and a soft green copper dome. Several statues dot the grounds, including a grim-faced Queen Victoria who stands out front, looking as if she wished she were anywhere else. Bronze figures around her represent the textile and shipbuilding industries that powered Belfast's success. There's also a memorial to the victims of the Titanic disaster. Inside the building, the elaborate entry hall is heavy with marble but lightened by stained glass and a rotunda with a painted ceiling. Somehow it all manages not to be tacky. Exhibitions are often displayed inside. To learn more about the building's history, take a free guided tour; call or ask in the lobby for details.

Donegall Sq. North, Belfast, BT1 5GS. **© 028/9027-0456.** Free admission. Guided tours Mon–Fri 11am, 2, 3pm; Sat 2, 3pm; otherwise by appointment.

the art of conflict: **BELFAST'S STREET MURALS**

Painted by amateur artists—albeit very talented ones—the huge street murals in West Belfast tell tales of history, strife, anger, or peace. The densest concentration is around the **Falls and Shankill roads**—the epicenter of the conflict during the Troubles, from the late 1960s to the mid-1990s. The Falls Road is staunchly Catholic and Republican (that is, those who want to see Ireland united as a single country). Shankill, just half a mile away, is resolutely Protestant and Loyalist (those who want Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom).

Although all are deeply political, there is a noticeable divide between the tones of the murals. Those on the Falls Road tend to be about solidarity with the downtrodden (and not just in Ireland—you'll see murals about war and oppression in other parts of the world too). On the corner of Falls Road and Sevastopol Street is the surprisingly small Sinn Fein headquarters. At one end of the building is a mural of the late hunger striker **Bobby Sands** (1954–81), arguably the most famous political mural in Ireland.

By contrast, the Shankill murals are more strident, featuring more violent and threatening imagery, although some of the most offensive were removed a few years ago by the government.

Locals in all districts are very proud of their murals and are fine with visitors taking photos. Still, you should exercise the usual caution you would in any rough city neighborhood. It's advisable to avoid these parts of town on **parade days**—ostensibly celebratory events, these tend toward displays of nationalism, erupting into street violence. The biggest, and most controversial, is the Protestant "Orange Order" parade on July 12th. Any parades likely to cause trouble are well covered by the local media, though, so it's easy to know when one is coming up.

The best, safest, and certainly the most informative way to see the murals is to take a **Black Taxi Tour** $\star\star\star$ (see p. 503). The tours are a real Belfast highlight, and could hardly be more convenient—the drivers will pick you up at your hotel and drop you off anywhere you like in the city.

Crown Liquor Saloon *** ARCHITECTURAL SITE/PUB Easily the most impressive Victorian pub in the city, and possibly the best building in Belfast, the Crown Liquor Saloon piles on the

atmosphere. The old "gin palace" owes its ornate appearance to Italian workers who had come to Ireland in the late 19th century to work on churches but ended up building this. Some of the finer features definitely have something ecclesiastical about them, from the stained glass in the windows to the pew-like "snugs," complete with elaborately carved doors designed to shield the more refined class of Victorians from their fellow drinkers. The floors are intricately tiled, and the ceiling is gorgeous hammered copper. This place was considered so important to the iconography of Belfast that it was actually bought for the nation by the National Trust in the 1970s, ensuring its impeccable upkeep while it continues to run as a working pub.

46 Great Victoria St., Belfast, BT2 7BA. www.nicholsonspubs.co.uk/thecrownliquorsaloonbelfast. © 028/9024-3187. Mon–Wed 11:30am–11pm; Thurs–Sat 11:30am–midnight; Sun 12:30–10pm.

Cultúrlann Macadam Ó Flaich \star CULTURAL CENTER Located in a former church building on the notorious Falls Road (a Republican stronghold during the Troubles), this cultural and arts center is a friendly, inclusive place. There's a handy cafe, a tourist information point, and a well-stocked shop, full of Irish interest books, traditional crafts, and music CDs. The **Dillon Gallery**, West Belfast's only public art gallery, showcases work by Irish artists, and those from farther afield. There's also a theater, with a varied program of traditional music, plays, spoken word events, and films. Check the website for listings.

216 Falls Rd., Belfast, BT12 6AH. www.culturlann.ie. **© 028/9096-4180.** Free admission. Mon–Thurs 9am–9pm; Fri–Sat 9am–6pm; Sun 11am–4pm.

Queen's University \star UNIVERSITY Founded during the reign of Queen Victoria in 1845 to provide nondenominational higher education, this is Northern Ireland's most prestigious university. The main, 19th-century Tudor revival building may remind you of England's Oxford, especially because its design was based on that of the Founder's Tower at Magdalen College. But there's much more to this university, which sprawls through 250 buildings and where 17,500 students are studying at any given time. The surrounding neighborhood is a quiet, attractive place to wander, and University Square on the north side of campus is simply beautiful. At one end of the square is the Union Theological College, dating from 1853, which housed the Northern Ireland Parliament after the partition of Ireland in 1921 until its abolition in 1972. Tours of the campus can be arranged on request; contact the university's welcome center for details. Access to parts of the campus may be restricted during exam times.

Queen's Welcome Centre, Queen's University, University Rd., Belfast, BT7 1NN. www.queenseventus.com/QueensWelcomeCentre. **028/9097-5252.** Free admission; tours £3.50 per person. Mon–Fri 9:30am–4:30pm; also Sat–Sun 11am–4pm during summer vacation.

St. George's Market ★ MARKET While this eclectic, iron-and-glass street market dates back to 1896, a market has been held on this spot for much longer. Friday is the **Variety Market**, packed with 250 stalls of fresh produce, antiques, clothing, and bric-a-brac. There's also a lively fishmarket that supplies many of the local restaurants. On Saturday the **City Food and Craft Market** specializes in artisan foods with plenty of tempting fresh snacks on offer, plus an assortment of local crafts. The **Sunday Market** is a happy combination of the two, although the balance tends to be in favor of crafts. May St. at Oxford St., Belfast, BT1 3NQ. **© 028/9043-5704.** Free admission. Fri 6am–2pm; Sat 9am–3pm; Sun 10am–4pm.



Queen's University in Belfast.

Titanic Belfast *** MUSEUM This ambitious new museum, which opened in 2012 to great fanfare, tells the story of the Titanic in revelatory detail. Located next to the site where the doomed vessel was constructed, the enormous angular frontage, clad in 2000 individual sheets of aluminum, juts out in four directions at the height of the ship's actual bow. The innovative design continues across nine well-laid-out galleries, covering everything from the *Titanic*'s construction to the triumphant launch, disastrous sinking, and the lasting cultural phenomenon that rose in her wake. A special ride takes you on a virtual tour of the shipyard to see how *Titanic* and her sister ship, *Olympic*, were built. In a split-level gallery you can even "explore" the wreck yourself, via huge high-definition screens and other interactive gizmos. Finally, the **Ocean Exploration Centre** takes the story into the 21st century with high-tech exhibits on the science of sea exploration, including a live link to an undersea probe. In truth, the content can sometimes feel stretched to fill the space, but it's all impressively done. Needless to say, an extremely well-stocked gift shop is at the end. Crowds can swell at busy times, so it's advisable to book ahead in summer.

1 Olympic Way, Belfast, BT3 9DP. www.titanicbelfast.com. \bigcirc 028/9076-6386. Admission £16 adults; £11 seniors-weekdays; £13 seniors-weekends; £11 students; £7 children 5–16; children 4 and under free; £39 families. Parking £1.50 per hr. for 1st hr., then £1 per hr. afterward. Apr-Sept daily 9am-7pm; Oct-Mar daily 10am-5pm. Last admission 1 hr. 40 min. before closing.

Titanic Boat Tour ***** TOUR Many of Belfast's historic shipyard buildings were demolished in the

early 2000s to make way for new development—a controversial move, but one that also opened up long-obscured views of the harbor from the river. This jaunty and informative boat trip takes you past many of them. Despite the opportunistic name, there really aren't that many *Titanic*-related sights left to see, but this is also a good introduction to Belfast's maritime past and a pleasant way to spend an hour. With typically dry Belfast wit, the crew t-shirts read, "She was alright when she left here." In summer, the tour goes as far as Musgrave Channel, home to a large breeding colony of seals. The departure point is on Donegall Quay, about 100m (330 ft.) to the left of the big fish sculpture.

The Obel, Donegall Quay, Belfast, BT3 3NG. www.laganboatcompany.com. **© 028/9024-0124.** Admission £10 adults; £8 seniors, students and children 6–16; children 5 and under free; £30 families. Tours daily 12:30, 2, 3:30pm (no 3:30pm tour in winter). Tours daily 12:30, 2, 3:30pm. (No 3:30pm tour in winter.)

Titanic Dock and Pump House $\star\star$ MUSEUM Another of Belfast's major ship-related attractions, this fascinating tour takes you around the dry docks at the old Harland and Wolff shipyard, where *Titanic* and *Olympic* were constructed from 1909–11. Designed to appeal to a general audience, not just enthusiasts, it's a great way to learn what it was really like to work here at the turn of the last century, when Belfast was one of the world's greatest industrial cities. The enormous Edwardian pump house, which could drain a staggering 21 million gallons of water in just over an hour and a half, is worth the price of admission by itself. An audio-visual room includes some rare film footage of the *Titanic* in situ at the dock. Fully guided versions of the tour take place daily at 3 and 4pm; if you want to join one of these, tickets cost a couple of pounds extra. The large visitor center also has plenty of interesting exhibits, a gift shop, and a cafe.

Queen's Rd., Queen's Island, Belfast, BT3 9DT. www.titanicsdock.com. **© 028/9073-7813.** Admission £5 adults; £4 seniors-weekdays; £4.50 seniors-weekends; £4 students; £3 children 5–16; children 4 and under free, £12 families. Mon-Thurs 10am-6pm, Fri 9:30am-6pm, Sat-Sun 10am-6pm.

JOINING THE national trust

Several of Ulster's best historic sites are managed by the **National Trust**, a not-for-profit organization that preserves thousands of buildings and areas of natural beauty across the U.K. (including Northern Ireland), keeping them accessible to the public. Taking out a yearly membership gives you unlimited free admission to all of them, which can work out cheaper if you plan to visit several. If you also happen to be visiting Britain on your trip, or within the same year, it could be a wise investment.

The current membership costs are £56 for individuals, £92 for couples, £26 for children, and £61 to £97 for families. You can sign up for membership at any National Trust property, or join in advance online at **www.nationaltrust.org.uk**.

Alternatively, American visitors can join the U.S. wing of the National Trust, the **Royal Oak Foundation**. Visit **www.royal-oak.org** or call © **212/480-2889** or for more information. Royal Oak members get the same benefits, plus money off lectures, tours, and other special events held in the U.S.

Ulster Museum *** MUSEUM One of Belfast's best museums, the Ulster Museum has a comprehensive collection of everything from dinosaur bones and prehistoric artifacts to art and other treasures from Ireland and around the world. Highlights include a collection of 16th- to 18th-century Dutch and Italian paintings; a hoard of priceless 16th-century Spanish jewelry, recovered off the coast near Belfast in the 1960s; clothes, textiles, and ceramics from Asia and Africa; and items relating to the Ascendancy, the period of Protestant rule in Ireland that finally came to a head with the rebellion of 1798. The collection of objects from the Classical world is particularly strong; the Life and Death in Ancient Egypt exhibit has about 2,000 artifacts from Pharaonic times (including a mummy), as well as items from ancient Mesopotamia, Rome, and Greece. The museum's calendar often has

special exhibitions, talks, and even the occasional concert; check the website to see what's on. At the Botanic Gardens, Belfast, BT9 5AB. www.nmni.com. © 028/9044-0000. Free admission. Tues–Sun 10am–5pm. Closed Mon (except Bank Holidays).



The Ulster Museum explores 9,000 years of Irish history.

W5 ★ SCIENCE CENTER This great, hands-on science play center for kids is part of the Odyssey Complex, a huge indoor arena on Queen's Quay that's bursting with activities. Properly known as "Whowhatwhenwherewhy"—you can see why they abbreviate it to W5—it's a high-tech, interactive learning environment. Kids can take part in over 250 individual activities, all in the spirit of science-based fun. They can do everything from create animated cartoons, try to beat a lie detector test, and

even present the weather on TV. There are also plenty of special events and temporary exhibitions. The Odyssey also contains a cinema, game arcades, and a sports arena.

2 Queen's Quay, BT3 9QQ. www.w5online.co.uk. **© 028/9046-7700.** Admission £8 adults; £6.50 seniors and students; £6 children; £22–£39 families. Mon–Sat 10am–6pm, Sun noon–6pm. Last admission 1 hr. before closing.

Day Trips from Belfast

Just outside Belfast off the M3 motorway, the castle town of **Carrickfergus** offers a nice break from the hustle and bustle of the city, and some fresh sea air. Locals like to say that Carrickfergus was thriving when Belfast was a sandbank, and looking around its winding medieval streets and traces of city walls, it's easy to believe. Even today, although the town spreads for several miles along the shore, the forbidding hulk of **Carrickfergus Castle** \star (see below) is still its center.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Lough, Cultra is a relatively nondescript residential suburb with one big attraction—the excellent **Ulster Folk & Transport Museum** $\star\star\star$ (see p. 511). And a short drive south of Belfast, the charming little town of **Downpatrick** (see p. 514) is a major destination for those with an interest in Ireland's patron saint.

Andrew Jackson Cottage and U.S. Rangers Centre ★ HISTORIC HOUSE This recreated 18thcentury dwelling is built in the style of cottages once lived in by Scotch-Irish settlers—including the ancestors of Andrew Jackson (1767–1845), the seventh President of the United States and the first President of Irish extraction. The cottage is restored to how it would have looked in the 1750s; also here is an exhibition devoted to the life of Jackson. Although it's a faithful reproduction, the house isn't the actual home of the Jacksons—that was demolished in the 19th century. Next door is a very small museum devoted to the U.S. Rangers, who were stationed in Carrickfergus during World War II. 2 Boneybefore, Carrickfergus, BT38 7EQ. © 028/9335-8049. Free admission. June–Sept Mon–Fri 10am–1pm; Sat–Sun 10am–1pm, 2– 6pm. Oct–May Fri–Sat 11am–3pm. Hours vary; call to check.

Carrickfergus Castle \star CASTLE This massive Norman castle, built in 1180 by John de Courcy, was Ireland's first real castle, built to loom darkly over the entrance to Belfast Lough. Centuries later, its defensive location would prove prophetic, as William of Orange landed here on June 1690 en route to the Battle of the Boyne. The central part dates to the 12th century, the thick outer walls were completed 100 years later, and the gun ports are a relatively new addition at only 400 years old. The outside is more impressive than the inside, which has been largely designed to inspire kids' imaginations, with a number of waxwork figures riding horses, threatening to shoot people over the walls, et cetera. Sometimes actors in medieval costume add a touch of hammy fun. The castle has a visitor center and a small museum. In the summer, medieval banquets, a medieval fair, and a crafts market all add a touch of play and pageantry.

Marine Highway, Carrickfergus, BT38 7BG. © 028/9335-1273. Admission £5 adults £3 seniors and children. Apr–Sept daily 10am–6pm; Oct–Mar daily 10am–4pm. Carrickfergus is on A2, 12 miles northeast of Belfast.



Carrickfergus Castle in Country Antrim.

Ulster Folk & Transport Museum *** HERITAGE SITE One of Northern Ireland's best living history museums, the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum is made up of buildings rescued from demolition and reconstructed, piece by piece. The majority of the buildings are from the 19th century; they include houses, schools, a chemist's shop, a pub, and even a working farm. The level of detail is impressive—the shops are fully decked out as they would have been in Victorian times, complete with shelves overflowing with authentic bottles, jars, and items of clothing. Costumed guides add to the sense of fun. As you wander about, you may encounter a Victorian housewife engaged in some day-to-day household drudgery or watch a village blacksmith working away in a forge using authentic methods from the period. Frequent special events include craft demonstrations and classes, horse-drawn vehicle days, or wildlife hunts. The Transport Museum contains a wealth of historic vehicles, from old cars and small planes to buses and trams.

Signposted off A2 (Bangor Rd.), Cultra, Hollywood, Co. Down, BT18 0EU. www.nmni.com/uftm. **© 028/9042-8428.** Folk or Transport Museum: £9 adults; £7 seniors and student; £5.50 children 5–17; children 4 and under free; £19–£25 families. Mar–Sept Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; Oct–Feb Tues–Fri 10am–4pm, Sat–Sun 11am–4pm. Closed Mon (except Bank Holidays).

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

CYCLING Cave Hill Country Park ****** (p. 504) has dedicated mountain bike trails. To hire a bike, contact Full Cycle, 387 Antrim Rd., Belfast, BT15 3BG (www.fullcyclebikeshop.co.uk; © 028/9074-

1569 or 0845/839-3280). Their service is pretty comprehensive, but they do insist that you make reservations at least 24 hours in advance, preferably a full week ahead.

FISHING The 5¹/₂-mile (9km) stretch of the Lagan River from the Stranmillis weir to Shaw's Bridge offers decent coarse fishing, especially on summer evenings. From May to July, Lough Neagh has good shore and boat fishing. For fishing equipment and contacts, try **Get Hooked**, 4 Woodbourne Crescent, Belfast, BT11 9PH (© 028/9062-3431). For info, tackle, and bait, there's the **Village Tackle Shop**, 55a Newtownbreda Rd., Belfast (www.villagetackleshopbelfast.co.uk; © 028/9049-1916).

GOLF The Belfast area offers four 18-hole courses within 3³/₄ miles (6km) of the city center. Some 3 miles (5km) southwest of the city, there's the **Balmoral Golf Club**, 518 Lisburn Rd., Belfast (www.balmoralgolf.com; © 028/9038-1514), with greens fees of £27 to £33. About 3³/₄ miles (6km) southwest of the city center you'll find the **Dunmurry Golf Club**, 91 Dunmurry Lane, Dunmurry, Belfast (www.dunmurrygolfclub.co.uk; © 028/9061-0834), which costs £30 to £32. About 3 miles (4.8km) south of the city center is the **Belvoir Park Golf Club**, 73 Church Rd., Newtownbreda, Belfast (www.belvoirparkgolfclub.com; © 028/9064-6714), £30 to £75; and 3 miles (4.8km) north, the Fortwilliam Golf Club, Downview Avenue, Belfast (www.fortwilliamgc.co.uk; © 028/9037-0770), £20 weekdays, £24 weekends (in truly old-fashioned style, women are charged a few pounds less). Weekdays are usually better for visitors, and each club has preferred weekdays. Phone ahead.

Where to Stay In & Around Belfast

Belfast's hotel scene has grown in leaps and bounds during the last few years. A decade ago, expecting to find a top-quality boutique hotel or B&B from £100 per room was a tough task; today, however, you have much more to choose from. Best of all, because Belfast is still developing as a major tourist destination, the prices are still relatively low—although depending on where you're from, that advantage can be quickly wiped out by the exchange rate, which is often more punishing to pounds than it is to euros.

EXPENSIVE

Europa Hotel ** For some time this has been a lodging of choice for big-name politicians, diplomats, and celebrities when visiting Belfast (Hilary Clinton stayed here a couple of years ago). The decor is subtly masculine; the lobby has marble floors with a modern gas fireplace to take the edge off the chill. Large guest rooms are contemporary in style, with comfortable beds and sizeable bathrooms. A little rubber ducky in a top hat is waiting for you as you enter the bathroom (you can take it home if you want). It's a nice touch and indicative of the attention to detail here. Downstairs is a piano bar and the laidback **Causerie** restaurant. Check the website for deals such as a theater package that includes tickets to the **Grand Opera House **** (see p. 523) and return train travel from Dublin, for around £100 per couple.

Great Victoria St. Belfast, BT2 7AP. www.hastingshotels.com/europa-belfast. **© 028/9027-1066.** 240 units. £75–£260 double; £500– £750 suite. Free parking. Breakfast not included in lower rates. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; room service; gym; Wi-Fi (free).

The Merchant Hotel *** One of Ireland's most luxurious hotels, the Merchant is a real treat. The Victorian building was once a bank, and the conversion is stunning, from the grand dining room (lacquered and gilded Corinthian columns, marble floors, ceiling friezes) to the elegant cocktail lounge (chandeliers and a gently curved, dark wood bar). Guest rooms are thoroughly modern, but ask for an Art Deco style room, as opposed to a traditional one—they're larger and better designed.

There's an excellent **spa**, complete with hydrotherapy pool and treatment rooms and even a hot tub on the roof with a lovely view over the city. The Great Room Restaurant serves top-notch modern Irish cuisine. Afternoon tea is also a bit of an event here, and popular, so it's advisable to book if you want to indulge. Service is impeccable. The staff could hardly be friendlier or more helpful.

16 Skipper St., Belfast, BT1 2DZ. www.themerchanthotel.com. **© 028/9023-4888.** 62 units. £160–£240 double; £220–£300 suite. Valet parking. Breakfast not included in lower rates. Dinner, bed and breakfast packages available. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; spa; gym; Wi-Fi (free).

MODERATE

Dunnanelly Country House *** This delightful country mansion is just outside Downpatrick, about 18 miles (29km) south of Belfast, but the half-hour or so it takes to drive here from the city is a small price to pay for such a relaxing location. The beautiful grounds stretch for miles. The decor inside mixes a feeling of history with a playful edge: traditional, Regency-style color schemes and furnishings, offset by pieces of modern art, an interesting sculpture, or (memorably) an antique rocking horse, complete with mouth open in an oh-so-happy-to-see-you grin. The guest rooms are thoughtfully designed with large, modern bathrooms and have lovely views of the estate that's just begging to be discovered on a gentle stroll or invigorating hike. And you may need that exercise to help work off the hearty and delicious breakfasts. Guests have the use of a conservatory, a sitting room, and a separate game room. There's no dinner, but the owners can cheerfully point you in the direction of the best local pubs. This is a truly idyllic retreat.

26 Rocks Chapel Rd., Downpatrick, Co. Down, BT30 9BA. www.dunnanellycountryhouse.com. **© 077/1277-9085.** 3 units. £100–£120 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. No children under 12 unless all 3 rooms booked by same group. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

DOWNPATRICK: sainted **TOWN**

The charming town of Downpatrick is closely identified with St. Patrick. Legend has it that when Patrick came to Ireland in AD. 432 to begin his missionary work, strong winds blew his boat here. He'd meant to sail up the coast to County Antrim, where as a young slave he had tended flocks on Slemish Mountain. Instead, he settled here and converted the local chieftain Dichu and his followers to Christianity. Over the next 30 years, Patrick roamed through Ireland carrying out his work, but this is where he died, and some believe he is buried in the graveyard of Downpatrick Cathedral, although there's no proof. Because of all of this, the town tends to be crowded, largely with Catholic pilgrims, around St. Patrick's Day.

Stop in first at the **Down County Museum**, The Mall, English St., BT30 6AH. Set in a converted jail, the museum tells the story of Down from the Stone Age to the present day. They also have an extremely flashy son et lumiere (sound and light) show, which is projected onto the old prison walls; and a handy tearoom. The museum opens weekdays from 10am to 5pm, and weekends from noon to 5pm.

Almost next door to the museum, at the end of the English Street cul-du-sac, is **Down Cathedral** (www.downcathedral.org; **O 028/4461-4922**). Excavations show that Downpatrick was a dún (or fort), perhaps as early as the Bronze Age, and its earliest structures were built on the site where this church now sits. Ancient fortifications ultimately gave way to a series of churches, each built atop the ruins of the previous incarnation, over 1,800 years. The current cathedral is an 18th- and 19th-century reconstruction of its 13th- and 16th-century predecessors. Just south of the cathedral stands a relatively recent monolith inscribed with the name "Patric." By some accounts, it roughly marks the grave of the saint, who is said to have died at Saul, 2 miles (3km) northeast. The tradition identifying this site as Patrick's grave seems to go back no further than the 12th century, though, when John de Courcy reputedly transferred the bones of saints Columba and Brigid to lie beside those of St. Patrick. The Cathedral is open to visitors Monday to Saturday from 9:30am to 4:30pm. Entry is free.

A 5-minute walk away Is **St. Patrick Centre**, 53A Market St., BT30 6LZ (www.saintpatrickcentre.com; **© 028/4461-9000**). Housed in a modern glass-and-steel building, the center tells the story of Ireland's patron saint, through high-tech displays and exhibits. There's also an exhibition devoted to the legacy of Irish missionaries who helped spread Christianity in Europe in the latter half of the first millennium. The center is open Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5pm; also Sunday 1 to 5pm in July and August. Entry costs £5.75 adults, £4 seniors and students, £3.50 children and £14 families.

