

150 Secrets of the Wild Atlantic Way

...Go where the locals go



Download the
**FREE Wild Atlantic
Way App** now
- your official guide
to the journey of a
lifetime!



INTRODUCTION

Have you ever dreamt of embarking on a journey of discovery, to hidden places and secret worlds where all kinds of enchantments lie in wait? Well now you can, along the wildest, most captivating, coastal touring route in the world – Ireland’s Wild Atlantic Way! Tucked away in little villages and towns that snuggle into the coastline are delightful cafés and restaurants, where you can indulge in your passion for good food and great wine. Maybe you will hear a few words of Irish spoken along the way in Ireland’s Gaeltacht (Irish speaking regions) or reignite your passion for life while surfing on magnificent waves off the coast of Donegal and Sligo. Take time to reflect on times past with a visit to the ruins of a 6th century monastic settlement on the stunning Skellig Michael in Kerry, roam through the romantic beauty of scenic Ards Forest Park in Donegal or watch the weather change from the historic Clare Island Lighthouse in Mayo. Wherever you go along the Wild Atlantic Way, you will encounter moments of magic, moments to treasure and experiences that you will want to return to again and again.

If you’re looking for something that little bit special, the 150 Secrets listed in this brochure should whet your appetite and help make memories to treasure long after you’ve returned home. So whether it’s beach trekking on a Connemara Pony, experiencing Donegal’s coastline in a classic car, surfing in Co Clare, salmon angling in Leitrim or a trip in Ireland’s only cable car in Co Cork, this brochure has examples of the many treasures hidden along the Wild Atlantic Way. Many lie off the beaten track and are therefore generally more suited to independent travellers.

Be sure to stop off along the Way in Erris, north Mayo recently voted ‘Best Place to Go Wild in Ireland’ where the people, scenery, wealth of activities and wild open spaces will steal your heart and mind. Further south in Co Kerry, Dingle has been named ‘Foodie Town of Ireland 2014’ with a long list of local produce including everything from smoked fish to chocolates and even cheese and ice creams made using the milk of the rare Kerry Cow.

This breath-taking coastal route along the west coast of Ireland will intrigue and remain in your heart and mind long after you have returned home to the everyday world.



Our coastline is precious and home to a vast array of habitats and wildlife. These fragile organisms survive in harsh environments and are vulnerable to visitor impacts. Visitors along the Wild Atlantic Way have a responsibility to minimise their impact on the environment. Leave No Trace Ireland is helping to create an ethic of understanding, responsibility and care for Ireland’s Wild Atlantic Way. To learn more about how you can Leave No Trace Ireland, visit www.leavenotraceireland.org.

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WHEREVER YOU GO ALONG THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY, YOU WILL ENCOUNTER MOMENTS OF MAGIC, MOMENTS TO TREASURE AND EXPERIENCES THAT YOU WILL WANT TO RETURN TO AGAIN AND AGAIN.

WILD ATLANTIC WAY SIGNATURE DISCOVERY POINTS



MULLAGHAMORE HEAD, CO SLIGO



CYCLING AT MAMORE GAP,
MALIN HEAD, CO DONEGAL



WALKING ON SLIABH LIAG,
CO DONEGAL

Malin Head, Co Donegal

Rugged yet inviting, County Donegal’s Malin Head is steeped in history and offers activities like walking, fishing, swimming and bird watching. Here, north of Trawbreaga Bay, you can view the Five Finger Strand, which is home to some of Europe’s largest sand dunes. At low tide, you can even spot the wreckage of the ‘Twilight’, which sank in 1889 while sailing to Derry. For more history, follow the coast road. You’ll pass the old radio station, built in 1910, and The Tower, a derelict signal station located on Banba’s Crown, the most northerly point in Ireland. It’s the perfect place to relax with a picnic, as the stunning panorama includes Inistrahull and Tory islands, as well as the Scottish hills on a clear day. Plus, you can work off any extra indulgences with a walk along the cliffs to Hell’s Hole, a chasm where the tide rushes in with impressive force. If treasure hunting is more your speed, head east to Ballyhillion beach, which dates back to the ice age and is known for its many semi-precious stones.