Downpatrick is about 21 miles (34km) southeast of Belfast. To get there from the city by car take A24 then A7; the drive takes just under 40 minutes. Alternatively, you can get there by bus from the main Europa Bus Station on Great Victoria Street. The journey takes an hour.

INEXPENSIVE

The Guesthouse at Ballylagan Organic Farm $\star\star$ Ballylagan is a working, fully certified organic farm (the first in Northern Ireland, no less) and at the center of it all is this welcoming little 1840s farmhouse. The two-story grey-stone building is covered by lush vines, and looks as if it, too, has grown out of the landscape. Patricia and Tom Gilbert are passionate about what they do, and that ethos shines through, especially in the food. All breakfast ingredients are completely organic (of course), from the fresh-baked bread to the bacon and sausages at breakfast; home-cooked dinners can be provided too, if booked in advance. (They can't serve wine, due to licensing restrictions, but you're welcome to bring your own.) The guest rooms are in a separate building from the owners' home, giving everyone a bit of privacy. Bedrooms are painted in soothing colors, with modern prints on the wall. The rooms are large enough to easily fit a sofa and a couple of chairs in addition to the extremely comfortable beds, so you certainly won't feel cramped here. There's a guest lounge, where the owners will leave you tea and homemade cakes on your arrival. For an extra charge of £10 you can have the use of a wood-burning stove in your room. A quiet night's sleep is guaranteed. Ballyclare is about 13 miles (21km) north of Belfast.

12 Ballylagan Rd., Straid, Ballyclare, Belfast, BT39 9NF. www.ballylagan.com. © 028/9332-2129. 4 units. £95 double. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Malmaison Belfast ****** This is the only Irish outpost of Malmaison, a British mini-chain that

specializes in rescuing unusual historic buildings and turning them into hip boutique hotels. This one used to be a seed warehouse, of all things. It's a gorgeous 4-story building, with weathered stone walls and tall, arched windows. Inside, ceilings soar, and they've done beautiful things with the space, using a chic, playful design that retains some of the original industrial touches. Carpets are dark hued, and walls are painted in deep, matte hues of grey and dark blue, with steel girders left exposed here and there. Bedrooms are large, very quiet, and comfortable, each decorated in shades of taupe and gray, with low lighting, huge beds, and modern bathrooms—most have separate baths and showers. Breakfasts are large and varied. The in-house restaurant serves good, brasserie-style cooking (dinner, bed and breakfast packages are available) and there's a lively bar too.

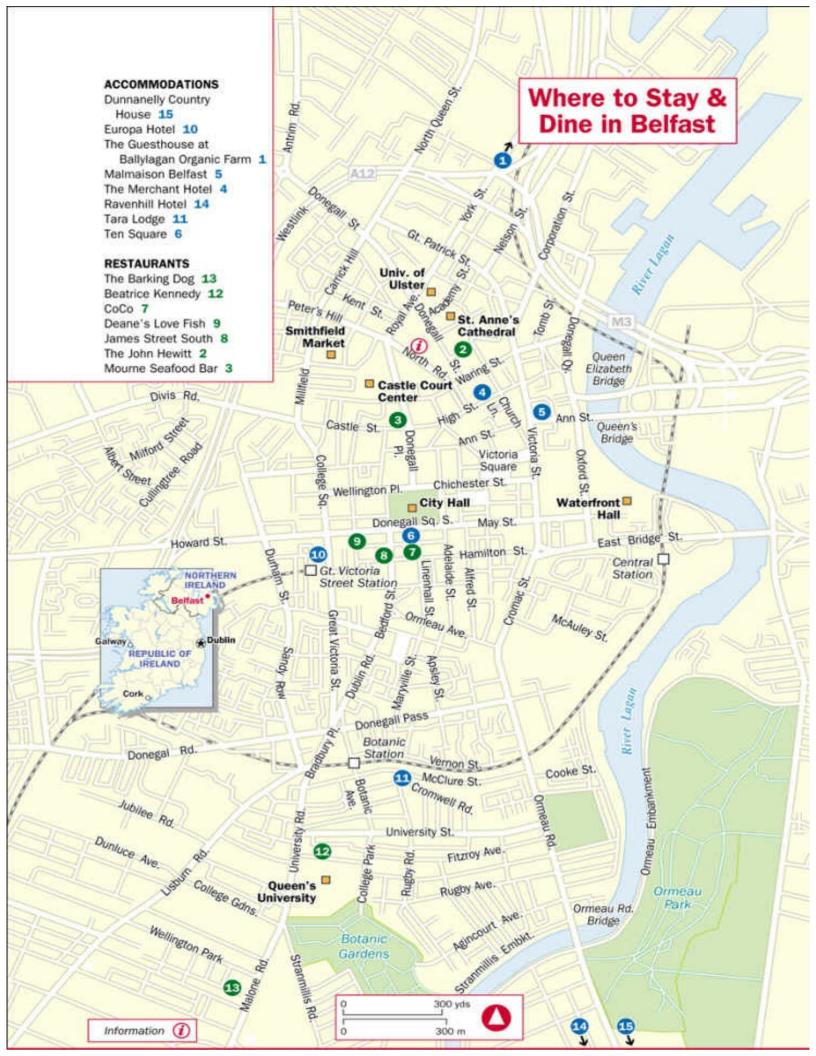
34-38 Victoria St., Belfast, BT1 3GH. www.malmaison.com/locations/belfast. 🖉 084/4693-0650. 64 units. £80-£145 double. Discounted parking at nearby lot (£10 per day). Breakfast not included in lower rates. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; gym; Wi-Fi (free).

Ravenhill Hotel ** A friendly welcome awaits from hosts Roger and Olive, whose handsome Victorian corner house has been converted into one of the best B&Bs in Belfast. They really know how to make guests feel at home, and nothing seems too much trouble. Bedrooms are simple but neat as a pin, with print fabrics and views of the street. You're in a residential area here, but not far from the action; the city center is about a 10-minute cab or bus ride. Roger cooks delicious breakfasts and guests can expect the full Ulster fry, in addition to a few options such as kippers with parsley butter and scrambled eggs. They also bake their own traditional Irish wheaten bread from scratch, even down to milling their own flour. At certain times of the year you can get a discount for stays of two nights or more. You'll be hard pressed to find a better or more hospitable B&B at this price.

690 Ravenhill Rd., Belfast, BT6 0BZ. www.ravenhillhouse.com. © 028/9020-7444. 5 units. £65-£90 double. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Tara Lodge \star When Tara Lodge opened in the mid-2000s, it was part of a new wave of modern, inexpensive, boutique-style small hotels in Belfast, a city where good budget accommodations were scarce. It has more competition these days, but Tara Lodge still manages to get everything just about right. Guest rooms are simple and contemporary in style, if perhaps a little small, but the beds are large and comfortable. Breakfasts are very good and offer plenty of choice. The **Botanic Gardens** \star (see p. 499) and **Ulster Museum** $\star \star \star$ (see p. 509) are about 10 minutes away on foot; you could walk to the city center in about 25 minutes, or it's a short cab ride. The hotel doesn't have a full restaurant, but breakfast is served every morning and there are plenty of good eateries within easy reach.

36 Cromwell Rd., Belfast, BT7 1JW. www.taralodge.com. © 028/9059-0900. 34 units. £83-£120 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).



The Red Hand of Ulster

Around Belfast and Northern Ireland, you'll frequently come across representations of a red hand. It's carved in doorframes, painted on walls and ceilings, and even planted in red flowers in gardens. Known as the Red Hand of Ulster, it is one of the symbols of the region. According to one version of the old tale, the hand can trace its history from a battle between two men competing to be king of Ulster. They held a race (some say by boat, others say it took place on horseback) and agreed that the first man to touch Ulster soil would win. As one man fell behind, he pulled his sword and cut off his right hand, then with his left, flung the bloody hand ahead of his competitor, winning the right to rule.

Ten Square \star This boutique hotel aims to emulate luxurious five-star hotels at a fraction of the cost. In a historic Belfast building minutes from all the sights, it's got a great look, with stone walls and tall arched windows. Bedrooms are small but chic, with low-slung, king-size beds draped in pure white linens. Mattresses are very firm. The overall feel is one of elegant minimalism. The hotel's Grill Room restaurant serves modern Irish cuisine with an emphasis on Irish meats, especially steak. The restaurant also serves afternoon tea, with all the extras. Service is efficient, and there are good discounts available online in advance.

10 Donegall Sq., Belfast, County Antrim. www.tensquare.co.uk. 🖉 028/9024-1001. 23 units. £70-£150 double. Rates include breakfast. Street parking only. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; Wi-Fi (free).

Where to Dine in Belfast

A prominent British journalist tells the story of ordering an Ulster fry in Belfast, sometime in the 1970s. "No sausage," he asked the waitress. When his food arrived, there were sausages on the plate. He sent it back, asking again for no sausage. But back it came, with sausages still there. "But I said no sausages," he complained. "Chef says sausage is compulsory," came the taciturn reply. Today the Belfast dining scene is, happily, much more cosmopolitan. The number of top restaurants in the city seems to increase year on year, from funky little gastropubs to chic fine dining.

The Barking Dog $\star\star$ IRISH/INTERNATIONAL There's something quintessentially Belfast about this place—quirky, artsy, lively, but ultimately no-nonsense. The dining room has a funky pub feel, complete with exposed brick and old candelabras balanced on battered wood tables. If you sit in the front garden, you're separated from the street by a fence with paw prints all over it. The menu is balanced and straightforward, with a juicy cheeseburger with fat French fries, for example, or a simple fish pie. Vegetarian choices are more than the usual "mushroom pie" variety—herb gnocchi and green beans, for example, or sweet potato ravioli. The selection of nibbles (a good value at five for £12) put a nicely Irish-style twist on tapas. There's a good lunch menu, and the Sunday brunch is popular.

33-35 Malone Rd., Belfast, BT9 6RU. www.barkingdogbelfast.com. **© 028/9066-1885.** Main courses £11–£24. Mon–Thurs noon–3pm, 5:30–10pm; Fri–Sat noon–3pm, 5:30–11pm; Sun noon–9pm. No children after 9pm.

Beatrice Kennedy \star IRISH This great little find in the heart of the University Quarter is great for traditional Irish cooking with a few modern flourishes. The dining room is quirky and small; maybe a little too much so, especially when it gets busy. Start with a scallop and crab carpaccio, or soup of the day, then tuck into a main of herb roast chicken, or duck with gnocchi and roasted pears. Desserts are mostly sweet comfort food—try the sticky toffee pudding if it's available. Early bird specials are a good value at £16 for two courses.

44 University Rd., Belfast, BT7 1NJ. www.beatricekennedyrestaurant.com. @ 028/9020-2290. Main courses £12-£20. Tues-Thurs 5-

9:30pm; Fri-Sat 5-10:30pm; Sun 12:30-2:30pm, 5-8:30pm.

CoCo ** MODERN EUROPEAN/INTERNATIONAL Coco's funky dining room is plastered in modern art along with posters and photo-collages that set the tone. The contemporary menu has an international flavor with flavors like goat-cheese fritters served with essence of bell pepper, lamb with merguez sausage and couscous, or Thai red chicken curry served with sticky rice and bok choi. The vegetarian menu is a pleasant surprise; try the "admiral pie" made with chili tofu, asparagus, sugar snap peas, and parsley cream. Prices are a little high for the evening service, but the three-course pre-theater menu is much more affordable at just £19. They also do a popular Sunday lunch. 7-11 Linenhall St., Belfast, BT2 8AA. www.cocobelfast.com. @ 028/9031-1150. Main courses £15-£24. Mon-Fri noon-3pm, 6pm-midnight; Sat 6pm-midnight; Sun midday-4pm.

Deane's Love Fish ** SEAFOOD Michael Deane is something of a local celebrity chef. Eipic, his flagship, formal restaurant on Howard Street, is known for very good Irish-French cuisine, but the adjacent Love Fish is equally good—and (even better) less expensive. Here you'll find plates such as salt-cod croquettes, tempura oysters, or crispy monkfish filet served with hot and sour peppers. After 10pm they do a late-night menu of nibbles and snacks (Stilton and poached pear salad; smoked salmon and crème fraiche; sardines on toast). Also here is the excellent Meat Locker, a laid-back grill where you can pick up a three-course pre-theater menu for an incredibly reasonable £23. Michael Deane now has several offshoots across Belfast, each cleverly going for a slightly different crowd, and sometimes sharing premises. There's the Deli-Bistro (© 028/9024-8800) and Deli/Vin Café (© 028/9024-8830), a tapas bar, on Bedford Street; while in the University Quarter, next to the Ulster Museum, is the informal bistro, Deanes at Queens (© 028/9038-2111). The newest addition to the mini-empire is his foray into Italian cooking, Deane & Decano (© 028/9066-3108), on Lisburn Road. *Tip:* Love Fish, Deane's Deli, Deanes at Queens, and Deane and Decano share one of Belfast's best lunch deals—main dishes for just £6.50.

36-40 Howard St., Belfast, BT1 6PF. www.michaeldeane.co.uk. 🖉 028/9033-1134. Main courses £7-£21. Mon-Sat noon-11pm; Sun 1-6pm.

James Street South *** MODERN IRISH One of Belfast's leading restaurants, James Street South has built a great reputation on interesting, modern Irish cuisine, with an inventive twist. The food is indeed outstanding; you could start with some crispy mackerel with rosewater cucumber, or goat-cheese mousse, followed by beef filet with smoked butter potatoes, or monkfish with apples and eggplant. Desserts could include a deliciously sweet chocolate clafoutis with praline ice cream. Prices are surprisingly reasonable. A tasting menu is compact and interesting (£45 for four courses, or £65 with paired wines).

21 James St. South, Belfast, BT2 7GA. www.jamesstreetsouth.co.uk. 🖉 028/9043-4310. Main courses £16-£21. Mon-Sat noon-2:30pm, 5:30-10:30pm.

The John Hewitt \star IRISH/INTERNATIONAL Near the Cathedral, this atmospheric bar is a popular hangout with locals. The gastropub-style lunch menu is a real crowd pleaser, serving items like soup of the day with crusty bread, crispy squid with coriander (cilantro) rice, and a steak and onion sandwich made with Italian-style ciabatta bread and served with garlic butter. They don't serve food in the evenings or any time on Sundays, but you may still want to drop by—the John Hewitt is one of the best spots in the city for live music, with bands every night from 9:30pm or 5:30pm on Saturday. Admission to gigs is usually free.

51 Donegall St., Belfast, BT1 2FH. www.thejohnhewitt.com. © 028/9023-3768. Main courses £4–£9. Mon–Fri 11:30am–1am; Sat noon–1am; Sun 7pm–midnight. (Food served Mon–Sat noon–3pm.)

Mourne Seafood Bar *** SEAFOOD This is one of the best places in Belfast for top quality seafood. The dining room has a pleasingly casual air—this is a seafood bar after all—but the food speaks entirely for itself. Oysters are a specialty, served traditionally, with Tabasco and lemon, or in more elaborate ways, such as with pickled ginger and soy dressing. Alternatively, you could go for some crab claws with chili butter to start, before moving on to one of the fresh daily specials like seared scallops with pea risotto. The atmosphere is relaxed and convivial, and the prices are thoroughly reasonable for food this good. They don't take reservations at lunchtime, but evening booking is essential.

34-36 Bank St., Belfast, BT1 1HL. www.mourneseafood.com. © 028/9024-8544. Main courses £9–£20. Mon–Thurs noon–9:30pm; Fri, Sat noon–4pm, 5–10:30pm; Sun 1–6pm.

Shopping

Belfast is a surprisingly good place to shop. Start at Donegall Place, where the streets are lined with shops and the Victorian arcades are filled with gift and jewelry stores. Good buys are to be had on Belleek china, linen, and crystal from County Tyrone. Shops are typically open weekdays from 9 or 9:30am to 5 or 5:30pm, and open later on weekends.

The main shopping street is **Royal Avenue**, home of several well-known chain stores, while the **Westfield Castlecourt Shopping Centre** on Royal Avenue and the glass-domed **Victoria Square** shopping center are Belfast's main downtown multistory shopping malls.

In addition to the selection below, don't forget to check out the lively and eclectic St. George's Market \star (p. 506).

ANTIQUES

Archive's Antiques Centre ★ Several dealers sell their wares at this sprawling center, with specialists in everything from silverware to pub memorabilia and militaria. 88 Donegall Pass, Belfast, BT7 1BX. www.archivesantiquecentre.co.uk. © 028/9023-2383.

Oakland Antiques ** This enormous antiques emporium specializes in furniture, glassware, and other household items from the 18th to early 20th centuries. 135 Donegall Pass, BT7 1DS. www.oaklandantiques.co.uk. © 028/9023-0176.

BOOKS & STATIONERY

Kozo Paper $\star\star$ A popular entry in the little black books of wedding planners all over Ireland, this great little store specializes in wedding invitations, but they also sell stationery for other occasions, including notebooks and other papery delights. Check out their beautiful stationery from Japan and other parts of Asia. 18 North St., Belfast, BT1 1LA. © 028/9033-2321.

No Alibis ** Here's a mystery to solve. You walk into this independent bookstore empty handed and come out carrying a bag filled with books and a lighter wallet. What happened in there? J'accuse No Alibis, with its excellent stock devoted to crime fiction from all over the world. You think your sweet little cafe out back will save you? No chance. You are guilty as charged. 83 Botanic Ave., Belfast, BT7 1JL. www.noalibis.com. © 028/9031-9601.

CRAFTS, DESIGN & HOMEWARE

Coppermoon $\star\star\star$ A madly creative little boutique, Coppermoon sells one-of-a-kind art and gorgeous little knick-knacks. Plenty of local designers get good representation, including makers of bags and accessories; funky, Steampunk-style jewelry; glass and ceramics; and quirky pieces of homeware, from lampshades made of bottles to wittily embroidered pillows. They also create

beautiful, individually designed cards. 3 Wellington St., Belfast, BT1 6HT. www.coppermoon.co.uk. \bigcirc 028/9023-5325. The Wicker Man ****** Don't be put off by how humdrum this place looks from the outside; within lies an inventive selection of crafts, art, and other souvenirs, from clocks and jewelry to bath products and musical instruments. This is one of the best places to shop for gifts in Belfast. 44–46 High St., Belfast, BT1 2BE. www.thewickerman.co.uk. \bigcirc 028/9024-3550.

FASHION & CLOTHING

The Bureau ** When this place opened in the late 1980s, it was something of a harbinger of the modern, cultured city Belfast would slowly become in the 1990s and 2000s. Today it remains one of the major men's fashion boutiques in the city, selling a fantastic range of clothes and footwear from its airy, stylish new shop on Newtownards Road, east of the Titanic Quarter. Portview, 310 Newtownards Rd., Belfast. www.thebureaubelfast.com. © 028/9046-0190.

Rojo $\star\star$ This place is an absolute must for the well-heeled woman. Rojo specializes in women's shoes and boots, from a wide selection of top designers. They also sell beautiful purses, handbags, and other accessories. It isn't cheap, but the range is second to none in the city. 613 Lisburn Way, Belfast, BT9 7GT. www.rojoshoes.co.uk. © 028/9066-6998.

The Rusty Zip $\star\star$ Hipster heaven! Lovers of vintage style will fall for this place instantly, with its stock of retro items from the 60s, 70s, and 80s—though a few togs can usually be found from earlier decades too. The menswear is fab, but the selection of women's clothes and boots is truly groovy. 28 Botanic Ave., Belfast, BT7 1JQ. www.therustyzip.com. © 028/9024-9700.

JEWELRY

Frank and Carmel Alexander ** These wonderful designers sell beautiful and unique pieces from their little store on Great Victoria Street. They make all sorts of rings, necklaces, and other pieces, but their range featuring moonstones set with silver are particularly beautiful. 117A Great Victoria St., Belfast, BT2 7AH. © 028/9032-4010.

The Steensons *** This long-established showroom sells an outstanding collection of gold and silver jewelry. Most of what's on sale are their own designs, although they sell work by other top Irish designers too. They are also known for their beautiful pieces made for the TV series *Game of Thrones*, which is filmed in Northern Ireland (see box p. 527). Among their most popular lines are some elegant and tasteful limited edition pieces launched to commemorate the Titanic—the owner's grandfather was a crewmember on board. The showroom is behind Belfast City Hall. They also have a second branch on Toberwine Street in Glenarm, County Antrim (© 028/2884-1445). Bedford St., Belfast, BT2 7FD. www.thesteensons.com. © 028/9024-8269.

Belfast After Dark

Belfast has a plethora of historic pubs where the crowds tend to be local and friendly, but the big news here in recent years has been its fast-growing scene of late-night bars geared toward the young and trendy. These hotspots are mostly clustered in the University Quarter, while the pubs are spread around town. If you're drawn to traditional pubs, several of the best are tucked away in the pedestrian lanes off Donegall Place. The licensing laws in Northern Ireland aren't as notoriously strict as they used to be. Pub hours are generally Monday to Saturday from 11:30am to 11pm and Sunday from 12:30 to 2:30pm and from 7 to 10pm, although some open until 1am, especially on Friday and Saturday; bars stay open later. Nightclubs tend not to get busy until after the pubs close; admission ranges from a few pounds to about £15.

BARS & CLUBS

Apartment ******* This glamorous cocktail bar has a fantastic view of Belfast City Hall. It's popular with a young and sophisticated crowd, drawn by the top DJs (from about 9:30pm on weekend nights) and the excellent cocktail list. They also serve good food. 2 Donegal Sq. West, Belfast, BT1 6JA. www.apartmentbelfast.com. © 028/9050-9777.

Café Vaudeville ** Dripping with Gilded Age glamor, this luxurious bar is a pleasant café during the day; at night, come for dinner or drinks, while you listen to an old-school swing band or cabaret chanteuse—particularly on Fridays, when there's a regular Vaudeville slot. Reservations are advisable on weekends. 25–39 Arthur St., Belfast, BT1 4GA. www.cafevaudeville.com. © 028/9043-9160.

THE PERFORMING ARTS

Belfast Empire ★ This former music hall is now one of the city's busiest live venues, with live acts most Fridays and Saturdays (some big names, mostly of an indie/alternative variety) and standup comedy every Tuesday. It's also a busy bar and nightclub, open until 1am every night except Sunday. 42 Botanic Ave., Belfast, BT1 1JQ. www.thebelfastempire.com. © 028/9024-9276.

Black Box \star This eclectic venue has a great program of theater, spoken word, cabaret, and other live events. They also have exhibition spaces, where something interesting in the worlds of photography and visual art always seems to be going on. From Thursday to Saturday nights (and Sun afternoons in summer), the Green Room bar opens for pizza, beer, and free, live music. The slightly bohemian crowd is a great mix of ages, and the music a similarly mixed bag of styles. 18–22 Hill St., Belfast, BT1 2LA. www.blackboxbelfast.com. © 028/9024-4400.

Grand Opera House ** One of the main landmarks of Belfast's "Golden Mile," the Grand Opera House opened in 1895. The interior is full of late-Victorian detail, including a grand auditorium, complete with an elaborately painted frieze on the high ceiling. Severely damaged twice by IRA bombs, it underwent a full restoration in the mid-2000s that returned the place to its former glory. Today it continues to be a cornerstone of the Belfast live arts scene with a tremendous variety of shows, from touring plays, ballet, and opera to big-ticket musicals, concerts, and standup comedy. Ticket prices vary greatly, but expect to pay between £15 and £30 for most shows. Check the website for a detailed listing of what's on. 2–4 Great Victoria St., Belfast, BT2 7HR. www.goh.co.uk. **@ 028/9024-1919**.

Lyric Theatre ****** The Lyric is a highly respected repertory theater (the only one in Northern Ireland), producing original work and hosting a varied program of touring plays all year. Ticket prices vary, but are generally between about £10 and £25. In 2011, the Lyric played a walk-on part in history, when it was the venue for a meeting between the Queen and Martin McGuinness (the former IRA commander, now Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland). 55 Ridgeway St., Belfast, BT9 5FP. www.lyrictheatre.co.uk. © 028/9038-1081.

PUBS

Crown Liquor Saloon *** There's a very real possibility that this impeccably restored Victorian "gin palace" is the most handsome pub in the world. See full review on p. 505. 46 Great Victoria St., Belfast, BT2 7BA. www.nicholsonspubs.co.uk/thecrownliquorsaloonbelfast. **© 028/9024-3187.**

Kelly's Cellars $\star\star$ One of a couple of claimants to the title of Belfast's oldest pub, Kelly's Cellars certainly looks the part, with low doorways and an appealingly mismatched selection of vintage fishing nets, lanterns, and other bric-a-brac hanging from the high-beamed ceiling. It's particularly well known today as one of the best pubs in Belfast for live, traditional music; sessions are usually

held from Tuesday to Thursday at 8:30pm, Saturday at 4:30pm, and can last several hours. 30–32 Bank St., Belfast, BT1 1HL. www.kellyscellars.com. © 028/9024-6058.

The Morning Star \star Another lovely, traditional pub, the Morning Star has been in business since at least 1810. The name supposedly comes from the fact that it was once next to a stagecoach terminus; the story goes that carriages would arrive here at the crack of dawn, and customers would head straight inside for a pick-me-up. The pub is famously hard to find: Pottinger's Entry is a small, pedestrian-only alleyway off High Street, across from the post office; you can spot it by the iron arch over the entrance. 17–19 Pottinger's Entry, Belfast. www.themorningstarbar.com. © 028/9023-5986.

White's Tavern \star White's Tavern has been serving liquor since 1630, which makes it an even older establishment than all of the above (though not necessarily the oldest pub, exactly, as it began life as a wine shop—hence the dispute). It was renovated in 2014 to keep it looking . . . well, decidedly not new, but that's exactly why people love the place. The decor is all old whiskey bottles and vintage photos, which just adds to the satisfyingly old-world atmosphere. Things are somewhat more contemporary in the upstairs bar on Saturday night, when it transforms into a nightclub called **Sore Feet** (admission £5). The entrance to Winecellar Entry is between High and Rosemary Streets. 2–4 Winecellar Entry, Belfast, BT1 1QN. © 028/9031-2582.



The Crown Liquor Saloon in Belfast, a National Trust property.

SOUTHEAST OF BELFAST & THE ARDS PENINSULA

Farther afield from Belfast, the Ards Peninsula, beginning about 10 miles (16km) east of the city, curls around the western shore of **Strangford Lough.** This is a place of great natural beauty, as well as a bird sanctuary and wildlife reserve. It's also lined with historic buildings and ancient sites, from the austere **Castle Ward** and the elegant **Mount Stewart House**, to the mysterious, megalithic **Giant's Ring.** All are an easy drive from the city center—you can reach most sights in half an hour, perfect for a day trip.

Two roads traverse the peninsula: A20 (the Lough road) and A2 (the coast road). The Lough road is the more scenic.

At the southern tip of the peninsula, car ferry service connects Portaferry with the Strangford Ferry Terminal (© 030/0200-7898), in Strangford, on the mainland side. Service runs twice an hour from 7:30am to 10:45pm Monday to Friday, from 8am to 11:15pm on Saturday, and from 9:30am to 10:45pm on Sunday. Crossings take around 15 minutes.

Visitor Information

The **Portaferry Tourist Information Office** is at Mountstewart House, Portaferry Rd., Newtownards, BT22 2AD (© 028/4278-8387). It's open Easter to June, Monday to Saturday, 10am to 5pm, and Sunday, 1 to 5pm; and July and August, Monday to Saturday, 10am to 5:30pm, and Sunday, noon to 5pm. It's closed from September through Easter.

Exploring Southeast of Belfast & the Ards Peninsula

Castle Espie Wetland Centre \star NATURE SITE This marvelous wildlife center, named for a castle that has long since ceased to be, is home to a virtual United Nations of rare migratory geese, ducks, and swans. Some are so accustomed to visitors that they will eat grain from their hands, so kids can have the disarming experience of meeting Hooper swans eye to eye. Guided trails are designed for children and families, and the center sponsors activities and events year-round. Every summer, the "duckery" becomes home to dozens of adorable, newly-hatched goslings, ducklings, and cygnets. A favorite of bird-watchers, the center has thousands of pale-bellied brents in early winter. The book and gift shop is enticing, the kids' play area is excellent, and the restaurant serves good lunches and home-baked cakes.

78 Ballydrain Rd., Comber, BT23 6EA. www.wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/castle-espie. **© 028/9187-4146.** Admission £8 adults; £6.10 seniors and students; £3.90 children 4–16; £22 families. Mar–Apr, Sept–Oct daily 10am–5pm; May–Aug Mon–Fri 10am–5pm, Sat–Sun 10am–5:30pm; Nov–Feb daily 10am–4:30pm.

Castle Ward ** HISTORIC HOUSE About $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles (2km) west of Strangford village, this grand manor house dates from 1760. A hybrid of architectural styles melding Gothic with neoclassical, it sits on a 280-hectare (692-acre) country estate of formal gardens, woodlands, lakelands, and seashore. Inside, kids can dress up in period clothes and play with period toys, while outside, they can roam its vast estate of formal gardens, woodlands, lakes, and seashore, and even ride a tractor-trailer out to see the farm animals. A theater in the stable yard hosts operatic performances in summer. Castle Ward has achieved a degree of latter-day fame as one of the key locations for the HBO series Game of Thrones—albeit heavily disguised.

Park Rd., Strangford, Co. Down, BT30 7LS. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/castle-ward. **© 028/4488-1204.** Admission £7.50 adults; £3.60 children; £18 families. Grounds: Apr–Sept daily 10am–8pm; Oct–Mar daily 10am–4pm. House: Mar–May, Sept–Oct Sat–Sun noon–5pm; June–Aug daily noon–5pm.

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The most popular TV show in the world is filmed in Northern Ireland, and the publicity that HBO's *Game of Thrones* has brought to the region has been a massive boon for tourism. Major filming locations have included **Castle Ward** $\star \star$ (see p. 526); **Cushendun** \star (see p. 540), and **Ballintoy** (see p. 541) on the Antrim Coast Drive; and the **Tollymore Forest Park** $\star \star$ in County Down (see p. 532). **Brit Movie Tours** offer a bus tour of many of the most scenic places used in the show.

The tour, which will also cover a few extras like the **Giant's Causeway** $\star \star \star$ (see p. 540), leaves from the City Tours office in Victoria Square, central Belfast, and returns roughly 8½ hours later. They run all year on Saturdays and Sundays, and also on Tuesdays and Thursdays from April to September. Departure time is always 10am. Tickets cost £35 adults, £20 children 11 and under, and £90 families. Private tours, for up to six people, can be booked for £400.

For details and booking call © 0844/247-1007 in Northern Ireland and Britain (© 44/207-118-1007 in the rest of the world), or visit www.britmovietours.com.

Giant's Ring ** ANCIENT SITE This massive and mysterious prehistoric earthwork, 180m (590 ft.) in diameter, has at its center a megalithic chamber with a single capstone. Ancient burial rings like

this were thought to be protected by fairies and were left untouched, but this one is quite an exception. In the 19th century, it was used as a racetrack, and the high embankment around it served as grandstands. Today, its dignity has been restored, and it is a place of wonder for the few tourists who make the journey.

Ballynahatty, Co. Down. 3³/₄ miles (6km) southwest of Belfast center, west off A24. Free admission (open site).

Grey Abbey ★ RELIGIOUS SITE The striking ruins of Grey Abbey sit amid a beautifully landscaped setting, perfect for a picnic. Founded in 1193 by the Cistercians, it contained one of the earliest Gothic churches in Ireland. Many Cistercian ruins were quite elaborate, but this one is surprisingly plain. Amid the ruined choirs is a fragmented stone effigy of a knight in armor, possibly a likeness of John de Courcy, husband of the abbey's founder, Affreca of Cumbria. Grey Abbey is in the appropriately named Greyabbey, about 15 miles (24km) west of Belfast.

Greyabbey, Co. Down. No phone. Free admission. Apr-May Tues-Sun 10am-5pm; June-mid-Sept daily 10am-5pm; mid-Sept-Oct, Mar noon-4pm; Nov-Feb noon-4pm.

Legananny Dolmen \star ANCIENT SITE This renowned granite dolmen (Neolithic tomb) on the southern slope of Slieve Croob looks, in the words of archaeologist Peter Harbison, like "a coffin on stilts". This must be one of the most photographed dolmens in Ireland, and you must see it up close to fully appreciate its awesome size, with a massive capstone that seems weightlessly poised on its supporting uprights. The Dolmen is signposted about half way between Dromara and Castelwellan on the lower slopes of Slieve Croob Mountain, about 25 miles (40km) south of Belfast.

Signposted off Leganny Rd. Leitrim, Co. Down, BT32 3QR. No phone. Free admission (open site).

and Temple Winds HISTORIC Mount Stewart House, Garden, of the ** HOUSE/GARDENS Once the home of Lord Castlereagh, this 18th-century house sits on the eastern shore of Strangford Lough. Its lush gardens were named one of the 10 best in the world by the Daily Telegraph (a large British daily newspaper) in 2014, and are a candidate for UNESCO World Heritage status. An impressive array of rare and unusual plants flourish here, due to a rare and mild microclimate that means the gardens rarely experience bad frosts. Inside the house, the excellent art collection includes the Hambletonian by George Stubbs and family portraits by Pompeo Batoni and Anton Raphael Mengs. The Temple of the Winds, a rare 18th-century banqueting house, is also on the estate, but it's only open on Sunday afternoons (and not in winter). Admission to the house is by guided tour only.

Portaferry Rd., Newtownards, Co. Down, BT22 2AD. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/mount-stewart. **© 028/4278-8387.** House and Lakeside Garden: £6 adults; £3 children; £14 families. House: Apr–Oct daily 11am–5pm; Nov to mid-Dec weekends noon–3pm. Gardens: early Mar–Oct daily 10am–5pm; Nov–early Mar daily 10am–4pm. Temple: mid-Mar to Oct Sun 2–5pm; mid-Mar–early Nov 10am–6pm. Last admission 1 hr. before closing.



The Legananny Dolmen in the Mournes, County Down.

Nendrum Monastic Site \star RELIGIOUS SITE Hidden away on an isolated island, this site dates from the 5th century. This site is much older than Grey Abbey across the water, and the remains of the ancient community founded by St. Mochaoi (St. Mahee) are fascinating. Foundations show the outline of ancient churches, a round tower, and beehive cells. Other interesting details are concentric stone ramparts and a sundial, reconstructed from long-broken pieces. Its visitor center shows informative videos and has insightful exhibits. The road to Mahee Island crosses a causeway to Reagh Island and a bridge still protected by the 15th-century Mahee Castle.

Mahee Island, Ringneill Rd., Comber, Co. Down, BT23 6EP. **© 028/9054-3037.** Free admission. Mar andmid-Sept–Oct Tues–Sun noon–4pm; Apr–May Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; June–mid-Sept daily 10am–5pm; Nov–Feb Sun noon–4pm.

Portaferry Castle \star CASTLE Though it's little more than a small, 16th-century tower house, at one time Portaferry Castle, together with another tower house in Strangford, controlled all the ship traffic through the Narrows. It's a piece of history right beside the Portaferry visitor center, so it's worth popping your head in for a peek.

Castle St., Portaferry, County Down. Free admission. Easter-Aug daily 10am-5pm.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

CYCLING If you want to explore the area on two wheels, you can rent bicycles for around £15 a day. Cycle rental by the day or week, and delivery in the North Down/Ards area, are available from **Mike the Bike**, 53 Frances St., Newtownards (www.kayaksatmikethebike.co.uk; © 028/9181-1311). He also rents kayaks.

DIVING The nearby loughs and offshore waters are a diver's dream—remarkably clear and littered with wrecks. One of Europe's finest training centers, **DV Diving**, 138 Mount Stewart Rd., Newtownards, County Down (www.dvdiving.co.uk; © 028/9186-1686 or 028/9146-4671), offers diving courses.

FISHING For info, tackle, and bait, try the Village Tackle Shop, 55a Newtownbreda Rd., Belfast (www.villagetackleshopbelfast.co.uk; © 028/9049-1916), or Kelly Hardware, 54 Market St., Downpatrick, County Down (www.kellyhardwaredownpatrick.co.uk; © 028/4461-2193). To outfit yourself and fish for rainbow trout year-round, visit Ballygrangee Trout Fishery, Mountstewart Road, Carrowdore, County Down (© 028/4278-8883).

GOLF Several well-established courses are just a short drive from Belfast in north County Down. They include the **Bangor Golf Club**, Broadway, Bangor (www.bangorgolfclubni.co.uk; © 028/9127-0922), with greens fees of £22 to £35 (tell them you're a tourist and you'll get the lower rates); St. Patrick's Golf Club, 43 Saul Rd., Downpatrick (www.stpatricksgolfclub.org.uk; © 028/4461-5947), with greens fees of £30; and the 71-par Scrabo Golf Club, 233 Scrabo Rd., Newtownards (www.scrabogolfclub.com; © 028/9181-2355), with greens fees of £20 to £25, or £15 on Fridays.

THE MOURNE MOUNTAINS

South and west from Downpatrick, the Mournes are the highest mountains in Northern Ireland. The rocky landscape here is breathtaking—all gray granite, yellow gorse, purple heather, and white stone cottages. Remote and traversed by few roads, the mountains—complete with barren, wind-swept moors—are left to hikers and walkers. The ancestral home of the Brontës is here, in ruins. But the region is not desolate: You have forest parks, sandy beaches, lush gardens, and, of course, pubs to explore.

The region is dominated by the massive cold, barren peak of **Slieve Donard** (839m/2,752 ft.). From the top, the view takes in the full length of Strangford Lough, Lough Neagh, the Isle of Man, and, on a crystalline day, the west coasts of Wales and Scotland. (The recommended ascent of Slieve Donard is from Donard Park on the south side of Newcastle.) If that's too high for you, head to the heart of the Mournes, to the exquisite **Silent Valley Reservoir** (see p. 532).

Newcastle, a lively, traditional seaside resort with a golden sand beach and one of the finest golf courses in Ireland, makes a good base for exploring the area, but there are also several small coastal towns strung along the A2 road—**Kilkeel, Rostrevor,** and **Warrenpoint**—with more low-key charms.

Visitor Information

The Newcastle Tourist Information Centre is at 10–14 Central Promenade, Newcastle, County Down, BT33 0AA (© 028/4372-2222). The Silent Valley Visitor Centre is on Head Road, Annalong, Newcastle, County Down, BT34 4HU (© 028/9035-4716). Both are open daily, year-round.

Getting There

Driving from Belfast, the A24 and A2 south from the city will take you directly down to Newcastle; the drive should take just under an hour. If you're driving up from Dublin, turn east off the Dublin-Belfast Road at Newry and take A2, following the north shore of Carlingford Lough, between the mountains and the sea. It's a drive you won't soon forget.

Exploring the Mourne Mountains

Castlewellan Forest Park $\star\star$ NATURE SITE Surrounding a fine trout lake and watched over by the stately mid-19th-century Castelwellan Castle (sadly closed to the public), this forest park just begs for picnics and outdoor activities. Woodland walks, a formal walled garden, and an interesting lakeside sculpture trail are among its attractions. Anglers can fish for trout (brown and rainbow) in the lake. The **Peace Maze**, planted in 2000, is an enormous hedge maze designed to represent the path to peace in Northern Ireland. The real draw is the **National Arboretum**, opened in 1740 and now 10 times its original size. The largest of its three greenhouses features aquatic plants and a collection of free-flying tropical birds. The town of Castlewellan, elegantly laid out around two squares, is a short distance away, as is the ancient fort of Drumena Cashel (see below).

Forest Office: The Grange, Castlewellan Forest Park, Castlewellan, Co. Down, BT31 9BU. © 028/4377-8664. Admission and parking: £4.50. Daily 10am-sunset.

Drumena Cashel \star ANCIENT SITE Ireland once had thousands of fortifications like this irregularly shaped stone-ring fort, a farmstead dating from the early Christian period; this is one of the better-preserved examples. During the age of the Viking invasions, it likely provided protection for the local population. Its walls, partially rebuilt in the mid-1920s, measure 2.7m (9 ft.) to 3.6m (12 ft.) thick. The souterrain (underground stone tunnel) is T-shaped and was likely used in ancient times for cold storage. Castlewellan is about 30 miles (48km) south of Belfast.

Signposted from A25, 2 miles (3km) southwest of Castlewellan, Co. Down. Free (open site).

Dundrum Castle \star CASTLE The site of an early Irish fortification (of which nothing is visible now), the oldest visible portions of this castle's striking and extensive ruins date from the 12th century. The enormous keep was built in the 13th century, as was the gatehouse. It was the home of the Maginnis family until the 17th century, when it was captured by Oliver Cromwell's army, who destroyed it in 1652. The hilltop setting is lovely, and the views from the keep's parapet are panoramic. This was once one of the mightiest of the Norman castles in Northern Ireland (second only to Carrickfergus), and it still commands the imagination, if nothing else.

4 miles (6.5km) east of Newcastle, off A2, Dundrum, County Down. © 028/9181-1491. Free admission. Mid-Apr–May, Sept Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; June–Aug daily 10am–5pm.

Greencastle Royal Castle \star CASTLE The first castle on this site, built in 1261, faced its companion, Carlingford Castle, across the mouth of the lough. It was then a two-story rectangular tower surrounded by a curtain wall with corner towers. Very little of that survives; most of what you see is from the 14th century. It served as a royal garrison until it was destroyed by Cromwell's forces in 1652. Opening times are somewhat unpredictable, so if you want to see inside, call ahead.

4 miles (6.5km) southwest of Kilkeel, Greencastle, Cranfield Point, Co. Down. © 028/3885-3955. Admission £1.50. June-Aug daily 10am-5pm. Closed Sept-May.

Silent Valley Mountain Park ** NATURE SITE Between 1904 and 1922, the 22-mile (36km) dry-stone Mourne Wall and dam was built to enclose Silent Valley, creating the Silent Valley Reservoir, the major source of water for County Down. Easy, well-marked paths wind around the lake, and there's a coffee shop by the Silent Valley Information Centre. A shuttle bus takes visitors from the center to the top of nearby Ben Crom. It runs on weekends during May, June, and September, and daily in July and August.

Visitor Centre: Head Rd., Annalong, Newcastle, Co. Down, BT34 4HU. www.niwater.com/silent-valley. © 084/5744-0088. Admission £4.50 per car. Apr-Sept daily 10am-6:30pm; Oct-Mar daily 10am-4pm.

Tollymore Forest Park ****** NATURE SITE All that's left of the once-glorious Tollymore House is

this delightful 480-hectare (1,186-acre) wildlife and forest park. The park offers a number of walks up into the north slopes of the Mourne Mountains or along the Shimna River (which is known for its exceptionally fine salmon). The Shimna walk has several beguiling little landmarks, including caves and grottos. The park is scattered with follies, such as faux-medieval castle gatehouses and other fanciful fakes. The forest is a nature preserve inhabited by a host of local wildlife like badgers, foxes, otters, and pine martens. And don't miss the trees for the forest—some exotic species here include the magnificent Himalayan cedars and a 30-m (98-ft.) sequoia in the arboretum.

Off B180, 2 miles (3.2km) northwest of Newcastle, Tullybrannigan Rd., Newcastle, County Down. © 028/4372-2428. Free admission. Parking £4.50. Daily 10am–dusk.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

ADVENTURE SPORTS For canoeing, rock climbing, bushcraft, watersports, and a variety of other intrepid activities, contact **One Great Adventure**, The Grange Yard, Castlewellan Forest Park, Castlewellan, County Down, BT31 9BU (www.onegreatadventure.com; © 028/4377-0107).

CYCLING The Mourne roads are narrow and often bordered by dry-stone walls up to $1.7m (5\frac{1}{2}-ft.)$ tall. The foothills of the Mournes around Castlewellan are ideal for cycling, with panoramic vistas and very little traffic. In these parts, the perfect year-round outfitter is **Ross Cycles**, 44 Clarkhill Rd. (© 028/4377-8029), signposted from the Clough-Castlewellan Road, $\frac{1}{2}$ mile (.8km) out of Castlewellan. The shop carries mountain bikes for the whole family, including children's seats. You can park and ride, or request local delivery. Daily rates are around £10, and family and weekly rates are available.

GOLF Royal County Down \star , Newcastle, County Down (www.royalcountydown.org; © 028/4372-3314), is nestled in huge sand dunes with the Mountains of Mourne in the background. This 18-hole, par-71 championship course was created in 1889 and is still considered to be among the best. Greens fees are £170 to £190, depending on the day and time of year. (In winter, prices drop to £50–£100). Not too far away, the **Kilkeel Golf Club**, Mourne Park, Ballyardle, Kilkeel (www.kilkeelgolfclub.org; © 028/4176-5095), is a beautiful parkland course on the historic Kilmorey Estate. Green fees are £25 to £30, or £15 on Mondays and Wednesdays.

HORSEBACK RIDING The Mount Pleasant Trekking and Horse Riding Centre, Bannonstown Road, Castlewellan, County Down, BT31 9BG (www.mountpleasantcentre.com; © 028/4377-8651), offers group trekking tours into Castlewellan Forest Park ****** (see p. 531). For riding in the Tollymore Forest Park ****** (see p. 532) or on local trails, contact the Mourne Trail Riding Centre, 96 Castlewellan Rd., Newcastle, County Down, BT33 0JP (www.mournetrailridingcentre.co.uk; © 028/4372-9107). It has quality horses and offers beach rides for skilled riders. Expect to pay around £25 per hour.

WALKING The 22-mile (36km) **Mourne Wall Trek** follows the wall that threads together 15 of the range's main peaks. The steep path is more than most hikers want to take on, and certainly shouldn't be attempted in a single day. But it is a fine, long walk for experienced ramblers and offers wonderful views. More information about the route, including maps and a photo log of every stage, can be found at **www.mournewall.co.uk.** A good alternative is the more modest walk from the fishing port of Kilkeel to the Silent Valley and Lough Shannagh.

Where to Stay & Dine in the Mourne Mountains

The Carriage House ** With a view of Dundrum Castle on one side, and a shimmering bay dotted

with sailboats on the other, it's little wonder that this lovely little B&B inspires artistic sentiment. Owner Maureen Griffith is a collector of unique art, and her creative eye has furnished almost every corner of her terraced house with something wonderful to look at. She's also a great cook; breakfasts here are special, including produce picked fresh from her garden. She doesn't cook evening meals, but will recommend places to eat within walking distance.

71 Main St., Dundrum, Co. Down, BT33 0LU. www.carriagehousedundrum.com. **© 028/4375-1635.** 3 units. £70–£80 double. Free parking (on-street). Breakfast included. Amenities: Garden; Wi-Fi (free).

The Slieve Donard Spa and Resort ** The spindly, neo-Gothic turret of this 1897 hotel stands like a beacon overlooking Dundrum Bay. The surroundings are certainly dramatic, but inside this is a relaxing, luxurious place. Bedrooms are good-sized and modern; many have views of the bay and Mourne Mountains. Executive bedrooms are bigger and—a bonus if you're visiting during a rare heatwave—have air conditioning. The excellent spa has a long list of treatments, from Ayurvedic regimens to hot stone massages and full body salt scrubs. (Prices aren't cheap, however—expect to pay between £75 and £160 for a 1–2 hour signature treatment.) The two restaurants are the formal **Oak Room** and the more relaxed **Percy French.** Dinner, bed and breakfast packages offer good savings.

Downs Rd., Newcastle, Co. Down, BT33 0AH. www.hastingshotels.com. **© 028/4372-1066.** 178 units. £160–£220 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: 2 restaurants; bar; room service; spa; gym; pool; Wi-Fi (£10 per day).

COUNTY ARMAGH

Small and manageable **Armagh City** is a handsome cathedral city, with grand public buildings, huge churches, and big Georgian town houses along the Mall. Buildings, doorsteps, and sidewalks are made of delightful pink, yellow, and red local limestone that make the city glow even on a dull day. A short drive from Belfast, it makes for an easy day trip from the city.

Its name, from the Irish *ard Macha* (Macha's height) refers to the pagan queen Macha who is said to have built a fortress here. It's no coincidence that St. Patrick chose to base himself here when he was spreading Christianity—it was a bold challenge to the native paganism. The simple stone church that he built in the 5th century is now the giant Church of Ireland cathedral—clearly, his plan worked, at least to some extent. Armagh City actually has two St. Patrick cathedrals—one Catholic and one Protestant—and each is the seat of its primate.