Fanad Head, Co Donegal

Fanad Head lies on the north coast of County Donegal between Lough Swilly and Mulroy Bay. Its claims to fame include one of the world’s most beautiful lighthouses and the famous Flight of the Earls, which took place here in 1607. To reach the headland, travel along Knockalla Coast Road, a route with some seriously stunning panoramas. Along the way, you’ll take in views of the Inishowen Peninsula and Atlantic Ocean, and as the road ascends, you’ll look down upon Portsalon and Ballymas-tocker Bay. From this vantage point, it’s easy to see why the beach was once voted the second most beautiful in the world. Still, it has more to offer than good looks, as it’s also a haven for watersports enthusiasts, walkers and golfers. If a visit to the lighthouse is on your agenda, don’t forget to make some time for a leisurely stroll along the adjacent headland, where you’ll see awe-inspiring waves and the Wild Atlantic Way’s most rugged stretch of coastline. This is one place where you’ll certainly want to have your camera ready.

Sliabh Liag, Co Donegal

Some of the highest and finest marine cliffs in Europe, County Donegal’s Sliabh Liag (Sieve League in English) are not to be missed. To make the most of your visit, it’s best to leave your car in the car park and walk the few kilometres to the cliffs. As you climb toward the top of Sliabh Liag – which at 601m high is not a place for the faint-hearted – there are terrific views of the Atlantic Ocean, Donegal Bay and the Sligo Mountains. Sliabh Liag was also the site of a Christian pilgrimage for more than a 1,000 years, although it’s believed to have been a sacred place long before the Christians arrived. Given the mountain’s rich history, there is a lot you can learn at the visitor centre, where you’ll also get a taste of the local food, culture and sense of humour. Please note, only experienced walkers are advised to venture beyond the viewing point onto One Man’s Pass.

WILD ATLANTIC WAY SIGNATURE DISCOVERY POINTS *(continued)*

Mullaghmore Head, Co Sligo

Mullaghmore is a small fishing village that should be on any outdoor enthusiast's itinerary. The sandy beach here stretches as far as the eye can see and is ideal for a spot of swimming or windsurfing. You can also venture out into the Atlantic for an excursion to Inishmurray Island or a sea angling trip.

If you're more of a landlubber, there's plenty here for you too. Go for a leisurely stroll and take in panoramic views of Sliabh Liag or watch the waves crash under Classiebawn Castle. You can also enjoy surfing as a spectator sport, remaining on the beach while watching top international surfers ride some of Europe's best waves. Many come for Prowlers – a famous spot where swells can reach up to 30m – and practice the tow-in technique involving jet skis. These skilled big wave surfers are exciting to watch, but the waves tend to be best in the winter months, so you'll no doubt want to hurry back into a cosy pub where you can warm up by the fire.

Downpatrick Head, Co Mayo

Downpatrick Head is a majestic heritage site found about 5km north of Ballycastle village. Jutting out into the ocean and rising almost 40m above the waves, it provides unparalleled views of the Atlantic, including the unique collection of islands known as the Staggs of Broadhaven. You can also spot the nearby Dún Briste sea stack, with its different coloured layers of rock and nesting sea birds.

In addition to the natural scenery and wildlife, Downpatrick Head is home to the ruins of a church, holy well and stone cross, which together mark the site of an earlier church founded by St Patrick. Ireland's patron saint is also honoured with a statue that was built in the early 1980s. Given its religious associations, Downpatrick Head was once a popular destination for pilgrims, who came here each year on the last Sunday of July, known as 'Garland Sunday'. Today that tradition lives on, and mass is still celebrated at Downpatrick Head on that same day.