Just to the east of the town center is **The Mall**, a lush park surrounded by Georgian buildings. The courthouse at its northern end was destroyed by an IRA bomb in 1993 and since rebuilt. Opposite the courthouse, the gloomy Armagh Gaol was built in 1780 and remained in use until 1988.

A short distance outside the city, the small town of Bessbrook has historic cottages, the forests of Slieve Gullion, and ancient **Navan Fort**, the most important archaeological site in Ulster. The area's greatest natural attraction is a 40-minute drive north of Armagh City: **Lough Neagh**, Ireland's largest lake (see box p. 537).

A green, rolling stretch of gentle hills and small villages, County Armagh is also one of Northern Ireland's most rebellious Republican regions—you'll notice police watchtowers atop some hills, as well as the occasional barracks (mostly empty these days). Until a few years ago, you could also expect to hear the rhythmic thumping of military helicopters flying over. Thankfully, things have improved since then.

Visitor Information

The Armagh Visitor Information Centre, 40 Upper English St., Armagh, BT61 7BA (© 028/3752-1800), is the main information point for the surrounding area. It's open all year, Monday to Saturday, and also on Sunday afternoons in summer.

Getting There

Armagh is 40 miles (64km) southwest of Belfast. To get there from the city, take M1 and A3; the journey takes around 50 minutes.

Exploring County Armagh

Armagh Astronomy Centre and Planetarium $\star\star$ PLANETARIUM This state-of-the-art planetarium is a fantastic way to reward kids with an interest in science and astronomy. The digital projection system, which has 3D elements, is impressive. The 25-minute "We Are Aliens," full of crashes and zooms and loud space facts, runs at 2pm every weekday. On Saturdays, the program gets much more varied, with different shows on the hour, from 15-minute "Little Yellow Star," a rather gentle show aimed at very young children, to documentaries on constellations and astronomers. Outside the planetarium, you'll see the 200 year-old, working Armagh Observatory (not open to the public), and can wander around the Astropark, which is filled with scale models of planets. Note: All seats have to be booked in advance and you must arrive 30 minutes before start time to pick up your tickets.

College Hill, Armagh, Co. Armagh, BT61 9DB. www.armaghplanet.com. **© 028/3752-3689.** Admission to show and exhibition area £6 adults; £5 seniors and children 15 and under; £20 families. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm. Show times Mon–Fri 2pm only; Sat 11am–4pm (rotating schedule, start times on the hr.)

Armagh County Museum \star MUSEUM Intriguing Armagh-related artifacts going back to the Neolithic age fill this history museum on the Mall. Highlights include a collection of 19th-century Irish bog oak jewelry; Irish police uniforms from the 1820s up to the mid-20th century; and a collection of elaborate fans from around the world, from as far back as the 1700s. Chillingly, they also have a genuine scold's bridle, an iron torture instrument and "correctional" device that was placed over a woman's head, with a spike inside her mouth to prevent her from talking. It's part of the same National Museums Northern Ireland collective that includes the excellent **Ulster Museum** $\star\star\star$ (see p. 509) and the **Folk & Transport Museum** $\star\star\star$ (see p. 511).

The Mall East, Armagh, Co. Armagh, BT61 9BE. www.nmni.com/acm. © 028/3752-3070. Free admission. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat 10am–1pm, 2–5pm. Closed Sun.

Benburb Valley Park ★ NATURE SITE This rather lovely, sylvan park northeast of Armagh on the River Blackwater contains the ruins of Benburb Castle, a squat fortress-like ruin dating from the Plantation of Ulster in the early 1600s. It occupies an impressive cliffside spot overlooking a gorge. In 1646, an Irish army defeated an Anglo-Scottish invasion force at Benburb, thus ending the brief Scottish bid to rule Ireland. The castle is on the grounds of a Servite Priory; admission is free, but you have to arrange in advance if you want to do more than see it from the outside. (Call the priory at © 028/375-8241 for more information, or contact the Heritage Center.) Nearby, the Benburb Valley Heritage Centre (© 028/3754-9752), a former Linen factory, has some exhibits on the history of the area. The park also contains a working Servite priory.

89 Milltown Rd., Benburb, Co. Armagh. 🖉 028/3754-8170. Park free admission. Heritage Centre £3. Park daily until dusk. Heritage Centre Apr–Sept Mon–Sat 10am–5pm. Benburb is 7 miles (11km) northwest of Armagh; take B128 off A29.

Navan Fort and Centre $\star\star$ ANCIENT SITE Believed to have been the royal and religious capital of Ulster from 1150 B.C. until the spread of Christianity, the Navan Fort is a mysterious place. Its

central circular earthwork enclosure holds a smaller circular structure, and it all encloses an Iron Age burial mound. Even today, scientists do not really know what it was used for, although they know that it was all set on fire around 95 B.C., possibly as part of a ritual. The excellent interpretive center puts it all into context, complete with exhibition and reconstructed Iron Age houses. Admission rates are discounted slightly in the winter months.

The Navan Centre, 81 Killylea Rd., Armagh, Co. Armagh, BT60 4LD. www.armagh.co.uk/navan-centre-fort. **© 028/3752-9644.** Admission £6.50 adults; £4.50 children; £5.50 seniors and students; £18 families. Apr–Sept daily 10am–6:30pm (last admission 5pm); Oct–Mar daily 10am–4pm (last admission 3pm). The Fort is 2 miles (3km) from Armagh on A28, signposted from Armagh center.

Peatlands Park \star NATURE SITE As the name implies, Peatlands Park is a park filled with peat. It's also big—more than 240 hectares (593 acres)—and the peat bogs and small lakes are surprisingly lovely. The whole thing is a nature reserve, so you wander through it on a well-designed system of walking paths, or, slightly more fun on rainy days, you ride through it on a narrow-gauge railway. Nature walks and events are offered through the year. The park is southwest of Lough Neagh, just across the border into County Tyrone.

33 Derryhubbert Rd. (6³/₄ miles/11km southeast of Dungannon, at exit 13 off M1), Co Tyrone, BT71 6NW. **Ø 028/3885-1102.** Free admission to park. Rail ride £1.50 adults; £1 seniors and children 5–18; children 4 and under free. Vehicle access to park Sept–Mar daily 9am–4:30pm; Apr–Aug daily 9am–9pm. Railway June–Aug Sat, Sun and Bank Holidays only 1–5pm.

LOUGH neagh

Now here's a great creation story: Irish lore maintains that Lough Neagh—the largest lake in Ireland—was created by the mighty giant Fionn MacCumhail (Finn McCool) when he flung a chunk of earth into the sea to create the Isle of Man. It must have been a sizeable chunk indeed, to gouge out this 396 sq.-km (153 sq.-mile) lake.

The Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, Oxford Island, Craigavon, Co. Armagh (www.oxfordisland.com; © 028/3832-2205), is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, and 10am to 5pm on Saturday and Sunday (6pm in summer). Part of an enormous, lush nature reserve, the center has an exhibition on the Lough and its history, plus information about the best walking trails. They also host occasional guided walks trails (or "rambles") through the reserve; prices and times of any upcoming tours are advertised on the website. There's also a cafe, craft shop, and tourist information center—where, handily, you can hire a pair of binoculars.

Before you think about taking a dip, consider this: The lake's claim to fame is its massive population of eels. Yep, the waters are positively infested with the slimy creatures. Hundreds of tons of eels are taken from Lough Neagh and exported each year, mainly to Germany and Holland. The ages-old eel-extraction method involves "long lines," baited with up to 100 hooks. As many as 200 boats trailing these lines are on the lake each night (the best time to go fishing for eels). So, maybe take a rain check on that swim.

If you're not entirely creeped out by that, however, you can take a **boat trip** on the lovely lake. Boats depart regularly from the nearby **Kinnego Marina** (@ 028/3832-7573), signposted from the main road. They last about 45 minutes and cost about £10 for adults, £7 for children. It's advisable to call in advance to book.

For windsurfing on Lough Neagh, try Craigavon Watersports Centre, 1 Lake Rd., Craigavon, County Armagh, BT64 1AS (www.craigavonactivity.org/watersports-centre; © 028/3834-2669).

St. Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral \star CATHEDRAL Built on the site of St. Patrick's 5thcentury church, Armagh's Anglican cathedral dates from the 13th century, although much of the current structure was built in the 1830s. Inside the church are the remains of an 11th-century Celtic cross, and a strange granite carved figure known as the Tandragee Idol, which dates from the Iron Age. A stone slab on the exterior wall of the north transept marks the spot where Brian Boru, the high king of Ireland who died in the last great battle with the Vikings in 1014, is buried.

43 Abbey St, Armagh, Co. Armagh. www.stpatricks-cathedral.org. © 028/3752-3142. Free admission; suggested donation £3 adults; £2 seniors, students and children. Apr-Oct daily 9am-5pm; Nov-Mar daily 9am-4pm.

St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Cathedral * CATHEDRAL Built at the same time as the present-

day Anglican church—in the mid-1800s—this Catholic cathedral is a grand Gothic Revival building dominating its portion of the town. It stands on a hill that you scale by the stone stairs. Outside it's gray and hulking, but inside is another story, as vividly painted mosaics bathe it in color. Unfortunately, a renovation in the 1980s added some modern touches that stand out starkly against its otherwise perfect 19th-century authenticity.

Cathedral Rd., Armagh, Co. Armagh, BT61 7QY. www.armaghparish.net. **© 028/3752-2813.** Free admission. Daily 8am–dusk. Opening times can vary; call to check.

THE GLENS OF ANTRIM & THE ANTRIM COAST

The most extraordinary stretch of countryside in Northern Ireland, the glorious Antrim Coast Highway stretches north and west from Belfast, curving around toward Donegal. This stretch of rocky shoreline is one of the most beautiful in all of Ireland, and includes the North's most striking sights: the awe-inspiring Giant's Causeway and the picturesque Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge.

Most sights are equidistant from Belfast and Derry. It's possible to see them all in one day, staying in either city, although most travelers prefer to get a room on the coast and take their time. If you're not in a rush, the coastal moors and cliffs and the offshore nature reserve on **Rathlin Island** are well worth a visit. On the last Monday and Tuesday of August, the seaside town of **Ballycastle** plays host to the Oul' Lammas Fair, a traditional livestock and food market that has been running since the 17th century.

Visitor Information

The principal tourist information centers in North Antrim are at Narrow Gauge Road, Larne, BT40 1XB (© 028/2826-0088); Sheskburn House, 14 Bayview Rd., Ballycastle, BT54 6BT (© 028/2076-2024); and the Giant's Causeway Information Centre, 44 Causeway Rd., Bushmills, BT57 8SU (© 028/2073-1855). All offices are open daily, year-round, though the Larne and Ballycastle offices are closed Sundays outside the midsummer season (when Sun opening is limited to the afternoon).

The Giant's Causeway office stays open until 7pm from April to June, and 9pm in July and August.

Getting There

Coming from Belfast, the best starting point for the coast road is in Carrickfergus, which is 10 miles (16km) northeast of the city center on A2.

Exploring the Antrim Coast

Carnlough \star VILLAGE The first major stop along the Antrim Coast Drive is this quiet village, known for its glassy harbor bobbing with sailboats. It's a lovely place to wander around, sampling interesting little shops and restaurants. Just outside Carnlough is a peaceful, yet little-known, waterfall called **Cranny Falls.** To get there, look for a marked 1-mile walking trail beginning on the waterfront. After crossing the white-stone bridge, the route goes through idyllic countryside, following an abandoned railway bed, past a disused quarry, until it reaches the falls. Along the way, occasional markers tell you more about the history of the area. Carnlough, Co. Antrim.

Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge *** BRIDGE Each spring, local fisherman put up this rope bridge across a chasm 18m (59 ft.) wide and 24m (79 ft.) deep, swinging over the sea between the mainland and a small island. The bridge has a practical purpose—allowing access to the island's salmon fishery—but visitors can use it for a thrilling walk and the chance to call out to each other, "Don't

look down!" (By the way, that is excellent advice.) If you are acrophobic, stay clear; if you don't know whether you are, this is not the place to find out. Note: The 12-mile (19km) coastal cliff path from the Giant's Causeway to the rope bridge is always open and is worth the exhaustion.

119A Whitepark Rd., Ballintoy, Co. Antrim, BT54 6LS. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/carrick-a-rede. **© 028/2076-9839.** Admission £6 adults; £3.20 children; £16 families. Late Feb–late May daily 9:30am–6pm; late May–Aug daily 9:30–7; Sept–late Oct 9:30am–6pm; late Oct–late Feb daily 9:30am–3:30pm. Five miles (8km) west of Ballycastle off the A2 road.



It's best not to look down as you cross the ocean on the Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge.

Cushendun \star VILLAGE Way back in the 1950s, the National Trust bought most of this charming seaside village to preserve it from over-development. Today, the seafront is lined with an elegant sweep of perfect white, Cornish-style cottages, and the quaint teashops do a bustling trade. The Glendun River winds through the village, crossed by a lovely old stone bridge, while down on the beach are some atmospheric sea caves. Just north of the village, in a field overlooking the coast, stand the scant remains of **Curra Castle.** Cushendun is a good place to stop and take pictures before heading on down the main A2 road—or, if you want the most amazing views, the **Torr Head Scenic Road** $\star \star$ (see p. 542).

Cushendun, Co. Antrim.

Dunluce Castle \star\star CASTLE Between the Giant's Causeway and the busy harbor town of Portrush, the coastline is dominated by the hulking skeletal outline of what must have once been a glorious

castle. This was the main fort of the Irish MacDonnells, chiefs of Antrim. From the 14th to the 17th century, it was the largest and most sophisticated castle in the North, with a series of fortifications built on rocky outcrops extending into the sea. In 1639, part of the castle fell into the sea, taking some of the servants with it; soon after that, it was allowed to fall into a beautiful ruin. The 17th-century courtyard survives, including a few buildings. The site incorporates two of the original Norman towers dating from 1305. One enticing footnote: a recent archaeological dig here uncovered the remains of a town that was previously thought completely destroyed during a rebellion in 1641. Only a very tiny fraction of what is now thought to exist has so far been excavated.

87 Dunluce Rd., Bushmills, Co. Antrim, BT57 8UY. © 028/2073-1938. Admission £5 adults; £3 seniors and children age 4–16; £13 families. Daily 10am–4pm; last admission 30 min. before closing. Call to confirm times in winter.

Giant's Causeway *** NATURE SITE A UNESCO World Heritage Site, this natural rock formation is extraordinary. Sitting at the foot of steep cliffs and stretching out into the sea, it is a natural formation of thousands of tightly packed basalt columns. The tops of the columns form flat stepping stones, all of which are perfectly hexagonal. They measure about 30cm (12 in.) in diameter; some are very short, others are as tall as 12m (39 ft.). Scientists believe they were formed 60 or 70 million years ago by volcanic eruptions and cooling lava. The ancients, on the other hand, believed the rock formation to be the work of giants. To reach the causeway, you walk from the parking area down a steep path for nearly 1 mile (1.6km), past amphitheaters of stone columns and formations with fanciful names like Honeycomb, Wishing Well, Giant's Granny, King and his Nobles, and Lover's Leap. If you wish, you can then climb up a wooden staircase to Benbane Head to take in the views, and then walk back along the cliff top. Regular shuttle service down from the visitor center is available for those who can't face the hike. *Note:* The underground visitor center has a cafe, shop, interpretive center, and hugely expensive parking. However, the Causeway is a free, open site, so if you can find safe and legal parking, there's nothing to stop you from just walking straight down.

44 Causeway Rd., Bushmills, Co. Antrim, BT57 8SU. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/giants-causeway. © 028/2073-1855. Visitor center and parking: £9 adults; £4.50 children; £22 families. Visitor center Feb–Mar, Oct 9am–6pm; Apr–Sept 9am–7pm; Nov–Jan 9am–5pm.

THE antrim coast DRIVE

One of the most memorable routes in Ireland, the 60-mile (96km) drive along the Antrim coast road offers sweeping views of midnight-blue seas against gray unforgiving cliffs and deep green hillsides. Starting from Carrickfergus, just north of Belfast, it runs to Portrush, a few miles on from the spectacular **Giant's Causeway** $\star\star\star$ (see p. 540). You could do the whole journey in a couple of hours, but allow much longer if you can—it's the sort of drive you want to savor.

Once you join the coast road itself, about 16 miles (26km) or so north of Carrickfergus, the first town is Glenarm, decked out with castle walls and a barbican gate. In **Carnlough** \star (see p. 539), a quiet seaside village, you can climb the white stone bridge and walk along a path for about a mile to the Cranny Falls waterfall.

Continuing north along the coast, the road passes through the National Trust village of **Cushendun** \star (see p. 540), which is known for its teashops and whitewashed cottages. Along the way, the coastal drive meanders under bridges and stone arches, passing crescent bays, sandy beaches, harbors, and huge rock formations. The ocean gleams beside you as you curve along its craggy shoreline, and the light creates intense colors. In the spring and autumn, you can often have the road all to yourself. For the most spectacular views, turn off the main coastal road at Cushendun onto the **Torr Head Scenic Road** $\star \star$ (see p. 542). Just note that this narrow, rugged, cliffside road can induce vertigo as it climbs in seemingly perilous fashion to the tops of hills that are bigger than you might think. On a clear day, you can see all the way to Scotland.

In the late spring and summer, you can take a ferry from the bustling beach town of Ballycastle to Rathlin Island, where seals and nesting birds make their homes at the Kebble National Reserve.

The heart-stopping **Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge** $\star \star \star$ (see p. 539) allows the brave to cross on foot over to a small island just off the coast. Others may prefer to press straight on to the postcard-perfect little town of Ballintoy, filled with charming stone cottages and flowery gardens. Ballintoy is stretched out at the edge of Whitepark Bay, a wide, crystalline curve of sandy beach at the foot of rocky hills surrounded by green farms. On a sunny day, you might find it hard to go farther.

The last major stop along the way is the eerily lunar **Giant's Causeway** $\star \star \star$ (see p. 540), one of the world's true natural wonders. And after all that driving, don't you think you've earned yourself a tipple at the **Old Bushmills Distillery** $\star \star$ (see p. 542)?

The Old Bushmills Distillery ** FACTORY TOUR Licensed to distill spirits in 1608, but with historical references dating from as far back as 1276, this ancient distillery is endlessly popular. Visitors can tour the working sections and watch the whiskey-making process, starting with fresh water from the adjacent River Bush and continuing through distillation, fermentation, and bottling. At the end of the tour, you can sample the wares in the Potstill Bar, where you can learn more about the history of the distillery. Tours last about 25 minutes. The Bushmills coffee shop serves tea, coffee, homemade snacks, and lunch. *Tip:* Try to visit during the week for the full experience. Although tours do take place on weekends, the distillery itself is only in operation from Monday to Friday.

Main St., Bushmills, Co. Antrim, BT57 8XH. www.bushmills.com. **© 028/2073-3218.** Admission £7.50 adults; £6.50 seniors and students; £4 children 8–17; £21 families. No children under 8 on tour. Apr–Oct tours about every 20 min. throughout the day, Mar–Oct Mon–Sat 9:15am–4:45pm, Sun noon 4:45pm (last tours 4pm); Nov–Feb Mon–Sat 10am–4:45pm, Sun noon–4:45pm (last tours 3:30pm).

Torr Head Scenic Road ** SCENIC DRIVE This diversion is spectacular, but it's not for those with a fear of heights or narrow dirt roads; nor is it a good idea in bad weather. But on a sunny, dry day, the brave can follow signs from **Cushendun *** (see p. 540) up a steep hill at the edge of town onto the Torr Head Scenic Road. After a precipitous climb, the road narrows further and inches its way along the edge of the cliff overlooking the sea. Along the way are places to park and take in the sweeping views. On a clear day, you can see all the way to the Mull of Kintyre in Scotland. Arguably the best views of all are to be had at Murlough Bay (follow the signs).

Torr Rd., heading north out of Cushendun, Co. Antrim.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

ADVENTURE SPORTS The Ardclinis Activity Centre, High Street, Cushendall, Co. Antrim

(www.ardclinis.com; © 028/2177-1340), offers a range of year-round outdoor programs and courses. They include everything from rock climbing and mountain biking to windsurfing and rafting, for people age 14 and over.

GOING TO THE birds: A TRIP TO RATHLIN ISLAND

Want to get close to nature? Plan a trip to **Rathlin Island**, 6 miles (10km) off the coast north of Ballycastle. The tiny island is $3\frac{3}{4}$ miles (6km) long, less than 1 mile (1.5km) wide, and almost completely treeless, with rugged coastal cliffs, a small beach, and crowds of seals and seabirds in spring and summer. Once you get there, you'll realize that it's not quite as isolated as it seems—there's a resident population of about 100 people, plus a pub, a fish-and-chip shop, and a couple of guesthouses, should you miss the last boat to shore.

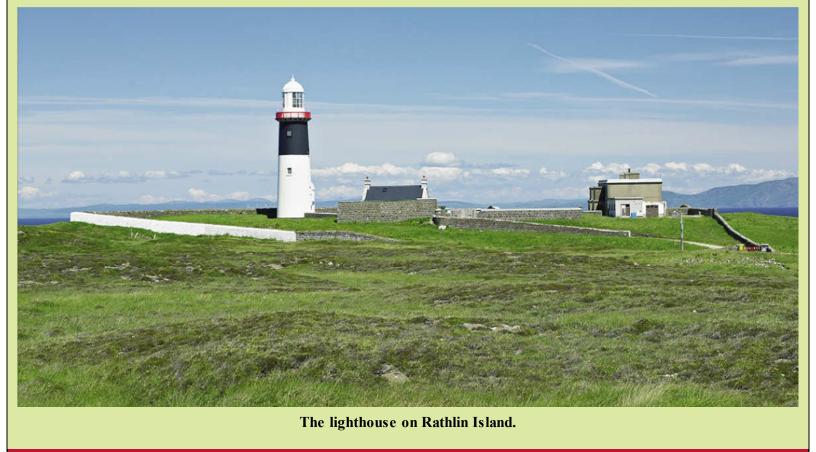
Start with a visit to the **Boat House Museum and Visitor Centre**, near the ferry landing at Church Bay, Rathlin Island, BT54 6RT (© 028/2076-2024). The center contains an exhibit on the history of the islands, as well as plenty of handy visitor information. It's open from April to September. Admission is free.

This is a favorite bird-watching spot, especially in spring and early summer when the birds are nesting. Given that there's little else to do here except to take in the scenery, it's no surprise that the island's biggest draw is bird-watching at the **Kebble National Nature Reserve** on the western side of the island, and the **RSPB Rathlin Seabird Centre** (© 028/2076-3948), located in an old lighthouse. There's no charge for entry, but you have to be let in by the warden; call in advance to arrange a time. From here you can watch colorful puffins, guillemots, kittiwakes, fulmars, razorbills, and other birds.

Boat trips operate daily from Ballycastle pier; crossing time is 50 minutes. The round-trip fare is around £13 for adults, £6.50 for children, free for kids 4 and under. The number and schedule of crossings vary from season to season and from year to year, and are always subject to weather conditions, but there are usually several crossings a day. To check times and book tickets call **Rathlin** Island Ferry (www.rathlinballycastleferry.com; © 028/2076-9299)

If you find yourself wanting to stay a little longer, Coolnagrock B&B (© 028/2076-3983), which has distant views of the Mull of Kintyre in Scotland, costs from £70 for a double.

For more information about Rathlin visit www.rathlin-island.co.uk.



GOLF North Antrim has several notable courses, including champion pro golfer Darren Clarke's

home course, the **Royal Portrush Golf Club**, Dunluce Road, Portrush, Co. Antrim (www.royalportrushgolfclub.com; © 028/7082-2311). Royal Portrush has two links courses, including the celebrated Dunluce Course, ranked number three in the United Kingdom. Greens fees here are £160 weekdays, £180 weekends, although prices plummet to just £60 all week in winter. Just over the border in County Londonderry is the **Portstewart Golf Club**, 117 Strand Rd., Portstewart (www.portstewartgc.co.uk; © 028/7083-2015). Of its three links courses, the par-72 Strand Course is the most celebrated. Some days and times offer more availability for visitors, so call ahead for times and fees, which range all the way from £10 to £150, depending on the course you choose and the day of the week.

PONY TREKKING Watertop Farm Family Activity Centre, 188 Cushendall Rd., Ballycastle, Co. Antrim (www.watertopfarm.co.uk; © 028/2076-2576), offers pony trekking and other outdoor activities. In the Portrush area, contact Maddybenny Riding Centre, Loguestown Road, Portrush, Co. Antrim (www.maddybenny.com; © 028/7082-3394); Maddybenny also has a good B&B (rooms run around £70 for a double) and some self-catering cottages. In Castlerock you'll find Hill Farm Riding and Trekking Centre (www.hillfarmridingcentre.co.uk; © 028/7084-8629). Fees are typically around £15 to £25 per hour-long trek.

The Ulster Way (www.walkni.com/ulsterway), 560 miles (904km) of marked trail, WALKING North Antrim Coast from Glenarm to Portstewart. follows the The Moyle Way (www.walkni.com/walks/187/moyleway) offers a spectacular detour from Ballycastle south to from Glenariff. Last, but far least, is the Causeway Coast Path (www.walkni.com/walks/186/causeway-coast-way). It stretches from Bushfoot Strand, near Bushmills, in the west to Ballintoy Harbour in the east. Short of sprouting wings, this is the best way to take in the full splendor of the North Antrim Coast. Comprehensive guides to each route, including downloadable maps of each stage, can be found on their respective websites.

Where to Stay on the Antrim Coast

Causeway Smithy ** A short hop from the Giant's Causeway (you can just see it in the distance, across rolling green fields), this warm and friendly B&B is a fantastic find. The guest rooms are simple but stylish with polished wood floors and contemporary print wallpaper. Big bay windows look out over the verdant countryside, flooding the rooms with light during the day. Each of the three rooms are located in a separate annex, and you have your own key, so you'll have more of a feeling of freedom and privacy than is usual in countryside B&Bs. Tasty breakfasts are served in a guest lounge. There's no restaurant, but owner Denise is full of recommendations about where to go in the evenings. 270 Whitepark Rd., Bushmills, Co. Antrim, BT57 8SN. www.causewaysmithybnb.com. **© 075/1506-6975.** 3 units. £100 double. Free parking. Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Londonderry Arms Hotel \star A pleasant Georgian inn, the Londonderry Arms is a well-run, traditional kind of place. The building has its quirks—most of the inn is original, with a well-designed modern extension. A couple of the rooms have views of the nearby sea. Bedrooms are simple but comfortable; executive rooms have a bit more space. Triple and quad rooms are really good value for money. (Check the website for plenty of special offers, including excellent weekend packages.) The restaurant is very good, and chef Manus Jamison's delicious menus are full of regional specialties. If you want something a little simpler, a more modest bistro-style menu is available in the cozy bar. An unexpected piece of historical trivia about this place: Winston Churchill

was once (briefly) the landlord. He inherited it and sold it soon afterward, although he is known to have stayed here at least once.

20 Harbour Rd., Carnlough, Co. Antrim, BT44 0EU. www.glensofantrim.com. **© 028/2888-5255.** 35 units. £65–£160 double. Limited free parking (on street). Breakfast not included in lower rates. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; room service; Wi-Fi (free).

Lurig View \star The atmosphere at this sweet little B&B in Glenariff feels akin to a family home. The manager, Rose Ward, and her husband, Chris, are friendly as can be, and happy to help with planning sightseeing trips, making dinner reservations, and so on. Bedrooms are simple but decorated with paintings of flowers chosen to match the accent colors of the room—an inventive touch. Breakfast is served outside if the weather's good. If you really must, the guest lounge has a TV, but a better choice is to get out and explore. Glenariff is a pretty little town and one of the most popular destinations along the Antrim coast. A forest park is within about 10 minutes' drive, and the beach is a short walk from the front door.

38 Glen Rd., Glenariff, Ballymena, Co. Antrim, BT44 0RF. www.lurigview.co.uk. 🖉 028/2177-1618. 3 units. £40-£65 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

The Meadows \star You can see Scotland on a (very) clear and sunny day from this jovial guesthouse on the main Antrim coast. Bedrooms are basic but cozy, and the bathrooms are modern and well equipped. Most are doubles, but families or groups can make use of a room that sleeps four; another is equipped for those with mobility problems. The hearty, tasty Ulster fry breakfasts are great fuel for a long drive ahead. A helpful footnote for those travelling on both sides of the border: as with the rest of Norhern Ireland, the British pound is the main currency here, but the owners will also accept euros.

79 Coast Rd., Cushendall, Ballymena, Co. Antrim, BT44 0RX. www.themeadowscushendall.com. © 028/2177-2020. 6 units. £60–£70 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Whitepark House ****** This fantastic little place is just a couple of miles from the Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge (see p. 539). It was built in the mid-1700s and still retains a traditional feel. Beds are wrought iron framed; one is a four-poster, while the others have canopies. Heavy silk fabrics lift the design of the room. Views of the lovely garden are sweet, but it's worth asking for a room overlooking the sea for a spectacular vista to wake up to in the morning. Bob and Siobhan Isles are genuinely warm people; the fact that they've won awards for their hospitality comes as no surprise whatsoever. Breakfasts are delicious—the full Ulster fry is the specialty, of course, but Bob also takes care of his vegetarian guests (he is one himself) with non-meaty options. What a lovely, idyllic find along the Antrim coast road.

150 Whitepark Rd., Ballintoy, Co. Antrim, BT54 6NH. www.whiteparkhouse.com. **©** 028/2073-1482. 3 units. £120 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Children allowed, but must have own room (no discount). Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Where to Dine on the Antrim Coast

Red Door Tea Room $\star\star$ CAFE This sweet little cottage tearoom is cozy and welcoming inside, with a turf-burning stove and the day's menu chalked onto blackboards behind the counter. But you'll want to sit outside if the weather allows, because the view from the garden over lush green fields to Ballintoy Harbour is stunning. They serve tempting, fresh cakes and desserts, so dig into the delicious Victoria sponge cake (two layers, separated by jam and cream). They also serve good light lunches if you want something a little more substantial. Salads, soups, bagels, sandwiches, or plates of tasty fresh fish are all good. It all adds up to a welcome and idyllic rest stop along the Antrim coast road. Although officially the Red Door closes at 5pm, you may find it open into the evening on busy days in summer.

Ballintoy Harbour, Ballintoy, Co. Antrim, BT54 6NA. **© 028/2076-9048.** Main courses £9–£14. Easter week and June–Sept daily 11am–5pm; week after Easter–May weekends only 11am–5pm. Closed Oct–Mar.

Smuggler's Inn \star IRISH/INTERNATIONAL A convenient lunch spot, right across from the Giant's Causeway, the Smuggler's Inn serves traditional pub lunches. Choose from a few sandwiches and light snack options, or go for the full works like hefty burgers, fish and chips, or Cajun chicken goujons (strips of meat, breaded and deep fried). There's also a separate children's menu. In the evening it's much the same kind of thing, but pushed up a notch in terms of choice, when a couple of steaks join the menu, as well as the occasional dish with a bit more ambition, such as roast duck with fruity red cabbage and a sherry reduction. Like several places around here, euros are accepted as well as pounds. The Smuggler's also has rooms available for around £100 per night.

306 Whitepark Rd., Giants Causeway, Bushmills, Co. Antrim, BT57 8SL www.smugglersinnireland.com. © 028/2073-1577. Main courses £4-£12. Food served daily noon-2:30pm, 4-9pm.

Thyme & Co. \star MODERN IRISH Another great little cafe on the Antrim coast drive, Thyme and Co. serves delicious, healthful lunches. The ingredients are locally sourced and the short menu is thoughtfully put together. Dine on fishcakes made from salmon and smoked haddock (something of a house specialty) or a tasty pie or quiche. The dining room is a pleasant kind of space, and the staff is always friendly and cheerful. On Fridays and Saturdays in summer, they stay open into the evenings, when they sometimes serve thin-crust pizzas—a popular choice with locals. They do takeout too, which is a useful option to know about if you're staying nearby and your hotel doesn't provide dinner. 5 Quay Rd., Ballycastle, Co. Antrim, BT54 6BJ. www.thymeandco.co.uk. **@ 028/2076-9851.** Main courses £5–£11. Pizzas £6–£11. Tues–Sat 8:30am–4:30pm; Sun 10:30am–3:30pm.

DERRY CITY

Northern Ireland's second city is a vibrant place, surrounded by 17th-century walls that you can climb, walking the ramparts all the way around the town center. Although they were the focus of attacks and sieges for centuries, the 5-foot-thick fortifications are solid and unbroken to this day. Historians believe the city was modeled on the French Renaissance town of Vitry-Le-Francois, which in turn was based on a Roman military camp, with two main streets forming a central cross and ending in four city gates. It's made for walking, combining a medieval center with sprawling Georgian and Victorian neighborhoods.

Within Ireland, though, Derry is not known for its architecture, but for the fact that, in the 1960s and 1970s, the North's civil rights movement was born here, and baptized in blood on the streets. The "Bloody Sunday" massacre in 1972, in which British troops killed 14 peaceful civil rights protesters, shocked the world and led to years of violent unrest. In the **Bogside**, as the neighborhood at the bottom of the hill west of the walled section is known, the famed mural reading "You Are Now Entering Free Derry" remains as a symbol of those times.

Happily, much of that sectarian strife seems to be behind Derry now, and it has had some success in reinventing itself as a center of culture and commerce. Symbolic of the changes in Derry is the *Hands Across the Divide* sculpture that you pass as you cross the Craigavon Bridge into town. Erected 20 years after Bloody Sunday, it is a bronze sculpture of two men reaching out toward one another.



A cannon on the medieval ramparts of Derry.

For travelers, Derry is strategically located at the edge of Donegal's picturesque Inishowen Peninsula, near Glenveagh National Park (see chapter 13), with the Giant's Causeway and the North Antrim Coast (see p. 541) and the Northwest Passage and the Sperrins (see p. 557) all within an hour's drive. This makes the town an ideal base of operations from which to explore one of Ireland's most unspoiled regions.

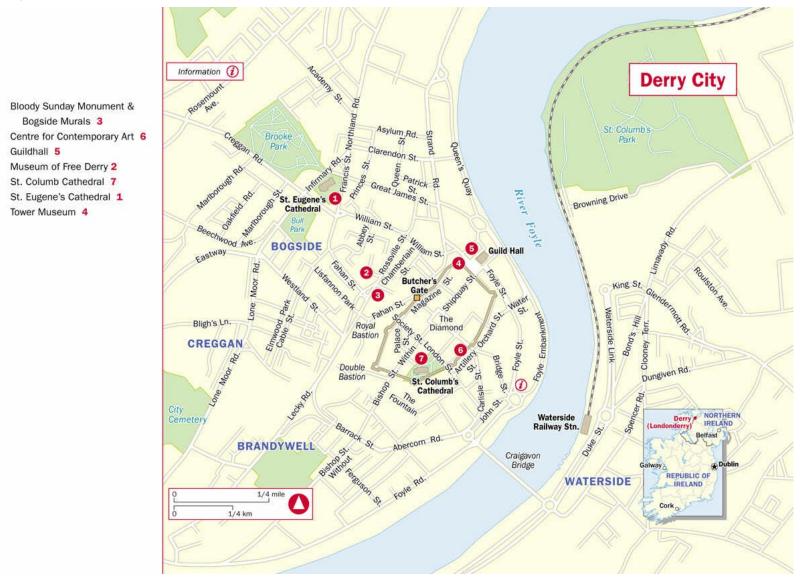
Visitor Information

The **Derry Tourist Information Centre** is at 44 Foyle St., Derry, B48 6AT (www.derryvisitor.com; **028**/7126-7284). It's open Monday to Friday from 9:30am to 5pm; Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 4pm. Hours may be extended in summer, or on days where there's a big event going on in town.

Getting There

BY PLANE Service to City of Derry Airport (www.cityofderryairport.com; © 028/7181-0784) is provided by the budget airline Ryanair (www.ryanair.com; © 0818/303030 in Ireland, 0871/246-0000 in the U.K.) from London Stanstead, Birmingham, Liverpool and Glasgow, plus Alicante and Faro in summer only.

BY TRAIN Northern Ireland Railways (www.translink.co.uk; © 028/9066-6630) operates frequent trains from Belfast, which arrive at the Northern Ireland Railways Londonderry/Derry Station—known by everyone, mercifully, as Waterside Railway Station (© 028/7134-2228), on Duke Street, on the east side of the Foyle River. A free Linkline bus brings passengers from the train station to the city center. It's possible to travel by train from Dublin, but you'd have to take the train to Belfast and transfer. The whole journey costs about £40 one-way, and takes about 4 hours, depending on the transfers. For more information, contact Irish Rail/Iarnród Éireann (www.irishrail.ie; © 1850-366-222).



DERRY OR LONDONDERRY: what's in a name?

The short answer is: quite a lot.

Depending on which side of the border you're on, Northern Ireland's second city is called two different things. Road signs and maps in the Republic say **Derry**; in Northern Ireland they point to **Londonderry**.

This stubborn dispute dates to the Plantation of Ulster in the 1600s, when English settlers were given land in Ireland as an attempt to entrench Protestant rule. A new city was founded by the City of London trade guilds and named Londonderry in their honor. Nationalists have always objected to the term, preferring Derry, an Anglicization of *Daire Calgaich*, the name of the much older settlement that once stood on the same site.

During the Troubles, the dispute was a cause celebre. Many attempts have been made to change the name, including several unsuccessful court cases. Loyalists fiercely defend the name. But having a city with two names poses a knotty problem for residents and visitors alike—what to call it?

The best advice is just to be tactful. If you're drinking in a pub with a big Irish tricolor on the side, it's probably best to use Derry; but if they're flying the British flag, opt for Londonderry. Of the two, Derry is probably the more commonly used in town, and certainly throughout the Republic, so we've chosen to call it Derry in this book.

Fed up with having to make a political statement whenever they talk about their own city, residents have long since tried to find an acceptable solution to the Derry/Londonderry dilemma. In the '90s, local radio DJ Gerry Anderson suggested the wry compromise "Stroke City." (American readers: Stroke is a slash in the U.K.) Quick-witted locals swiftly nicknamed the DJ "Gerry/Londongerry."

To see further evidence of how far back this titular dispute goes, look no further than a United States road atlas. Near Manchester, New Hampshire, is a small old town called Derry. In the early 19th century there was a dispute over its name, so a group of residents set up a new town just to the south called—you guessed it—Londonderry.

BY BUS The fastest bus between Belfast and Derry, the no. 212, operated by **Ulsterbus** (www.translink.co.uk; \bigcirc 028/9066-6630), takes just under 2 hours. Ulsterbus also has service from Portrush and Portstewart. From the Republic, **Bus Éireann** (www.buseireann.ie; \bigcirc 091/562000) offers a few buses a day from Galway (about 5½ hours), Cork (between 7 and 9 hours) and Dublin (around 6 hours). Most of the long-distance routes involve changes.

City Layout

The focal point of Derry is the **Diamond**, a large square holding a war memorial in the center of the city. Four streets radiate out from the Diamond: Bishop, Ferryquay, Shipquay, and Butcher. Each extends for several blocks and ends at a gateway (Bishop's Gate, Ferryquay Gate, Shipquay Gate, and Butcher's Gate) cut into the thick city walls.

Although the original walled city was built on the west bank of the River Foyle, Derry has spread across to the east bank as well, with two bridges connecting the two sides. The Craigavon Bridge, built in 1933, is one of the few examples of a double-decker bridge in the British Isles. The Foyle Bridge, Ireland's longest bridge, opened in 1984 and provides a dual-lane highway about 2 miles (3.2km) north of the Craigavon Bridge. West of the river are two major areas: the walled inner city and, west of that, the area known as the Bogside. The streets near the waterfront are known as Waterside, which is where most of the better hotels and many restaurants are located. Also in Waterside is a small grassy viewing point called the **"Top of the Hill,"** where you can enjoy spectacular eagle's-eye views of the city. You'll never find your own way there, so take a taxi and bring your map. Short of a helicopter tour, this is the best way to get your initial bearings.

Exploring Derry

Centre for Contemporary Art ★ ART MUSEUM Drop in here to see new and touring works by contemporary artists from Ireland and farther afield. Themed seasons include visual art, film

screenings, performances, and public debates. Recent seasons have included a retrospective of a pivotal early 20th-century Dublin workers strike; art inspired by people's relationship to the natural world; and creative responses to revolution and unrest in Egypt. It's all serious and fascinating stuff for grown-up minds. With strong international links, the center often hosts residencies for artists from across the globe. Admission to the center and most events is free, but there may be a charge for some. Check the website for up-to-date listings.

10-12 Artillery St., Derry, BT48 6RG. www.cca-derry-londonderry.org. 10 028/7137-3538. Free admission. Tues-Sat noon-6pm.

Guildhall \star ARCHITECTURAL SITE Just outside the city walls, between Shipquay Gate and the River Foyle, this Tudor Gothic-style building looks much like its counterpart in London. The site's original structure was built in 1890, but it was rebuilt after a fire in 1908 and again after a series of sectarian bombings in 1972. The hall is distinguished by its huge, four-faced clock (designed to resemble Big Ben) and its 23 stained-glass windows, made by Ulster craftsmen, which illustrate almost every episode of note in the city's history. The hall is used as a civic center for concerts, plays, and exhibitions. One nice bit of historical trivia: The Guildhall clock is designed not to strike between midnight and sunrise. This is because at the time it was finished in 1893, there was an expensive hotel nearby, and the management protested that a clock striking every hour through the night would disturb their sleeping guests.

Shipquay Place, Derry, BT48 6DQ. © 028/7137-7335. Free admission. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; Sat–Sun by appointment. Free guided tours July–Aug; enquire at reception.

THE bogside: THE PEOPLE'S GALLERY

In many ways, the recent history of Derry is embodied in the district known as the Bogside. In the 1960s and 1970s, the neighborhood bore witness to violent scenes that shocked the world. Today, it's known as much for its powerful street art, chronicling those troubled decades of the late 20th century.

Located just outside the walled city center, the Bogside was developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries as a home for Catholic workers. In the late 1960s, civil rights protests became regular events here, and the residents declared their neighborhood as "Free Derry," independent of local and British government. The situation came to a head on January 30th, 1972, later to be known as "Bloody Sunday," when British troops opened fire on a peaceful demonstration, killing 14 civilians. The soldiers said they'd been fired upon first; eventually, in 2010, after an inquiry that lasted 12 years and cost nearly £200 million, the British government finally accepted this was completely untrue and apologized.

Most of the Bogside has been redeveloped, but the Free Derry corner remains, near a house painted with the mural reading "You Are Now Entering Free Derry." Since the 1990s, local artists known as the **Bogside Artists** have painted more murals around the district, similar to those on the Falls Road in Belfast (see p. 505). Though some are overtly political in nature, many depict simple yet powerful messages of peace. This has effectively turned parts of the Bogside into a free art museum, and together the murals have become known as the **People's Gallery.**

Museum of Free Derry \star MUSEUM Thousands of documents and artifacts related to the civil rights movement are housed at this informative museum. Displays tell the story of Bloody Sunday and other key events in the "Troubles" of the 1960s to '90s. The timeline is clearly laid out and easy to understand; the calm, level tone makes the impact all the more powerful. The Bogside (see box above) naturally becomes the focus for much of this history—so afterward, why not take one of the excellent **Free Derry Tours** of the district, which leave from the museum. *Note:* At this writing the museum was in the process of moving. This should be complete by the end of 2015, but it would be advisable to call ahead all the same.

55 Glenfada Park, Derry, BT48 9DR. www.museumoffreederry.org. 10 028/7136-0880. Admission £3 adults; £2 seniors, students, and

children. Joint ticket with Free Derry Tour: £6 adults, £5 seniors and children. Jan–Mar, Oct–Dec Mon–Fri 9:30am–4:30pm; Apr–June, Sept Mon–Fri 9:30am–4:30pm, Sat 1–4pm; July–Aug Mon–Fri 9:30am–4:30pm, Sat–Sun 1–4pm.

St. Columb Cathedral ★ CATHEDRAL Within the city walls, near the Bishop's Gate, this Protestant cathedral was built by the Church of Ireland between 1628 and 1633 as a prime example of the so-called "Planters Gothic" style of architecture. It was the first cathedral built in Europe after the Reformation, although several sections were added afterward, including the impressive spire and stained-glass windows depicting scenes from the siege of 1688 and 1689. The chapter house contains a display of city relics such as the four massive original padlocks for the city gates. On the porch, a small stone inscribed "In Templo Verus Deus Est Vereo Colendus" ("The true God is in His temple and is to be truly worshipped") is part of the original church built on this site in 1164. An old mortar shell is on the porch as well. It was fired into the churchyard during the great siege; in its hollow core it held proposed terms of surrender. The flags around the chancel window were captured during the siege.

London St., Derry, BT48 6RQ. www.stcolumbscathedral.org. © 028/7126-7313. Requested donation £2 adults; £1.50 seniors, students and children. Mar–Oct Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; Nov–Feb Mon–Sat 9am–1pm, 2–4pm; also Sun at service times, year-round.

St. Eugene's Cathedral $\star\star$ CATHEDRAL Designed in the Gothic Revival style, Derry's Catholic cathedral is appropriately enough located in the heart of the Bogside district, just beyond the city walls. The foundation was laid in 1851, but work continued until 1873. The spire was added in 1902. It's built of local sandstone and is known for its stained-glass windows depicting the Crucifixion, which were designed by the famed stained-glass makers Meyer and Company of Munich.

Francis St., Derry, BT48 9AP. www.steugenescathedral.com. © 028/7126-2894. Free admission. Mon–Sat 7am–9pm; Sun 7am–6:30pm.

The Tower Museum ** MUSEUM This engaging museum chronicles the history of Derry from the earliest times to the 21st century. It's located in **O'Doherty Tower**, a reconstructed medieval fortress originally built in the early 17th century (rather wonderfully to pay off a tax debt, rather than for any specific defensive purpose). The **Story of Derry** exhibition presents a chronology of life in the city from the first Monastic settlers through the Plantation era, up to the turbulent 20th century, when the city was a focus of the civil rights movement driven by the Troubles. The main attraction, however, is the large, multi-floor exhibition devoted to an historic shipwreck that happened off the coast of Derry in the 16th century. **An Armada Shipwreck** tells the story of La Trinidad Valencera, part of the main fleet and sank during a storm. Four hundred years later the wreck was salvaged, together with an extraordinary hoard of treasure including clothes, shoes, pottery, cannons, goblets, and other items that revealed tantalizing glimpses of life on board.

Union Hall Place, Derry, BT48 6LU. www.derrycity.gov.uk/museums/tower-museum. © 028/7137-2411. Admission £4.30 adults; £2.80 seniors, students, and children; £10 families. Daily 10am-5:30pm. Last admission 1 hr. before closing.

CLIMBING THE walls

One of the best ways to explore Derry is via its 17th-century stone walls, about 1 mile (1.6km) in circumference and more than 5m (16 ft.) thick. Climb the stairs to the top and you can circle the entire walled city in about 30 minutes. Stairways off of the parapets are frequent, so you'll never get stuck up there. If you start at the **Diamond**, as the square in the center of the walled section is called, and walk down Butcher Street, you can climb the steps at **Butcher's Gate**, a security checkpoint between the Bogside and the city during the Troubles. Walk to the right across **Castle Gate**, which was built in 1865, and on to **Magazine Gate**, which was once near a powder magazine. Shortly afterward, you'll pass **O'Doherty's Tower**, which houses the worthwhile Tower Museum (see p. 553). From there you can see the brick walls of the Guildhall (see p. 551).

Farther along, you'll pass **Shipquay Gate**, once located very near the port, back when the waters passed closer to the town center. The walls turn uphill from there, past the Millennium Forum concert hall, and up to **Ferryquay Gate**. Here in 1688, local apprentice boys saved the town from attacking Catholic forces by locking the city gates—thus saving the town from attack, but launching the Great Siege of Derry, which lasted for months. (By the time it ended, nearly a quarter of the town's population had died.)

Next you'll pass **Bishop's Gate**, where a tall brick tower just outside the gate is all that remains of the **Old Gaol**. The rebel Wolfe Tone was imprisoned here after the unsuccessful uprising in 1798. Farther along, the **Double Bastion** holds a military tower with elaborate equipment used to keep an eye on the Bogside—it's usually splashed with paint hurled at it by Republicans. From there you can easily access the serene churchyard of **St. Columb's Cathedral** (see p. 553). From the next stretch of wall, you have a good view over the political murals of the Bogside down the hill.