Keem Strand, Co Mayo

Keem Strand is a sheltered rural beach surrounded by cliffs on Achill, Ireland's largest island. Located at the head of a valley between the cliffs of Benmore and Croaghnaun Mountain, to reach this idyllic spot just follow the Atlantic Drive to Keel and continue westward via a cliff-top road with spectacular views of the Atlantic Ocean.

The beach, which is lifeguarded during the bathing season, is very popular with swimmers and is the site of a Blueway snorkel trail. If you're feeling inspired there are several activity providers in the area that offer equipment hire and tuition.

In the past, this area was a key location for the Achill Basking Shark Fishery, which operated in the 1950s and 60s. During that period, spotters were stationed at Moyteoge Head, which borders the beach, to identify the sharks and direct hunting boats to them. The sharks were targeted for oil which was used as a lubricant in the aerospace industry.



KEEM STRAND, ACHILL ISLAND, CO MAYO



FERRY AROUND THE CLIFFS OF MOHER, CO CLARE

Killary Harbour (south), Co Galway

Located in the heart of Connemara, Killary Harbour ('An Caoláire Rua' in Irish) is a fjord that forms a natural border between counties Galway and Mayo. Here, you will find some of the most dramatic scenery in Ireland. From the northern shore of the harbour rises Mweelrea, the highest mountain in Connacht at 814m. To the south you can see the Maumturk Mountains and the Twelve Bens.

There are two small communities in the vicinity: Rosroe on the southern side and Leenane to the east. In the former, you'll find a hostel that was once a residence where philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein stayed for some time after WWII, using it as a quiet place to write. Nearby you can also explore the so-called Green Road, a route that travels eastward along the side of the fjord toward Leenane. This road stretches for 9km and was built in the 19th century as a famine relief project.

Additionally, this area is known for aquaculture, with a salmon farm operating at Rosroe and mussel rafts commonly spotted to the east.

Derrigimlagh, Co Galway

You can hire a bike in Connemara's largest town, Clifden, and set out on one of the area's cycle routes which brings you through the townland of Derrigimlagh on quiet country roads. Your journey will take you by the blanket bog, a stunning mosaic of tiny lakes and peat, where you can stop and view two sites of international historical significance.

First, you'll pass the scattered remnants of the world's first permanent transatlantic radio station. It was built more than a century ago by Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi and transmitted the first transatlantic radio signal in 1907. At its peak, the station employed several hundred people who helped transmit news across the ocean. It burned to the ground during the Irish War of Independence, but you can still view the vast site where many foundations of the buildings and workers' houses remain.

Nearby you'll also come across a white memorial in the shape of an aeroplane wing, which pays tribute to John Alcock and Arthur Whitten Brown. In 1919, Alcock and Brown were the first pilots to fly non-stop across the Atlantic, before they crash-landed (safely) in Derrigimlagh Bog.

Cliffs of Moher, Co Clare

The iconic Cliffs of Moher are one of Ireland's most visited natural attractions. Stretching for 8km along the Atlantic coast of Clare, the cliffs reach 214m at their highest point at Knockardakin.

Midway along the cliffs you'll find the environmentally friendly visitor centre set into the hillside. Here, you can also discover O'Brien's Tower, a 19th century viewing tower, and access 800m of protected cliff side pathways with viewing areas.

There are many vantage points from which to admire the awe-inspiring Cliffs of Moher. From the main platform, you can see the south cliffs toward Hag's Head, a natural rocky promontory that resembles a seated woman. From the North Platform, you can spot An Branán Mór sea stack, home of guillemots and razorbills, as well as the Aran Islands and, if the conditions are right, the famous surfing wave known as 'Aileen's'. Continue on about 5km from here and you'll arrive in the village of Doolin. And if you'd like to see the puffins that reside on Goat Island instead, head for the south Platform.