A bit farther along the wall, an empty plinth stands where once there was a statue of Rev. George Walker, a governor of the city during the siege of 1699. It was blown up by the IRA in 1973. The small chapel nearby is the **Chapel of St. Augustine** (1872), and the building across the street from it with metal grates over the windows is the **Apprentice Boys' Memorial Hall**, commemorating the boys from the Great Siege of Derry. Walk but a short way farther, and you're back to Butcher's Gate.

Where to Stay in Derry

Saddler's House & the Old Rectory $\star\star$ Two charming buildings full of character with one pair of owners, these lovely B&Bs are among the best accommodations in Derry. Choose from the elegant Merchant's House, which was built in the mid-19th century (one of relatively few townhouses from that period left in Derry), or Saddler's House, a slightly simpler, late-Victorian building. (Check-in for both is at the Saddler's House.) Both have been beautifully maintained and renovated with designmagazine interiors and antiques scattered about. Breakfast is served in whichever house you choose. The same owners also have three self-catering places in Derry, including a small terraced cottage opposite the cathedral, an apartment in the old pump house, within the walled part of the city, and a 1950s-style apartment. Tip: The Merchant's House family room sleeps up to five, and has its own kitchen, for just £100 to £135 per night.

36 Great James St., Derry, BT48 7DB. www.thesaddlershouse.com. © 028/7126-9691. 7 units. £60–£80 double. Limited free parking (on street); otherwise paid street parking nearby. Rates include breakfast. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Troy Hall ** How delightfully unexpected to find this lavish Victorian mansion so close to the Derry city center. Troy Hall was built in 1897, complete with the Gothic flourishes that were so popular in the period. Turrets give the redbrick exterior an almost fairytale look, while the sweeping back lawn is a mere remnant of what was once a huge estate. The building suffered terribly over the years, until the current owners restored it to its now beautiful condition. The spacious guest rooms are individually designed but share a country-house-style chic, furnished with handmade wood or wrought iron beds and occasional antique pieces. Family rooms sleep up to five. Excellent breakfasts are served in the equally well-restored dining room, also known as the Turret. Central Derry is about 5 minutes by car or cab, and there's a bus stop nearby too.

9 Troy Park, Culmore Rd., Derry, BT48 7RL. www.troyhall.co.uk. 🖉 078/8436-1669. 3 units. £85 double. Free parking. Rates include

breakfast. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

Where to Dine in Derry

Badger's \star IRISH A friendly, proper local pub, right in the center of Derry, Badger's serves hearty, traditional grub—stews, fish and chips, steak and Guinness pie, burgers, and the like, plus a few lighter options such as hot sandwiches and wraps. Plates are generous, and of course, you can wash it all down with a pint of the black stuff. The dining room is satisfyingly unreconstructed with plenty of polished wood and low hanging lamps. No matter what the time of day, there always seem to be a few locals propping up the bar, which helps keep the atmosphere authentic.

16-18 Orchard St., Derry, BT48 6EG. **© 028/7136-0763.** Main courses £6–£12. Mon–Sat 11:30am–1am; Sun 11:30am–midnight. (Food served about noon–9pm.) No children after 9pm.

Brown's Restaurant and Champagne Lounge $\star\star$ BRASSERIE One of Derry's best restaurants, Brown's serves excellent Irish food with a few international influences. The menu uses plenty of local and regional ingredients, embracing traditional flavors with a touch of well-judged, modern innovation. Menus change frequently, but start with the local seafood tasting plate if it's on the menu —the turf-smoked salmon is particularly delicious—or perhaps some fresh Donegal crab. Afterward, how about beef filet with horseradish and Parmesan cheese, or some Greencastle cod with a rich langoustine thermidor ravioli? A six-course tasting menu is available for £40 (£65 with wines) and the three-course early bird special is just £22.

1 Bonds Hill, Derry, BT47 6DW. www.brownsrestaurant.com. © 028/7134-5180. Main courses £19–£24. Tues–Fri noon–2:30pm; 5–9:30pm; Sat 5–9:30pm; Sun noon–3pm.

Primrose Café $\star\star$ CAFE This lovely, cheerful cafe is nicely old-fashioned without being at all stuffy. Drop in for a bowl of delicious soup, fresh sandwiches, or a tasty pie (served with a side of excellent chips). Or you could just have a plate of homemade scones and some tea, served the proper way with a teapot and fine china. Service is cheery and prices are reasonable—just what you want for a casual lunch on the go.

15 Carlisle Rd., Derry, BT48 6JJ. 6 028/7126-4622. Lunch £3-£8. Mon-Sat 8am-5pm; Sun 11am-4pm.

Derry After Dark

Derry pubs are an important part of the local fabric, and hanging out in one is a good way to meet locals. Boozers are tied into the local music scene, so you'll frequently find bands playing. Pubs even host debating contests, in the midst of which you'll hear Irish eloquence at its well-lubricated best. Along **Waterloo Street**, just outside the city walls, a handful of Derry's most traditional and popular pubs are known for their live music. Walk from one end of Waterloo to the other—an act that will take you all of 2 minutes—and you'll likely find the bar for you.

Bennigan's $\star\star$ A fairly new addition to the top-tier of Derry's live music scene, Bennigan's is known for its fantastic live jazz, which attracts performers from all over Ireland (and beyond). Sessions usually start at around 9pm. 13 John St., Derry, BT48 6JY. © 028/7126-9127.

Peadar O'Donnells *** "Peadars" to the locals, this is one of the best places in Derry to hear traditional live music. Sessions are every night except Monday; generally they run from 10:30pm to about 1am weekdays, 7pm to 1am Saturdays, and 5pm to 1am Sundays—although spontaneous sessions have been known to start up pretty much anytime. The craic is lively and the atmosphere is buzzing. 59–63 Waterloo St., Derry, BT48 6HD. www.peadars.com. **© 028/7126-7295.**

River Inn $\star\star$ Allegedly Derry's oldest pub (the city walls form part of the building), the River Inn opened its doors in the 17th century. They also serve food, although people come for the atmosphere.

37 Shipquay St., Derry, BT48 6DW. @ 028/7137-1965.

THE SPERRIN MOUNTAINS

The beautiful Sperrin Mountains, a short drive southeast of Derry in County Tyrone are filled with beautiful walks, national parks, and extraordinary views. This is splendid, wide-open walking country, home to golden plover, red grouse, and thousands upon thousands of fluffy white sheep. There's also no shortage of ancient sites, including standing stones (about 1,000 have been counted in these hills), high crosses, dolmens, and hill forts. More reminders that every last bit of bog on this island has its own slew of stories, if only we could hear them told.

Visitor Information

The **Sperrin Heritage Centre**, 274 Glenelly Rd., Cranagh, BT79 8LS (© 028/8164-8142), is a good place to start, with tourist information and an interesting exhibition on the history of the area. You can even pan for gold here (small amounts are found in the mountains). The center is east of Plumbridge, off B47.

In addition are four main tourist information centers in County Tyrone. The Cookstown Tourist Information Centre, Burn Road, Cookstown, BT80 8DN (© 028/8676-9949), is open from October to May, Monday to Friday; and also on Sunday afternoons in August. The Killymaddy Tourist Information Centre, 26 Market Square, Dungannon, BT70 1AB (© 028/8772-8600), is open Monday to Saturday, and also Sunday afternoons from April to September. The Omagh Tourist Information Centre, at the Strule Arts Centre, Townhall Square, Omagh, BT78 1BL (© 028/8224-7831), is open year-round, Monday to Saturday. And the Strabane Tourist Information Centre, at the Alley Arts and Conference Centre, 1A Railway St., Strabane, BT82 8EF (© 028/7188-4444), is open Monday to Saturday, year-round.

Exploring the Sperrins

An Creagán Visitors' Centre \star INTERPRETIVE CENTER Beautifully designed to fit in with the craggy countryside around, this modern center is an excellent place to get your bearings when you first arrive in the Sperrins. A small gallery has an interactive exhibit about the mountains and what the area has to offer. A few Bronze Age artifacts that were excavated from nearby sites are also on display. The helpful staff will give you all the information you need on walking and cycling routes, as well as maps and bicycle rentals. There's a restaurant and craft shop, and the center even owns a few self-catering properties if you're interested in staying longer. (Prices start at about £180 for a one-bedroom cottage in the low season.) The center is in the tiny village of Creggan, about 37 miles (60km) southeast of Derry. Although it's on a main road, there's also a scenic back way. From Derry, head south on A5 to New Buildings, then take B48 southeast through Plumbridge. At Gortin, turn left and follow B46 to the A505 crossroads in Creggan.

A505, Creggan, Omagh, Co. Tyrone. www.an-creagan.com. © 028/8076-1112. Free admission. Daily 11am–5pm.

Beaghmore Stone Circles ★ ANCIENT SITE In 1945, seven stone circles and a complex assembly of cairns and alignments were uncovered here, in remote moorland north of Evishbrack Mountain and near Davagh Forest Park on the southern edge of the Sperrins. Arranged inside the largest circle are around 800 small stones, christened the "Dragon's Teeth." No one knows what this intriguing bit of Bronze Age stonework was built for, but it may have involved astronomical observation and calculation. The layout of the stones has also led archaeologists to believe that they

surround unexcavated megalithic tombs.

11 miles (17km) northwest of Cookstown, signposted from A505, Co. Tyrone. No phone. Free admission (open site).

Drum Manor Forest Park \star NATURE SITE Once a private estate, this extensive park and woodland has numerous trails and three old walled gardens, one of which has been designed as a butterfly garden. Also on the grounds are a visitor center, a heronry, and a pond that attracts a variety of wildfowl.

2¹/₂ miles (4km) west of Cookstown on A505, Co. Tyrone. **© 028/8675-9311** (forest ranger). Admission £3 per car; pedestrians £1 adults, 50p children. Daily 8am–dusk.

Gortin Glen Forest Park ** NATURE SITE Nearly 400 hectares (988 acres) of conifers make up this serene nature park. The woodlands are a habitat to a variety of wildlife, including a herd of Japanese sika deer. A forest drive offers splendid views of the Sperrins. Here you'll also find a nature center, wildlife enclosures, trails, and a cafe. The park has three separate marked walking trails; details can be found at the visitor center on the B48 road just south of Gortin. The long-distance **Ulster Way** hiking trail also passes through the park; for more information on the Ulster Way visit www.walkni.com/ulsterway.

Vistor Center: On B48 (Glenpark Rd.), about 2¹/₂ miles (4km) south of Gortin, Co. Tyrone. **© 028/8167-0666.** Free admission; parking £4. Visitor Center: daily 10am–dusk.

Ulster American Folk Park *** HERITAGE SITE Another of the region's excellent "living history" outdoor museums, this one celebrates and commemorates the links between Ulster and the New World. It chronicles the story of those 18th and 19th century emigrants who left their homes in the north of Ireland to seek a new life overseas. The park contains authentic structures from the period —some of them actual dwellings reconstructed from elsewhere—to give an accurate impression of the life they left behind. After looking around the humble thatched cottages, you can explore a small town street, complete with convincingly decked-out shops, manned by costumed actors. Next you'll see a full-size replica emigrant ship, and finally examples of the kinds of frontier, log cabin-type homes the emigrants lived in when they settled in the United States. The park has an active schedule of special events, including a respected Bluegrass festival around the tail end of August or the beginning of September. Check the website for full listings.

2 Mellon Rd., Castletown, Co. Tyrone BT78 5QU. www.nmni.com. © 028/8224-3292. Admission £7.50 adults; £5 seniors and students; £4.50 children 5–17; £16–£21 families. Prices rise by roughly 50% on major event days. Mar–Sept Tues–Sun 10am–5pm; Oct–Feb Tues–Fri 10am–4pm, Sat, Sun 11am–4pm. Closed Mon (except public holidays).

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

BIRD-WATCHING The Sperrins are home to golden plovers, peregrines, ravens, grouse, and hen harriers. **Sawel Mountain**, the highest of the Sperrins at at 661m (2,168 ft.), is a great place to take out your binoculars and field guide.

CYCLING The Sperrin countryside is ideal for cycling. Bicycles can be rented by the day or week from the **An Creagán Visitors' Centre** (see p. 557). Bike rentals run roughly £10 a day, £35 a week. **FISHING** The **Foyle System** of rivers, from Derry to Omagh and Limavady to Dungiven, makes this a promising area for brown and sea trout (Apr to early July and Sept) and a variety of salmon (Mar–Sept). Some good coarse fishing is also available north and west of Omagh, on the Baronscourt Lakes

and on the Strule and Fairy Water rivers. The necessary permits, equipment, and good advice are available from C. A. Anderson & Co., 64A Market St., Omagh, BT78 1EN (© 028/8224-2311); and Mourne Valley Tackle, 12 Killymore Rd., Newtownstewart, BT78 4AA (© 028/8166-1543).

HORSEBACK RIDING For private lessons or country trail rides, contact the magnificently named **Tullywhisker Riding School,** 51 Brocklis Rd., Strabane, BT82 9LZ (© 028/8165-8015 or © 077/4098-0600).

WALKING Whether you're on foot, wheels, or horseback, be sure to traverse the **Glenshane Pass** between Mullaghmore (545m/1,788 ft.) and Carntogher (455m/1,492 ft.), and the **Sawel Mountain Drive** along the east face of the mountain. The vistas along these routes through the Sperrins will remind you of why you've gone out of your way to spend time in Tyrone.

THE FERMANAGH LAKELANDS

In the extreme southwest corner of Northern Ireland, County Fermanagh is a resort area dominated by **Lough Erne**, a long, narrow lake with 154 islands and countless coves and inlets. The **Shannon-Erne Waterway**, linking the lough to the Shannon system, enhances the lure of Lough Erne as a boating destination. Were you to cruise the whole length of the waterway between the village of Leitrim and Lough Erne, you'd travel 40 miles (65km), past 16 lochs, three lakes, and the Woodford River, all of which are ripe for exploration.

In medieval times, a chain of island monasteries stretched across the waters of Lough Erne, establishing it as a haven for those seeking peace and contemplation. Traces of those monasteries can still be found on those unspoiled islands—and the Fermanagh Lakelands still feel like a peaceful place to get away from it all.

Visitor Information

The **Fermanagh Tourist Information Centre**, Wellington Road, Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, BT74 7EF (© 028/6632-3110), is open Monday to Friday, year-round, and also on Saturday and Sunday from Easter to the end of September. For an introduction to the Fermanagh Lakelands on the web, take a look at www.fermanaghlakelands.com.

Exploring the Lakelands

The hub of this lakeland paradise—wedged between Upper Lough Erne to the south and Lower Lough Erne to the north—is **Enniskillen**, a delightful resort town that was the medieval seat of the Maguire clan and a major crossroads between Ulster and Connaught. Both Oscar Wilde and Samuel Beckett were once students here at the royal school. A handful of lovely historic homes are dotted around the midsection of the lake as well, including **Castle Coole** \star (see p. 561), the **Crom Estate** $\star\star$ (see p. 561), and **Florence Court** $\star\star$ (see p. 563).

At the northern tip of the lake, right near the Republic of Ireland border, Belleek is known the world over for its trademark delicate bone chinaware. At the southern end of the lake is County Cavan and another slice of border with the Irish Republic.

One of the best ways to explore Lough Erne is by boat. Erne Tours Ltd., Enniskillen (www.ernetoursltd.com; © 028/6632-2882), operates 2-hour cruises on Lower Lough Erne, departing daily May through September from the delightfully named Round "O" Jetty, Brook Park, Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, BT74 7EU. Fares start at £10 adults, £9 seniors, or £6 for children 11 and under. Call for schedules. On Upper Lough Erne, cruises are operated on Sundays and bank holidays by Share Holiday Village, Smith's Strand, Lisnaskea (www.sharevillage.org; © 028/6772-2122). Fares are £10 adults, £9 seniors, or £6 for children 11 and under.

Independent boatmen offer ferry crossings to some of the many islands in Lough Erne. Besides **Devenish Island** $\star\star$ (see p. 562), **White Island** and **Boa Island** are rich in archaeological and early Christian remains. On White Island, seven stone figures remain from a vanished 10th-century monastery inside a ruined 12th-century church. (The ferry to White Island runs from Castle Archdale Marina in Irvinestown; © 028/6862-1892; the fare is £4 round-trip.) Boa Island is connected to the shore by bridges; poke around the cemetery at the island's west end to find two ancient idols of the god Janus (with faces looking both ways), thought to date from the 1st century.

Castle Coole \star HISTORIC HOUSE On the east bank of Lower Lough Erne, this quintessential neoclassical mansion was designed by James Wyatt for the Earl of Belmore and completed in 1796. Its rooms include a lavish state bedroom hung with crimson silk, said to have been prepared for George IV (1762–1830). Other features include a Chinese-style sitting room, magnificent woodwork, fireplaces, and furniture dating from the 1830s. A nearly 600-hectare (1,482-acre) woodland estate surrounds the house. A classical music series runs from May to October.

1¹/₂ miles (2.4km) southeast of Enniskillen on the main Belfast-Enniskillen Rd. (A4), Co. Fermanagh. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/castlecoole. **© 028/6632-2690.** House: £4.80 adults; £2 children; £11 families. Grounds only (cars): £3.50 adults, £2 children, £9 families. Grounds only (walkers): £2.50 adults; £1.50 children; £6.50 families. House mid-Mar to May Sat–Sun 11am–5pm (and all week during Easter week only); June–Aug daily 11am–5pm. Grounds Mar–Oct daily 10am–7pm; Nov–Feb daily 10am–4pm. Last admission 30 min. before closing.

Crom ** NATURE SITE On the east bank of sinuous Upper Lough Erne, this nearly 800-hectare (1,976-acre) nature reserve is a splendid National Trust–owned estate, with forest, parks, wetlands, fen meadows, and an award-winning lakeshore visitor center. The numerous trails have concealed places for observing birds and wildlife. You can rent a rowboat and row your way out to the islands. A 19th-century castle is also located on the grounds, though it's not open to visitors. The estate is a great place to fish for bream and roach; permits and day tickets are available at the gate lodge. During the summer, the weekends frequently feature special programs and guided nature walks. The estate has several cottages available for rent by the week (about £250–£800). Call or check the National Trust website for more information.

Upper Lough Erne, Newtownbutler, Co. Fermanagh, BT92 8AP. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/crom. **© 028/6773-8118.** Admission £4.70 adults; £1.90 children; £11 families. Mid-Mar–May, Sept–Oct daily 10am–6pm; June–Aug daily 10am–7pm. Visitor center mid-Mar to Sept daily 11am–5pm; Oct Sat–Sun 11am–5pm. Last admission 1 hr. before closing. Closed Nov–mid-Mar. 21 miles (34km) south of Enniskillen. Take A4 and A34 from Enniskillen to Newtownbutler, then take the signposted right turn onto a minor road.

BUYING belleek

Perhaps the most famous Irish homeware brand in the world after Waterford Crystal, Belleek Pottery has been making fine china since 1864. The **Belleek Visitor Centre**, Belleek, County Fermanagh (www.belleek.ie; **© 028/6865-9300**) is the world headquarters of the brand. You can look around their museum—which displays unique objects of Belleek pottery, such as the extraordinary International Centre Piece vase they created for the 1900 Paris Expo—and also take factory tours. But of course, the reason most people come is to visit the enormous gift shop.

If you're not a china expert, but you still want to bring back some Belleek pieces from your trip, here are a few tips to ensure that your purchases become heirlooms:

- The Belleek Heirloom Centre has the best selection of patterns from which to choose, giving you lots of options and a wide price range.
- At the center, all the china is displayed around the room. You walk around looking at all the pieces, then note the item numbers of those pieces you like. You take the numbers to the central counter, and they bring boxed china pieces to you.
- Make sure they pull the pieces out of the boxes so you can be sure they are what you expected.
- Take the pieces from the sales assistant and look at them closely. This is delicate china, and it can have tiny imperfections that you can only see by getting up close and personal.
- Be particularly conscious of the bottom of the piece—look for tiny hairline cracks. We bought a lovely Belleek vase once that looked perfect, but leaked through a nearly invisible crack.
- The center will ship internationally if you don't want to risk taking your purchases on a plane.
- If it looks good to you and you love it-buy it! You may not get the chance again.

The Belleek Centre is generally open from Monday to Friday, 9pm to 5:30pm; Saturday, 10am to 5:30pm; and Sunday, 2 to 5pm. From July to September, the center stays open a half-hour later and opens at noon on Sunday. In January and February, it's closed on Saturday and Sunday. On weekdays, there are tours every half-hour from 9:30am to 12:15pm and 1:45 to 4pm (last tour 3pm on Friday). From June to September, there are also tours on Saturday from 10:30am to 12:15pm and 2 to 4pm.

Devenish Island ** NATURE SITE The most extensive of the ancient Christian sites in Lough Erne, Devenish Island is a marvelous mélange of remnants and ruins, providing a glimpse into the lake's mystical past. In the 6th century, St. Molaise founded a monastic community here, to which the Augustinian Abbey of St. Mary was added in the 12th century. In other words, this is hallowed ground, even more so for the legend that the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah is buried somewhere nearby—if you can figure that one out. The jewel of Devenish is the perfectly intact, 12th-century round tower, which was erected with Vikings in mind. A regular ferry to Devenish Island usually runs in July and August only, from Trory Point, 6.5km (4 miles) from Eniskillen on A32. To find it, take A32 north from Enniskillen, toward nearby Irvinestown. After about 2 miles you will come to a roundabout; almost immediately before turn left (next to the gas station), down the small country road. After about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile you'll come to a fork in the road; turn left here and look out for the jetty on your right.

 $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles (2.4km) downstream from Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh. **© 028/6862-1588.** Admission to round tower £2.50; £1.50 seniors and children. Ferry: July–Aug at 10am, 1, 3, 5pm; other sailing times based on demand. Round-trip fare £3 adults; £2 seniors, students and children age 5–16, children 4 and under free.

Enniskillen Castle $\star\star$ CASTLE On the banks of Lower Lough Erne in Enniskillen, this impressive castle was built sometime around the first half of the 14th century, but significantly remodeled in the 17th. It's unusual in that the design owes more to the Scottish Baronial style of castle, with its small round turrets, redolent of Gothic motifs, than the more solid, fortress-like English-French style that predominates throughout Ireland. Today it is home to three different museums, each covering a

different aspect of the Fermanagh area, including its history as an important center of clan power in the middle ages. The castle is on the west side of Enniskillen town center. At this writing, parts of the castle and museums are closed for refurbishment, but the renovations should be completed by the beginning of 2016.

Castle Barracks, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, BT74 7HL. www.enniskillencastle.co.uk. **© 028/6632-5000.** Admission £4 adults; £3 seniors, students, and children; £11 families. Apr–June, Sept–Oct Mon, Sat 2–5pm, Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; July–Aug Mon, Sat, Sun 2–5pm, Tues–Fri 10am–5pm; Nov–Mar Mon 2–5pm, Tues–Fri 10am–5pm.

Florence Court ****** HISTORIC HOUSE This 18th-century Palladian mansion is set among dramatic hills, 8 miles (13km) southwest of Lower Lough Erne and Enniskillen. Originally the seat of the earls of Enniskillen, its interior is rich in rococo plasterwork and antique Irish furniture, while outside is a fine walled garden, an icehouse, and a water-wheel-driven sawmill. The forest park offers a number of trails, one leading to the top of Mount Cuilcagh (nearly 660m/2,165 ft.). You can recover from the climb at the tearoom.

Florence Court, off A32, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, BT92 1DB. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/florence-court. **©** 028/6634-8249. Admission £5.75 adults; £2.95 children; £15 families. House tour: £4 adults, £2 children, £10 families. House: mid-Mar to Apr, Oct Sat–Sun 11am–5pm; May, Sept Sat–Thurs 11am–5pm; June–Aug daily 11am–5pm. Gardens and park Jan–Feb and Nov–Dec daily 10am–4pm; Mar–Oct daily 10am–7pm. Also open all public holidays. Last admission and tour 1 hr. before closing.

Marble Arch Caves ** CAVES Near the Florence Court estate (see above), these UNESCOlisted caves are among the finest in Europe for exploring underground rivers, winding passages, and hidden chambers. Electrically powered boat tours take visitors underground, and knowledgeable guides explain the origins of the amazing stalactites and stalagmites. Tours last 75 minutes and leave at 15-minute intervals. The caves are occasionally closed after heavy rains, so phone ahead before making the trip if there's been particularly bad weather near the time of your visit.

Marlbank Rd., Florence Court, off A32, Co. Fermanagh. www.marblearchcavesgeopark.com. **© 028/6634-8855.** Admission £8.75 adults; £6 seniors and students; £5.75 children; £20 families. Reservations recommended. Apr–June and Sept daily 10am–4:30pm (last tour); July–Aug daily 10am–5pm (last tour); Oct Mon–Fri 11am–4pm, Sat 10am–4:30pm. Sometimes opens Mar but times vary; call to check.

Sports & Outdoor Pursuits

BIRD-WATCHING These lakelands are prime bird-watching territory. To mention a few, you'll find whooper swans, great-crested grebes, golden plovers, curlews, corncrakes, kingfishers, herons, merlins, peregrines, kestrels, and sparrow hawks. On Upper Lough Erne, the primary habitats are the reed swamps, flooded drumlins, and fen; on the lower lake, the habitats of choice are the less visited islands and the hay meadows. Two important preserves are at **Crom **** (see p. 561) and the **Castle Caldwell Forest and Islands** on Lower Lough Erne, near Belleek. The preserve includes a stretch of the lough's shoreline; the picturesque 17th-century ruins of Castle Caldwell itself stand nearby.

BOATING Lough Erne is an explorer's dream, and you can take that dream all the way to the Atlantic if you want. The price range for fully equipped, four- to eight-berth cruisers is around £650 to £1,200 per week, including tax, depending on the season and the size of the boat. The many local cruiser-hire companies include Erne Marine, Bellanaleck (www.erne-marine.com; © 077/0812-7700), and Carrickcraft, Lurgan (www.cruise-ireland.com; © 028/3834-4993 or 01/278-1666 from the Republic).

On Lower Lough Erne, north of town, you can hire motorboats from Manor House Marine, Killadeas (www.manormarine.com; @ 028/6862-8100). Charges average £65 to £90 for a half-day, and £90 to £130 for a full-day, depending on the size of the boat (maximum eight people). You'll have to pay a refundable deposit before heading out.

CYCLING Several of the watersports and activity centers in the area, such as One Great Adventure (see "Watersports," below), also rent bicycles. Bicycles are also available from Corralea Activity Centre, Belcoo (www.activityireland.com; © 028/6638-6123). Daily bike rental runs around £15.

FISHING If you can't catch a fish here, you will really have to question your technique. The best time for salmon is February to mid-June; for trout, mid-March to June or mid-August until late September. As for coarse fishing, about a dozen species await your line in the area's lakes and rivers. If you're planning in advance, contact the **Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCNI)**, Bedford St., Belfast, BT2 7EG (www.dcalni.gov.uk; © 028/9025-8825). For on-the-spot info, tackle, and bait, try **Home, Field and Stream**, 18 Church St., Enniskillen (www.hfs-online.com; © 028/6632-2114). For locally arranged game fishing, call or drop in on **Melvin Tackle**, Main Street, Garrison, Co. Fermanagh (© 028/6865-8194). All necessary permits and licenses are available at the **Fermanagh Tourist Information Centre** (see p. 560).

The two 18-hole courses in the Lakelands are both in Enniskillen. The Enniskillen Golf Club, GOLF in the Castle Coole estate (www.enniskillengolfclub.com; @ 028/6632-5250), charges greens fees of £15 weekdays, £25 weekends. They sometimes have special offers that can drop the price by half off-season. The Castle Hume Golf midweek. especially Club, Castle Hume (www.castlehumegolf.com; @ 028/6632-7077), is 3 miles (5km) north of Enniskillen, with greens fees of £25 to £45, depending on the number of holes played.

HORSEBACK RIDING Pony trekking and riding lessons are available from Drumhoney Stables, Drumhoney, Irvinestown, BT91 1NB (© 028/6862-1892).

WALKING The southwestern branch of the **Ulster Way** follows the western shores of Lough Erne, between the lake and the border. The area is full of other great walks as well. One excellent 6.75-mile (11km; 3–7 hr.) hike is from a starting point near Florence Court and the Marble Arch Caves (see p. 564) to the summit of **Mount Cuilcagh** (656m/2,152 ft.). For a detailed description of the route, and downloadable map, visit www.walkni.com/walks/585/cuilcagh-mountain.

Where to Stay & Dine in the Fermanagh Lakelands

Belmore Court Motel \star Don't be put off by the lofty name—this is actually a good, quality budget option on the edge of Enniskillen. The basic rooms are laid out like a traditional American motel (virtually unheard of in Europe). They're clean and modern, with compact kitchen areas and free Wi-Fi. Pay just a little more, however, and you get much more space, plus nice little touches like Nespresso machines, breakfast, and even (in the executive rooms) little balconies. Family rooms cost just a bit more than doubles. The location, although not the most romantic spot in Enniskillen, isn't too far from the town center and nearby sights; **Enniskillen Castle** $\star\star$ (see p. 563) is a mile in one direction, and **Castle Coole** \star (see p. 561), a mile in the other.

Tempo Rd., Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, BT74 6HX. www.motel.co.uk. 🖉 028/6632-6633. 60 units. £65–£115 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Wi-Fi (free).

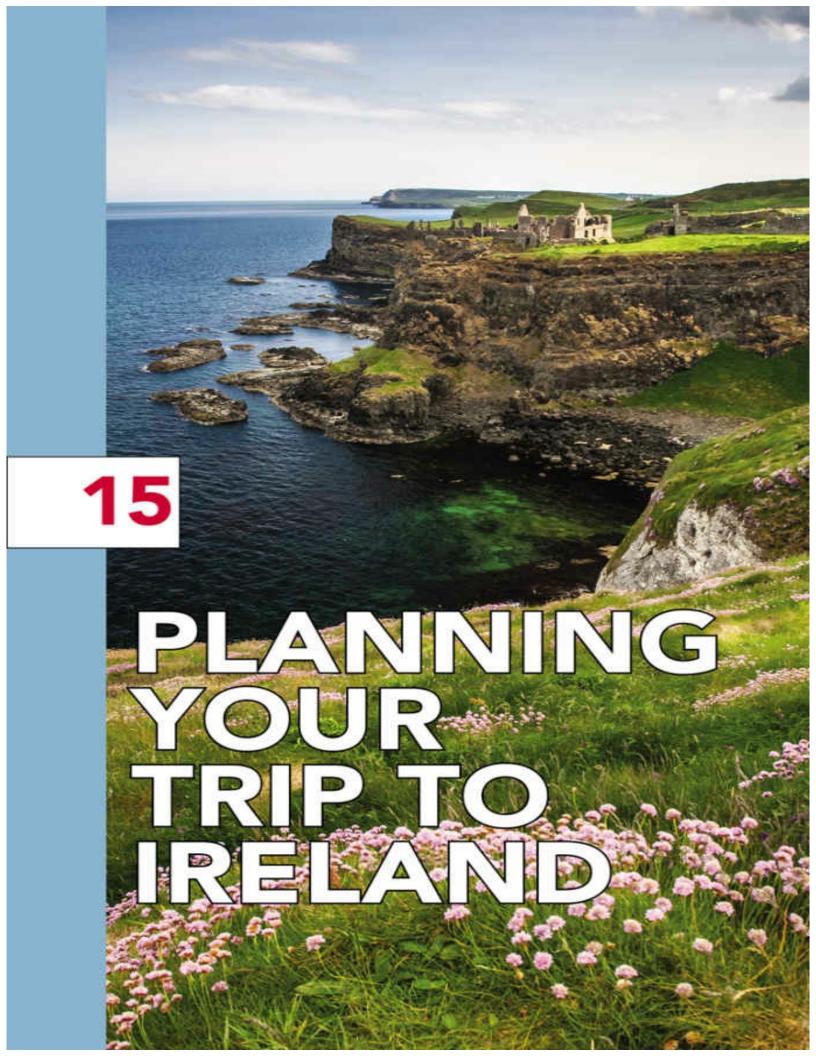
Castle Leslie *** This historic estate, surrounded by lush grounds that seem to go on forever, is one of the very best places to stay in the North. It's also one of the most historic places you could hope to lay your head in Ireland—it has welcomed a dazzling list of luminaries over the years, from historical figures (W. B. Yeats was a houseguest, and Winston Churchill was a cousin of the Leslie family) to celebrities (Paul McCartney and Heather Mills were married here in 2002). Because the owners were great collectors, it's a place of hidden treasures. Strolling around you'll wander past

Wordsworth's harp, the Bechstein grand piano on which Wagner composed Tristan and Isolde, and Winston Churchill's baby clothes, among many other things. Guest rooms are individually designed, to varying degrees of grandeur; most are located in the converted hunting lodge, although guests with the deepest pockets can stay in the main house for the full *Downton Abbey* effect. **Snaffles Restaurant** is as outstanding as you'd expect from a place like this; classic and sophisticated dishes prepared with local ingredients, such as roast Silverhill duck served with orange marmalade and creamed sweet potato, or beef filet with a horseradish glaze, served with spinach and onion gnocchi. Less formal dining options are also available. Check the website for dinner, bed and breakfast packages. There are several hundred acres of grounds to wander, where horseback riding, clay pigeon shooting, and other outdoors activities can be arranged, plus an elegant spa to smooth away the few cares you have left. Best of all—the price is incredibly reasonable for what you get.

Glaslough, Co. Monaghan. www.castleleslie.com. © 047/88100. 62 units. £122–£202 double. Dinner, bed and breakfast packages available. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; spa; Wi-Fi (free).

The Enniskillen Hotel $\star\star$ This stylish boutique hotel in central Enniskillen has a wonderfully bon vivant streak. Bedrooms are modern and chic, with subtle lighting and plenty of dark grays and oatmeal colors. The bar, Wilde's, specializes in whiskey, and sometimes hosts special tasting sessions. You can also take light meals here, or eat in the excellent **Beckett's Grill;** the relatively short menu focuses on barbecue, with a few fish options too. Special offers, including dinner, bed and breakfast packages, and family weekends (with passes for a local play center), are excellent values. The hotel is on the eastern side of the city, about a 20-minute walk from **Enniskillen Castle** $\star\star$ (see p. 563).

72 Forthill St., Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, BT74 6AJ. www.enniskillenhotel.com. **© 028/6632-1177.** 35 units. £95–£110 double. Free parking. Breakfast included. Amenities: Restaurant; bar; room service; Wi-Fi (free).



Dunluce Castle.

C hances are you've been looking forward to your trip to Ireland for some time. You've probably set aside a significant amount of hard-earned cash, taken time off from work, school or other commitments, and now want to make the most of your holiday. To accomplish that, you'll need to plan carefully. The aim of this chapter is to provide you with the information you need, and to answer any questions you might have on lots of topics, including: When to go? How to get there? Should you book a tour or travel independently? And how much will everything cost? Here you'll find plenty of resources to help get the most out of your Irish adventure.

GETTING THERE

By Plane

The Republic of Ireland has three major international airports. They are, in order of size, **Dublin** (**DUB**) (www.dublinairport.com; © 1/814-1111), **Cork (ORK)** (www.cork-airport.com; © 021/431-3131), and Shannon (www.shannonairport.com; © 061/712000). Northern Ireland's main airport is **Belfast International Airport (BFS)** (www.belfastairport.com; © 028/9448-4848).

The Republic of Ireland has seven smaller regional airports, all of which offer service to Dublin and several that receive some (very limited) European traffic. They are Donegal, Kerry, Knock, Sligo, and Waterford. In Northern Ireland, the secondary airports are Belfast City Airport and Derry City Airport. Airline service to these smaller airports changes frequently, so be sure to consult your preferred airline or travel agent as soon as you begin to sketch your itinerary.

Begin thinking about flying plans at least 6 months ahead of time. Consider exchange rate movements: Fares may be calculated in U.S. dollars, British pounds, or euros, depending on the airline. The key window for finding a **deal** is usually between 5 and 6 months ahead of your departure according to a massive study of some 21 million fare transactions by the Airline Reporting Corporation (a middleman between travel agencies and the airlines). They also found that those who booked on a Sunday statistically found the best rates (on average they paid 19% less than those who booked midweek).

The glory days of generous **frequent flyer programs** and bucket loads of free miles are no more, but those who collect miles via credit cards (rather than trying to fly to get them) are having better luck getting free trips nowadays. The key strategy is to get a card that will work with a number of airlines, rather than one branded by a particular airline (as those usually have less generous rates of return and more draconian fees). The forum **Flyertalk.com** is a handy resource for learning how to get the most out of your miles (both for airlines and hotels); such companies as **AwardMagic.com** and **IFlyWithMiles.com** can help stressed travelers redeem miles for flights for a flat fee that's usually far less than a ticket from the United States to Ireland would have cost.

Run searches through the regular online agents such as Expedia, as well as metasearch engines like **DoHop.com, Kayak.com, Skyscanner.net**, and **Momondo.com.** For complex journeys, with multiple departures, doing multiple searches (so such affordable intra-European airlines as Ryanair, Flybe, and EasyJet show up on the search) is a good way to find deals; a specialist flight agent such as

Roundthe WorldFlights.com or AirTreks.com will also likely save you money.

By Ferry

If you're traveling to Ireland from Britain or the Continent, traveling by ferry is a good alternative to flying. Several car and passenger ferries offer reasonably comfortable furnishings, cabin berths (for longer crossings), restaurants, duty-free shopping, and lounges.

Prices fluctuate seasonally and depend on your route, time of travel, and whether you are on foot or in a car. It's best to check with your travel agent for up-to-date details, but just to give you an idea, the lowest one-way adult fare in high season on the cruise ferry from Holyhead to Dublin starts at around £30. A car usually costs about £80 including one adult passenger, £30 per extra adults, £15 per extra child.

Irish Ferries (www.irishferries.ie; © 0818/300-400 in the Republic of Ireland, or © 353/818-300-400 in Northern Ireland/U.K.) operates from Holyhead, Wales, to Dublin, and to Rosslare, from Pembroke, Wales, to Rosslare, County Wexford. They also sail from Cherbourg and Rosscoff in France.

Stena Line (www.stenaline.com; © 01/204-7777) sails from Fishguard, Wales, to Rosslare; and from Cairnryan, Scotland, and Liverpool, England, to Belfast, Northern Ireland.

P&O Irish Sea Ferries (www.poferries.com; © 0871/664-2121 in Britain, © 01/407-3434 in Ireland, or © 352/3420-808-294 in the rest of the world) operates from Liverpool to Dublin and from Cairnryan, Scotland, to Larne, County Antrim, Northern Ireland.

TRIPS & TOURS

Package Tours

Package tours are simply a way to buy the airfare, accommodations, and other elements of your trip (such as car rentals, airport transfers, and even activities) at the same time and often at discounted prices.

One good source for package deals of all kinds is the airlines themselves. Most major airlines offer air/land packages, with surprisingly cheap hotel deals. Several big online travel agencies—such as **Expedia** (www.expedia.com), **Travelocity** (www.travelocity.com), Orbitz (www.orbitz.com), and **Lastminute** (www.lastminute.com)—also do a brisk business in packages

Fully escorted tours mean a travel company takes care of absolutely everything, including airfare, hotels, meals, tours, admission costs, and local transportation. Although we hope this book will help you to plan your trip independently and safely, many travelers still prefer the convenience and peace of mind that a fully escorted tour offers. They are particularly good for inexperienced travelers or people with limited mobility. They can also be a great way to make new friends. On the downside, you'll have little opportunity for serendipitous interactions with locals. The tours can be jam-packed with activities, leaving little room for individual sightseeing, whim, or adventure. Plus they often focus on heavily trafficked sites, so you miss out on many lesser-known gems.

Discover Ireland (www.discoverireland.com) can give advice on escorted tours and publishes upto-the-minute deals on the front page of their website. If you prefer to speak to a person, the website has individual phone numbers for around 50 countries—and every region in the world—on the contact page of the website.

One highly recommended Irish company is C.I.E. Tours (www.cietours.com; @ 020/8638-0715).

They offer fully escorted tours; help organize self-guided tours; and will even arrange individual, chauffeur-driven tours. Another, **Hidden Ireland Tours** (www.hiddenirelandtours.com; © 087/221-4002), specializes in more off-the-beaten-path tours of Kerry, Galway, and Donegal.

A good company for travelers from the U.S. and Canada is Authentic Ireland (www.authenticireland.com; © 087/221-4002 or 125/1478-7519 outside Ireland). In addition to escorted, self-guided, and private tours, their range also covers themed tours such as castle and golfing vacations.

Those wanting to combine their trip with some serious learning opportunities might be interested in the **International Summer School** program at the National University of Ireland, Galway (University Rd., Galway, Co. Galway; www.nuigalway.ie/international-summer-school), which includes courses on Irish language and history. Contact the course administrator on © 091/495-442 for more information.

Sightseeing Tours

A limitless array of tour companies offer organized tours in Ireland, from Ghost Tours of Dublin to trips to the Aran Islands from Galway to horseback rides through the Burren. **Dublin Bus** (www.dublinsightseeing.ie; \bigcirc 01/703-3028) runs a good range of tours in Dublin and the southeast. They include a North Coast and Castle Tour, a South Coast and Gardens tour, as well as the extremely popular Ghost Bus. Most tours cost between \notin 20 and \notin 30. Irish City Tours (www.irishcitytours.com; \bigcirc 01/898-0700) runs several day trips from Dublin to destinations such as Powerscourt (p. 189), the Cliffs of Moher (p. 364), and the Giant's Causeway (p. 540). Prices range from about \notin 30 to \notin 65.

Special Interest Tours GOLF

A host of U.S. companies offer package golf tours. Among them are **Golf International** (www.golfinternational.com; © 800/833-1389 or 212/986-9176) and Wide World of Golf (www.wideworldofgolf.com; © 800/214-4653).

CYCLING

All-inclusive bicycle trips in Ireland can be booked from the United States with either **Backroads** (www.backroads.com; © 800/462-2848 or 510/527-1555) or VBT (www.vbt.com; © 800/245-3868), both well-regarded companies. Their tour packages include bikes, gear, luggage transportation via a support van, good food, and rooms in local inns and hotels of character—everything bundled into one price. In Ireland, Irish Cycling Safaris, Belfield Bike Shop, Belfield House, University College Dublin, Dublin 4 (www.cyclingsafaris.com; © 01/260-0749) offers cycling trips to practically every part of Ireland suitable for two wheels, including packages that cover B&B and some meals.

HIKING

For a full walking holiday package to County Kerry or County Clare and Connemara, the U.S.-based **Backroads** (www.backroads.com; © 800/462-2848) is one highly recommended operator. For guided walks in the southwest of Ireland, contact **South West Walks Ireland** (www.southwestwalksireland.com; © 066/718-6181).

HORSEBACK RIDING

Hidden Trails (www.hiddentrails.com; © 888/987-2457) offers 7-day guided riding tours in several regions in Ireland, including the Wicklow Mountains, West Cork, and Connemara. The tours are

graded easy, moderate, or challenging, and include lodging and meals (breakfast, picnic lunch, and dinner).

GETTING AROUND

By Car

Although Ireland has a reasonably extensive network of public transportation, it will only be useful if you don't mind being confined to the major towns and cities, or taking organized tours out to attractions that are farther afield. Trains tend not to go to charming small towns and villages, and great houses and castles are usually miles from any major town. Buses are slow, and service to places off the beaten track can be infrequent.

Renting a car is not for everyone—particularly if you're not used to driving n small, winding European country roads (and on the *left* side of the road). But if you're intrepid enough to do it, this is by far the best way to get around. It will give you the most freedom and open up more choices to you than any other way of getting around. Put simply: rent a car and you'll see more of Ireland.

In the summer, weekly rental rates on a manual-transmission compact vehicle begin at around €160 and ascend steeply. Rates are much cheaper out of season.

Unless your stay in Ireland extends beyond 6 months, your own valid driver's license (provided you've had it for at least 6 months) is all you need to drive in Ireland. Rules and restrictions for car rental vary slightly and correspond roughly to those in other European nations and the U.S., with two important distinctions: Most rental-car agencies in the Republic won't rent to you (1) if you're 24 and under or 75 and over (there's no upper age limit in the North) or (2) if your license has been valid for less than a year.

DRIVING LAWS, TIPS & WARNINGS

Highway safety has become a critical issue in Ireland during the past several years. The number of highway fatalities is high for such a small nation—Ireland regularly comes out near the bottom of European league tables for accident rates.

In an effort to rein in Irish drivers, the Republic now uses a penalty "points" system similar to that in the U.K. and the U.S. Although visitors won't have points added to their licenses, they may still be penalized with fines if they speed or commit driving infractions.

All distances and speed limits on road signs in the Republic of Ireland are in **kilometers**, while in Northern Ireland they are in **miles**. Take care if you're driving around the borderlands—the border is unmarked, so you can cross over from one side to the other without knowing it. It's easy to get confused and speed accidentally.

road rules IN A NUTSHELL

- 1. Drive on the left side of the road.
- 2. Road signs are in kilometers, except in Northern Ireland, where they are in miles.
- 3. On motorways, the left lane is the traveling lane. The right lane is for passing.
- 4. Everyone must wear a seat belt by law. Young children must be in age-appropriate child seats.
- 5. Children 11 and under are not allowed to sit in the front seat.
- 6. When entering a roundabout (traffic circle), give way to traffic coming from the right.
- 7. Another roundabout rule: always go left (clockwise) around the circle.
- 8. The speed limits are 50kmph (31 mph) in urban areas; 80kmph (50 mph) on regional and local roads, sometimes referred to as non-national roads; 100kmph (62 mph) on national roads, including divided highways (called dual carriageways); and 120kmph (75 mph) on freeways (called motorways)

If you're not used to driving in rural areas on the left-hand side of the road, take precautions. Try to avoid driving after dark, and stay off the road when driving conditions are compromised by rain, fog, or heavy traffic. Getting used to left-side driving, left-handed stick shift, narrow roads, and a new landscape all present a challenge, especially if you're driving solo—it's helpful if you can have somebody along to navigate. Some people even use tricks such as sticking a big arrow to the dashboard reminding you that the left is your default lane.

You can also rent a GPS navigation device with your car. These can be invaluable in finding your way around, especially in the remote countryside. Nearly all rental firms offer them.

Roundabouts (what Americans call traffic circles or rotaries) are found on most major roads and take a little getting used to. Remember always to yield to traffic coming from the right as you approach a roundabout and follow the traffic to the left, signaling before you exit the circle.

One signal that could be misleading to U.S. drivers is a flashing amber light at a pedestrian traffic light. This almost always follows a red light, and it means yield to pedestrians but proceed when the crossing is clear.

The Republic has relatively few types of roads. **Motorways (M)** are major highways, the equivalent of Interstates in the U.S. **National (N)** roads link major cities on the island. Though these are the equivalent highways in North America, they are rarely more than two lanes in each direction (and are sometimes as small as one American-sized lane). Most pass directly through towns, making cross-country trips longer than you'd expect. **Regional (R)** roads have one lane of traffic traveling in each direction and generally link smaller cities and towns. Last are the rural or unclassified roads, often the most scenic back roads. These can be poorly signposted, very narrow, and a bit rough, but they usually travel through beautiful countryside locations.

Both the Republic and Northern Ireland have severe laws against drunk driving. The legal limit for both is 35 micrograms of alcohol per 100 milliliters of breath. What that equates to varies by person, but even one pint of beer can be enough to put you over the limit. The general rule is: Do not drink and drive.

RENTING A CAR

Most rental companies offer their best prices to customers who reserve in advance from their home country. Note that Ireland is a small country, and in high season it can virtually run out of rental cars

-but long before it does, it runs out of affordable rental cars.

Weekly rentals are almost always less expensive than day rentals. Three or more people traveling together can often get around cheaper by car than by train, depending on the distances traveled and the size and efficiency of the engine (note that fuel is very expensive in Ireland). Also keep in mind that the vast majority of available rental cars have **manual transmissions** (stick shifts). Automatics are available, but for a premium.

By law, you must be between the ages of 25 and 75 to rent a car in Ireland. The only documentation you should need is your driver's license and photo I.D., such as a passport, plus a printout of your reservation if you have one.

When you reserve a car, be sure to ask if the price includes: all taxes including value-added tax (VAT); breakdown assistance; unlimited mileage; personal accident or liability insurance (PAI); collision-damage waiver (CDW); theft waiver; and any other insurance options. If not, ask what these extras cost, because they can make a big dent in your bottom line. The CDW and other insurance might be covered by your credit card if you use the card to pay for the rental; check with your card issuer to be sure that there are no restrictions on that coverage in Ireland. (Not all cards do offer insurance protection for car rentals in Ireland.) Some travelers like to live dangerously and waive optional insurance. But when no CDW is purchased, many rental agencies will make you pay for any damages on the spot when you return the car—making even the smallest dent or scratch a potentially costly experience. To avoid any issues, take cellphone photos of your car with a time stamp, so that you have any dents and dings recorded and won't be charged for it.