WILD ATLANTIC WAY SIGNATURE DISCOVERY POINTS *(continued)*

Loop Head, Co Clare

At the western tip of County Clare, where the calm waters of the Shannon Estuary turn into the powerful waves of the Atlantic, you'll find Loop Head Peninsula.

Travel along the Loop Head Drive to the western end of the peninsula to see its famous lighthouse, which sits on land dotted with colourful wild flowers. You can climb to the top of the lighthouse and take in splendid views that stretch from County Kerry to the Cliffs of Moher. At the very end of the peninsula there is also a relic from WW2: large white letters spelling É-I-R-E, which let pilots know they were entering neutral airspace.

This area is a wildlife haven too, with thousands of seabirds making their nests on the rock ledges and an estimated 160 bottlenose dolphins living in the mouth of the Shannon River. If you'd like to see these majestic animals up close, you can take a boat trip from Carrigaholt, or follow the road from Kilrush to Aylevarro Point to see them playing just offshore.

Blaskets View, Co Kerry

Out on the very edge of Europe, off the Dingle Peninsula, lie the mystical Blasket Islands, a small archipelago renowned for its storytellers.

In the early 20th century, JM Synge became the first of many writers to arrive here in search of Ireland's traditional culture, which remained strong in this isolated and far-flung community. Here, people lived simply and frugally off the land and sea. Their stories were transcribed and became the first written works to be published from the oral Irish culture.

After many years of hardship and emigration, the last inhabitants left in 1953, and today, you can wander among their ruined cottages on the main island, An Blascaod Mór (Great Blasket). From there you can also spy dolphins and whales, and look out across the horizon toward America, as so many have done before. Back on the mainland, a visit to the Blasket Centre will provide insight into the islanders' lives and the rich literary heritage of the region.