If your credit card doesn't cover the CDW, consider buying Car Rental Collision Coverage from a third party. **Travel Guard** (www.travelguard.com; © 800/826-1300 in the U.S. and Canada), which will insure you for around US\$7 to US\$9 per day. In the U.K., **Insurance 4 Car Hire** (www.insurance4carhire.com; © 0844/892-1770) offers similar coverage. To see side-by-side comparisons of CDW rentals, go to the marketplace site www.tripinsurancestore.com.

By Train

Iarnród Éireann (Irish Rail) (www.irishrail.ie; **©** 1850/366222 or 01/836-6222) operates the train services in Ireland. Train travel is generally the fastest way to get around the country. Most lines radiate from Dublin to other principal cities and towns. From Dublin, the journey time to Cork is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours; to Belfast, just over 2 hours; to Galway, just under $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours; to Killarney, $3\frac{1}{4}$ hours; to Sligo, 3 hours; and to Waterford, about $2\frac{1}{4}$ hours.

In addition to the Irish Rail service between Dublin and Belfast, **Translink** (www.nirailways.co.uk; **028/9066-6630**) operates routes from Belfast that include Coleraine and Derry, in addition to virtually all 21 localities in Northern Ireland.

One useful piece of lingo: when buying any sort of travel tickets—air, ferry, train or bus—a "single" means one-way, a "return" is round-trip.

RAIL PASSES

The greatest value in European travel has traditionally been the **rail pass**, a single ticket allowing you unlimited travel (or travel on a certain number of days) within a set time period. A rail pass gives you the freedom to hop on a train whenever you feel like it, and there's no waiting in ticket lines. The granddaddy of passes is the **Eurail Pass**, covering some 28 countries, including Ireland (but not the U.K., which is frustrating if you want to include Northern Ireland on your visit.) It's best to buy these

passes before you leave home. You can get them from most travel agents, but the biggest supplier is **Rail Europe** (www.raileurope.com). The **Eurail Global Pass** offers unlimited multi-country firstclass travel for adults 26 and older. Options cost an average of US\$660 for 15 days, US\$850 for 21 days, US\$1,045 for 1 month, US\$1,470 for 2 months, or US\$1,810 for 3 months. The **Eurail One Country Pass** grants unlimited train travel from 3 to 10 days within a 1- or 2-month period in a single participating European country of your choice. Check online or call for the latest prices and offerings, which are always subject to changes. If you plan on traveling in Northern Ireland (especially if you're visiting it in combination with England, Scotland, and/or Wales), then **BritRail** (www.britrail.com; **© 866/938-RAIL [7245]** in the U.S. and Canada) is your best option.

By Bus

Bus Éireann (www.buseireann.ie; © 01/836-6111) operates an extensive system of express bus services, as well as local service, to nearly every town in Ireland. The Bus Éireann website provides timetables and fares for bus service throughout the country. Similarly, **Translink** provides detailed information on services within Northern Ireland (www.translink.co.uk; © 028/9066-6630). Bus travel in both countries is affordable, reliable, and comfortable—but also slow (see map on p. 579).



By Plane

Ireland is such a small country that there is very little point in flying from one end to the other. As it is, the options for internal flights seem to get more limited, year on year—partly because of improved roads and faster rail journey times. Aer Aerann (www.aerarann.com; © 081/836-5000) runs a couple of flights daily from Dublin to Kerry and Donegal.

By Bike

Cycling is an ideal way to explore the Irish landscape, especially the coastal roads of the southwest, west, and northwest. Distances are quite manageable, and many hostels, B&Bs, and hotels offer bike storage and luggage transfers for touring cyclists.

Roads in Ireland are categorized as **M** (Motorway), **N** (National), or **R** (Regional). It is illegal to cycle on motorways, but R roads (and roads with the older L designation, for "link") are always suitable for cycling, as are the N roads in outlying areas with little traffic. Be prepared, however, for two inevitable obstacles: wind and hills. Outside the Midlands, hills are just about everywhere, and those on the back roads can have thigh-burning grades. (*Tip:* if you're biking in the west, plan your route from south to north—the same direction as the prevailing winds.) Note that you can bring your bike on all passenger ferries to Ireland's islands, often for no extra charge.

Rental agencies with depots nationwide include **Raleigh** (www.raleigh.ie; \bigcirc 01/465-9659); and **Emerald Cycles/Ireland Rent-A-Bike** (www.irelandrentabike.com; \bigcirc 061/416983). Mountain and cross-country bike-rental rates average around \in 20 per day, \in 80 per week. You can also rent a car bike carrier for \in 40 per week (good for up to three bikes). On top of the hire price, you'll also have to fork up a refundable deposit, probably of around \in 50 per bike.

[FastFACTS] IRELAND

Area Codes Area codes in Ireland range from one number (the Dublin area code is "1") to three. Area codes are included in all listings in this guide. Within Ireland, you dial 0 before the area code. Outside of Ireland, however, you do not dial 0 before the area code. Business Hours Banks are generally open 10am to 4pm Monday to Wednesday and Friday and 10am to 5pm on Thursday. Post offices (also known as An Post) are generally open from 9am to 5:30pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 1:30pm on Saturday. Some take an hour for lunch from 1 to 2pm, and small or rural branches may close on Saturday. Museums and sights are generally open 10am to 5pm Tuesday to Saturday and 2 to 5pm on Sunday. Shops generally open 9am to 6pm Monday to Saturday with late opening on Thursday until 7 or 8pm. Most shops in larger towns and cities will also open on Sundays (typically from late morning to late afternoon). Major shops, such as department stores, often stay open much later than other businesses.



Car Rental See "By Car" under "Getting Around," earlier in this chapter.

Cellphones See "Mobile Phones," below.

Crime See "Safety," later in this section.

Disabled Travelers For disabled travelers, Ireland is a mixed bag. Its modern buildings and cities are generally accessible, but many of its buildings are historic, and those often lack wheelchair access. Trains can be accessed by wheelchairs but only with assistance. If you plan to travel by train in Ireland, be sure to check out Iarnród Éireann's website (www.irishrail.ie), which includes services for travelers with disabilities.

Finding accessible lodging can be tricky in Ireland. Many of the buildings here are hundreds of years old, and older hotels, small guesthouses, and landmark buildings still have steps outside and in. The rule of thumb should be: Never assume that a B&B, hotel, or restaurant has accessible facilities and ask about your requirements before booking. Where there are serious mobility issues with a property, we've tried to mention them in this book. Equally, where they provide notably good facilities for travelers with disabilities, we've noted that too.

To research options prior to your trip, one excellent online resource about Ireland's accessibility is www.disability.ie. For advice on travel to Northern Ireland, contact Disability Action (www.disabilityaction.org; © 028/9029-7880). The Northern Ireland Tourist Board also publishes a helpful annual Information Guide to Accessible Accommodation, available from any of its offices worldwide. Doctors Healthcare in Ireland is comparable to that in other European nations. In the Irish system, private doctors and hospitals provide care and patients purchase healthcare insurance. See the individual listings under "Fast Facts" in the other chapters of this book. Drinking Laws The minimum legal age to buy alcohol in Ireland is 18. Children under 18 are allowed in pubs until 9pm, or 10pm from May to September, so long as they're with their parents or guardians. (In practice you will often find that pubs serving food have separate dining areas, which, like restaurants, can accommodate children later.) Pubs are allowed to stay open until 11:30pm during the week, and around 12:30am on weekends, though some have licenses that allow them to stay open later. Many pubs choose to close earlier on Sundays. These times are roughly comparable in Northern Ireland. Restaurants can serve alcohol to diners if they have a liquor license (restaurants with no liquor license may allow you to bring your own alcoholic beverages—we've clearly stated in the restaurant listings in this book where this is the case). Alcohol is for sale at dedicated liquor stores (or "Off Licenses"—the name refers to the fact that they're licensed to sell alcohol for consumption off the premises only), in addition to supermarkets and convenience stores. Important note: The drunk driving laws in Ireland are very strict. Even a single pint of beer could be enough to put you over the limit. If you're arrested for drunk driving, the penalties range from a hefty fine to jail time. Rules in Northern Ireland are even more severe. The safest way is simply not to drink and drive.

Electricity The Irish electric system operates on 220 volts with a large plug bearing three rectangular prongs. The Northern Irish system operates on 250 volts with a similar plug. To use standard American 110-volt appliances, you'll need both a transformer and a plug adapter. Most new laptops have built-in transformers, but some do not, so beware.

Embassies & Consulates The American Embassy is at 42 Elgin Rd., Ballsbridge, Dublin 4 (dublin.usembassy.gov; © 01/668-8777); the Canadian Embassy is at 7–8 Wilton Terrace, Third Floor, Dublin 2 (www.canadainternational.gc.ca/ireland-irlande; © 01/234-4000); the British Embassy is at 29 Merrion Rd., Dublin 2 (www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations/british-embassydublin; © 01/205-3700); and the Australian Embassy is at Fitzwilton House, Seventh Floor, Wilton Terrace, Dublin 2 (www.ireland.embassy.gov.au; © 01/664-5300). In Northern Ireland, there's an American Consulate at Danesfort House, 223 Stranmillis Rd., Belfast BT9 5GR (belfast.usconsulate.gov; © 028/9038-6100).

Emergencies For the Garda (police), fire, ambulance, or other emergencies, dial @ 999.

Family Travel Recommended family travel websites include Family Travel Forum (www.familytravelforum.com), Family Travel Network (www.familytravelnetwork.com), Traveling Internationally with Your Kids (www.travelwithyourkids.com), and Family Travel Files (www.thefamilytravelfiles.com).

Internet & Wi-Fi Wi-Fi is widespread in Irish hotels and B&Bs, even in rural areas. It's not universal, however. Most B&Bs and smaller hotels provide it free, but larger hotels sometimes charge for access.

Language Ireland has two official languages: English and Gaelic (which is also known as Irish). All native Irish people can speak English. There is a strong national movement to preserve and expand the language, so areas of the country where Gaelic is protected and promoted are known as **Gaeltacht**. (For more on these regions, see box on p. 470.) As Gaelic is a complex and ancient language that you will not be able to figure out on your own, don't hesitate to ask for help (in English) if you get lost—despite the government's best hopes, everybody in the Gaeltacht regions speaks English.

LGBT Travelers Ireland has come a long way since homosexuality was legalized in 1993 (1982 in the North), but gay and lesbian visitors should be aware that this is still a conservative country. Cities like Dublin and Galway are more liberal in their attitudes

(particularly among the younger generation), and discrimination on the basis of sexuality is illegal throughout Ireland. Nonetheless, you should definitely proceed with caution when traveling in rural areas. Recommended websites for gay and lesbian travelers include **Gay Ireland** (www.gay-ireland.com) and **Outhouse** (www.outhouse.ie).

Lost Property If your passport is lost or stolen, contact your country's embassy immediately. Be sure to tell all of your credit card companies the minute you discover that your wallet is gone and file a report at the nearest police station.

Mail In Ireland, mailboxes are painted green with the word post on top. In Northern Ireland, they usually look the same but are painted red with a royal coat of arms symbol. From the Republic, an airmail letter or postcard to any other country outside Europe, not exceeding 50 grams, costs \in 1. From Northern Ireland to Europe, airmail letters not exceeding 20 grams cost £0.81.

Mobile Phones Before you leave your home country, check directly with your mobile phone provider to find out what you need to know about using your phone overseas. You may have to ask for the "international roaming" capability to be switched on—and that can't usually happen if you're already overseas.

Unfortunately, using your own phone in Ireland could prove very expensive. Most mobile phone companies charge very large premiums on call charges made while abroad. If you use a smartphone, such as an iPhone or Android device, you should ensure that you turn off features such as location services and push notifications, or you could end up facing *enormous* charges for data roaming. Similarly, you should always use Wi-Fi if you need to download anything.

To avoid all of this hassle, some travelers prefer to **rent** a phone for their trip to Ireland. You can do this from any number of overseas sites; several Irish phone companies have kiosks at the main airports, and car-rental agencies can usually rent you a phone for the duration of your stay. Alternatively, the company **Rent-a-Phone Ireland** (www.cell-phone-ireland.com; **©** 087/683-4563) enables you to reserve a phone in advance and pick it up from the arrivals lounge at Dublin airport. They charge around €80 per week for a standard phone (including €5 worth of calls—enough for roughly a half hour call to North America), or €100 for a smartphone, including €20 of calls and a 150MB data allowance. Rates drop for subsequent weeks.

Another option is to purchase a disposable "pay as you go" phone. Disposable phones aren't quite as big here as in some countries, due to the relatively low cost of phone contracts; however, you can buy them quite cheaply from mobile phone stores (most airports and almost any town of reasonable size will have at least one), or even some supermarkets.

Call charges in Ireland, and across the European Union, are much lower than they are in many other parts of the world, including the U.S; on pay-as-you-go, expect to pay around $\notin 0.35$ per minute. You are not charged for incoming calls.

Money The Republic of Ireland uses the single European currency known as the **euro** (\notin). Euro notes come in denominations of \notin 5, \notin 10, \notin 20, \notin 50, \notin 100, \notin 200, and \notin 500. The euro is divided into 100 cents; coins come in denominations of \notin 2, \notin 1, 50¢, 20¢, 10¢, 5¢, 2¢, and 1¢.

As part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland uses the British **pound sterling** (£). Notes come in denominations of £5, £10, £20, \pm 50, and £100. Coins are issued in £2, £1, 50p, 20p, 10p, 5p, 2p, and 1p denominations.

The British pound is not accepted in the Republic, and the euro is not accepted in the North—if you're traveling in both parts of Ireland you'll need some of both currencies, although shops on the border tend to accept both, as do some of the bigger tourist attractions in the North. Note that, although the pounds issued in Northern Ireland are legal tender in Great Britain and vice versa, the paper money actually looks different. You may find that cabdrivers and small business owners in the North won't accept bills issued in Great Britain—and vice-versa. In that case, you can change the money into locally issued versions at any large central bank, free of charge.

Note for all international travelers: Exchange rates can fluctuate wildly in the space of just a few weeks, so before departing consult a currency exchange website such as **www.xe.com** to check up-to-the-minute rates.

When it comes to obtaining foreign currency, please, **skip the currency exchange kiosks** in airports, train stations, and elsewhere. They give the poorest rates and charge exorbitant fees. Instead, order a small amount of foreign currency from your bank before leaving home, and then figure on using your debit card for the duration of your trip. ATMs (in Ireland also referred to as "cash machines" or "cash points") will give you a favorable rate, and you can withdraw however much cash you need for a day or so, as opposed to carrying around wads of money. The **Cirrus** and **Plus** ATM networks span the globe; look at the back of your bankcard to see which network you're on. Before you depart, be sure you know your personal identification number (PIN) and daily withdrawal limit. Confirm with your bank that your PIN will work in Europe, and be sure to let them know the dates and destinations to which you're traveling—you don't want to find your card frozen while you're abroad!

Credit cards are accepted just about everywhere, save street markets, small independent retailers, street-food vendors, and occasional small or family-owned businesses. However, North American visitors should note that American Express is accepted far less widely than at home, and Diners Club Card only at the very highest of highflying establishments. To be sure of your credit line, bring a Visa or MasterCard as well.

Many retailers ask for your 4-digit PIN to be entered into a keypad near the cash register. In restaurants, a server might bring a handheld device to your table to authorize payment. If you're visiting from a country where Chip and PIN is less prevalent (such as the U.S.), it's possible that some retailers will be reluctant to accept your swipe cards. Be prepared to argue your case: Swipe cards are still valid and the same machines that read the smartcard chips can also read your magnetic strip. However, do carry some cash with you too, just in case.

WHAT THINGS COST IN IRELAND

A pint of Guinness in the Temple Bar nightlife district in Dublin	€7
A pint of Guinness in Doolin, County Clare, with live traditional music	€4.50
High tea at the Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin	€35
Coffee and a homemade slice of cake at Lily's and Loly's Cafe in Sligo Town	€5.85
A 10-course chef's tasting menu at Anair, Galway City	€100 per person
Dinner for two at Crackpots, Kinsale	€80
Fish and chips at Leo Burdock's, Dublin	€8
An 18-hole round of golf	€30–€150
An afternoon of horseback riding	€25–€50
1-day bicycle rental in the countryside	€20
Train ticket from Dublin to Galway	€37
Train ticket from Dublin to Belfast	€19
Kissing the Blarney Stone (Blarney Castle admission plus tip to attendant holding your legs)	€15
Visiting the Cliffs of Moher (admission plus parking)	€6 per person
A claddagh ring from Thomas Dillon's in Galway	€25–€900
A Waterford crystal goblet	€45
An authentic Aran Island sweater	€60
One night in a top hotel in Dublin	€200 and up
One night in a budget hotel in Dublin.	around €70
One night in a country hotel in County Cork	around €120
One night in a B&B on the Ring of Kerry in high season	€100
One night in a B&B on the Ring of Kerry the rest of the year.	around €70

Passports See "Embassies & Consulates," p. 581, for whom to contact if you lose yours while traveling in Ireland. For country-specific information, please contact the following agencies:

For Residents of Australia Contact the Australian Passport Information Service (www.passports.gov.au; © 131-232). For Residents of Canada Contact the central Passport Office, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ottawa, ON K1A 0G3 (www.ppt.gc.ca; © 800/567-6868).

For Residents of New Zealand Contact the Passports Office, Department of Internal Affairs (www.passports.govt.nz; © 0800/225-050 in New Zealand or 04/463-9360).

For Residents of the United Kingdom Visit your nearest passport office, major post office, or travel agency or contact the United Kingdom Passport Service (www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-passport-office; © 0300/222-0000).

For Residents of the United States To find your regional passport office, either check the U.S. State Department website (www.state.gov) or call the National Passport Information Center toll-free number (© 877/487-2778) for automated information. Pharmacies Drugstores are called "chemists" and are found in every city, town, and most villages of any size. You'll find individual listings under "Fast Facts" in the other chapters of this book.

Police In the Republic of Ireland, a law enforcement officer is called a Garda, a member of the *Garda Siochána* ("Guardian of the Peace"); in the plural, it's Gardaí (pronounced *Gar*-dee) or simply "the Guards." Dial © 999 to reach the Gardaí in an emergency. Except for special detachments, Irish police are unarmed and wear dark blue uniforms. In Northern Ireland you can also reach the police by dialing © 999.

Safety By U.S. standards, Ireland is very safe, but, particularly in the cities, it's not safe enough to warrant carelessness. Be wary of the usual tourists' plagues: pickpockets, purse snatchers, and car thieves. Most advice is standard for travel anywhere. Do not leave cars unlocked or cameras and other expensive equipment unattended. Ask at your hotel which areas are safe and which are not. Take a taxi back to your hotel if you're out very late.

In Northern Ireland, safety has to be a somewhat greater concern, due to the long-running political tensions between different communities there. Violence is no longer commonplace, and your visit here should be every bit as safe as the rest of Ireland. However,

occasional flare-ups do happen, especially during the Orange marching season in the late summer. Visitors rarely have problems with this because they are not the targets of unrest. Still, keep abreast of things by reading or watching the news. See chapter 14 for more information.

Senior Travel In Ireland, seniors are sometimes referred to as "O.A.P.'s" (short for "Old Age Pensioners"). People over the age of 60 often qualify for reduced admission to museums and other attractions. Always ask about an O.A.P. discount if special rates are not posted. **Discover Ireland** (p. 571) can offer advice on how to find the best discounts.

Smoking Ireland and Northern Ireland both have broad antismoking laws that ban smoking in all public places, including bars, restaurants, and hotel lobbies. However, most restaurants and pubs have covered outdoor smoking areas.

Taxes As in many European countries, sales tax is VAT (value-added tax) and is often already included in the price quoted to you or shown on price tags. In the Republic, VAT rates vary—for hotels, restaurants, and car rentals, it is 13½%; for souvenirs and gifts, it is 23%. In Northern Ireland, the VAT is 20% across-the-board. VAT charged on services such as hotel stays, meals, car rentals, and entertainment cannot be refunded to visitors, but the VAT on products such as souvenirs is refundable. Save your receipts and present them at the Global Refund Desk when you get to the airport (they're located airside in the main terminals at Shannon and Dublin). They can usually issue you a refund there and then. Some larger stores can issue you with a Global Refund form and refund your VAT themselves, although you'll need to know your passport number, flight number, and departure time. In practice, this is usually much more fuss than it's worth.

Telephones In the Republic, the telephone system is known as Eircom; in Northern Ireland, it's BT (British Telecom). Every effort has been made to ensure that the numbers and information in this guide are accurate at the time of writing.

Overseas calls from Ireland can be quite costly, whether you use a local phone card or your own calling card. **To call Ireland from home:**

- 1. Dial the international access code: 011 from the U.S., 00 from the U.K., 0011 from Australia, or 0170 from New Zealand.
- 2. Dial the country code: 353 for the Republic, 44 for the North.
- 3. Dial the local number, remembering to omit the initial 0, which is for use only within Ireland (for example, to call the County Kerry number 066/12345 from the United States, you'd dial 011-353-66/12345).

To make international calls from Ireland: First dial 00, then the country code (U.S. or Canada 1, U.K. 44, Australia 61, New Zealand 64). Next you dial the area code and local number. For example, to call the U.S. number 212/000-0000 you'd dial © 00-1-212/000-0000. The toll-free international access code for AT&T is © 1-800-550-000; for Sprint it's © 1-800-552001; and for MCI it's © 1-800-551-001.

To make local calls: To dial a local number within the same area code, drop the initial 0. To dial a number within Ireland but in a different area code, use the initial 0.

As in many parts of the world, phone booths are slowly disappearing; however, you will still find them. Calls from a phone booth usually require coin payment, but at some you need a **calling card** (in the Republic) or **phone card** (in the North). Both are prepaid computerized cards that you insert into the phone instead of coins. They can be purchased in post offices, grocery stores, and shops (such as newsstands).

Time Ireland follows Greenwich Mean Time from November to March, and British Summer Time from April to October. Ireland is 5 hours ahead of the eastern United States. Ireland's latitude makes for longer days and shorter nights in the summer and the reverse in the winter. In June, the sun doesn't fully set until around 11pm, but in December, it is dark by 4pm.

Tipping For taxi drivers, hairdressers, and other providers of service, tip an average of 10 to 15%. For restaurants, the policy is usually printed on the menu—either a gratuity of 10 to 15% is automatically added to your bill, or it's left up to you. As a rule, bartenders do not expect a tip, except when table service is provided.

Toilets Public toilets are usually simply called "toilets" or are marked with international symbols. In the Republic of Ireland, some of the older ones carry the Gaelic words FIR (men) and MNA (women). Check out malls and shopping centers for some of the newest and best-kept bathrooms in the country. Free restrooms are usually available to customers at sightseeing attractions, museums, hotels, restaurants, pubs, shops, and theaters. Many of the newer gas stations (called "petrol stations" in Ireland) have public toilets, and a few even have baby-changing facilities.

VISas Citizens of the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand entering the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland for a stay of up to 3 months do not need a visa, but a valid **passport** is required.

For citizens of the United Kingdom, when traveling on flights originating in Britain, the same rules apply as they would for travel to any other member state of the European Union (E.U.).

Water Tap water throughout the island of Ireland is generally safe. However, some areas in the west of Ireland have been battling with

out-of-date water-purification systems. Always carry a large bottle of water with you.

Wi-Fi See "Internet & Wi-Fi," earlier in this section.

Women Travelers Women should expect few, if any, problems traveling in Ireland. Women are accepted traveling alone or in groups in virtually every environment, and long gone are the days when women were expected to order half-pints of beer in pubs, while men were allowed to order the bigger, more cost-effective pints. In fact, the only time you're likely to attract any attention at all is if you eat alone in a restaurant at night—a sight that is still relatively uncommon in Ireland outside of the major cities. Even then, you'll not be hassled.

If you drink in a pub on your own, though, expect all kinds of attention, as a woman drinking alone is still considered to be "on the market"—even if she's reading a book, talking on her cellphone to her fiancé, or doing a crossword puzzle. So be prepared to fend them off. Irish men almost always respond well to polite rejection, though.

In cities, as ever, take a cab home at night and follow all the usual advice of caution you get when you travel anywhere. Essentially, don't do anything in Ireland that you wouldn't do at home.

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