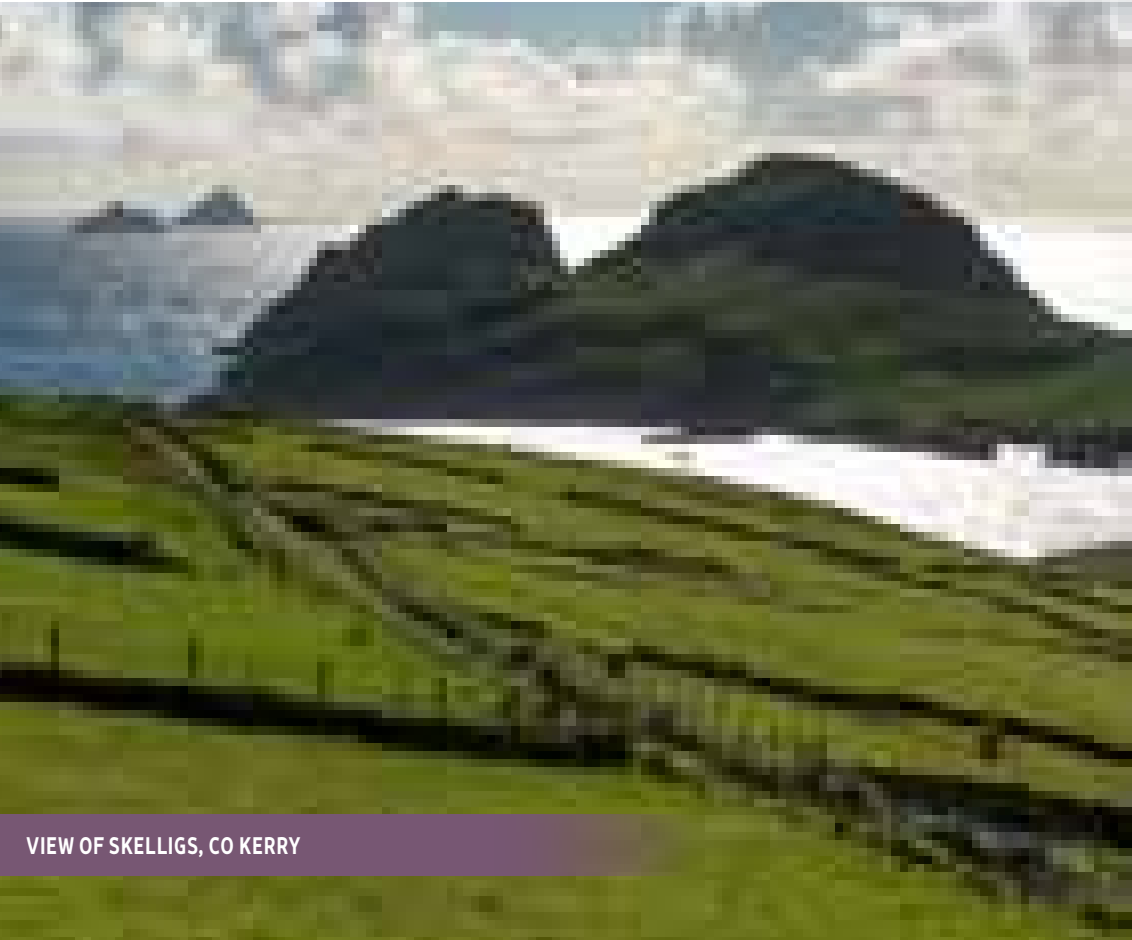
Bray Head, Co Kerry

Viewed from Bray Head, Skellig Michael and Small Skellig are two islands rising from the Atlantic some 13km southwest of Valentia Island in County Kerry.

Skellig Michael is renowned among archaeologists as the site of a well-preserved monastic outpost of the early Christian period, and it is now designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Small Skellig, meanwhile, is famous in the world of ornithology, as it is home to some 27,000 pairs of gannets, making it the world's second-largest colony of these sea birds.

The monastic site on Skellig Michael is reached by climbing more than 600 steps on a 1,000-year-old stairway. Stone beehive huts where the monks lived and prayed cling to cliff edges alongside oratories, a cemetery, stone crosses, holy wells and the Church of St Michael. These remains demonstrate the spartan conditions in which the monks lived until they left the island in the 13th century.

You can experience these islands first-hand with a boat trip, or opt to stay on dry land and visit the Skellig Experience Centre instead.



VIEW OF SKELLIGS, CO KERRY



DURSEY ISLAND, CO CORK

Durse Island, Co Cork

The most westerly of Cork's inhabited islands, Dursey is separated from the mainland by a narrow sound known for its strong tides. It is accessed by Ireland's only cable car, which runs about 250m above the sea. It can carry six people at a time (locals get preference) on the 15 minute journey.

Without any shops, pubs or restaurants, this peaceful little island offers day-trippers an escape from the hustle and bustle of modern living. It is, however, home to three small villages and forms part of the Beara Way Walking Trail.

Durse is an excellent place for viewing wildlife, as a variety of birds can be seen here, including rare species from Siberia and America. Dolphins and whales can also frequently be spotted in the waters surrounding the island.

On the island's most westerly hill sits the 200-year-old Signal Tower, which boasts commanding views north to the Skellig Islands and south to Mizen Head. There are also ruins of the ancient church of Kilmichael, which is thought to have been founded by monks from Skellig Michael.

Mizen Head, Co Cork

Located just 8km from Goleen, Mizen Head is a spellbinding place. As Ireland's most south-westerly point, it is home to a signal station that was built to save lives off the rocky shoreline. It was completed in 1910 and later became the home of Ireland's very first radio beacon in 1931.

Here, inside the Keeper's House, you'll find a dynamic visitor centre that contains a café and gift shop. It also has a navigation aids simulator, displays the geology of the region, tells the story of Marconi in Crookhaven and discusses the lighthouse keepers' hobbies.

Once your tour of the visitor centre is complete, head outside and follow the path down the famous 99 steps and over the arched bridge that looks down upon the gorge. This route will take you to the signal station, which is open to the public. Along the way, there is stunning scenery to be admired, with the possibility of spotting seals, kittiwakes, gannets and choughs, not to mention minke, fin and humpback whales.

Old Head of Kinsale, Co Cork

The Old Head of Kinsale is a remarkably dramatic piece of Ireland, protruding more than 3km into the Atlantic Ocean. Located on the southwest coast in County Cork, it is famous for its world-class, 18-hole golf course. Nine holes play along the tops of the cliffs, but all 18 holes boast stunning views of the ocean. Long before it became a golfer's paradise, Old Head was known for its lighthouse, established in the 17th century by Robert Reading. This is also the nearest land point to the site where the RMS Lusitania sank in 1915, after being hit by a German torpedo. Nearly 1,200 people perished in the incident. While Kinsale is a stunning place to admire on land, it's best seen from the sea. You can take in views of this port town and learn more about its history with a trip aboard 'The Spirit of Kinsale', which brings passengers across the harbour, past Charles Fort and right to the edge of the harbour where you will get a great view of the Old Head of Kinsale before returning to port passing James Fort on the way.

SECRETS



Take home a piece of Inishowen at Moville Pottery

Moville, Inishowen, Co Donegal
Contact: Lowry Wasson
Tel: +353 (0)74 9382059
Email: moville@eircom.net
Web: www.movillepottery.com

Bring your camera and capture the wonderful flora and fauna that live on Inishowen Head. On a wild and remote looped walk, you'll pass the spot where St Columba set sail for Scotland's Isle of Iona, the very place he later established a monastic community. On a clear day, you can also spot the Scottish coast from here. Once you've completed the loop, drop into Moville Pottery to see local artisans at work and make your own piece of pottery using inspiration from the walk.

Fish for a feast at Culdaff Beach

Go Fish, Culdaff, Inishowen, Co Donegal
Contact: Oliver Farren
Tel: +353 (0)87 6176996
Email: info@gofish.ie
Web: www.gofish.ie

Culdaff is one of Donegal's 13 Blue Flag beaches, making it the perfect place to bring your buckets, spades and imagination for a day of sandcastle building. Then, work up an appetite by fishing for your dinner. Go Fish will organise an instructor, rods, bait and even barbecue equipment. If you're lucky, you might hook some wild sea trout, turbot, plaice, flounder, coalfish, pollock or whiting. Afterwards, learn to fillet your fish, cook it and tuck into a delicious meal. This is also available at Kinnego Bay and Tullagh Strand.

Explore Irish legends at the Old Church Visitor Centre

Speenoge, Burt, Co Donegal
(on-site at An Grianán Hotel)
Contact: Ron Kerrigan
Tel: +353 (0)74 9368900
Email: info@oldchurchvisitorcentre.com
Web: www.oldchurchvisitorcentre.com

In this exciting visitor centre you can explore the legends of Grianán Fort and the people of Danú ('Tuatha De Danann' in Irish), a race of gods and warriors in Irish mythology. Experience the epic battles of Moytura, touch the magical weapons of the gods and discover if you're fit to succeed King Nuada by testing your might. After you've learned all about the local heritage and culture, bring some tea, coffee and scones outside for an impromptu picnic or to experience Celtic Feast Nights and truly immerse yourself in this mythical place.

Experience the heritage of Lough Swilly

Rathmullan/Ramelton, Co Donegal
Contact: Deirdra Friel
Tel: +353 (0) 86 2421008
Email: donegalheritagetrails@gmail.com
Web: www.donegalheritagetrails.com

Travel back in time with a guided tour of Ramelton, once a thriving market town and home to Donegal's biggest linen bleaching works. In years past, ships from the Caribbean anchored in Lough Swilly and came here to trade exotic goods for linen, corn, meat and fish. Alternatively, discover nearby Rathmullan, a quiet holiday resort with a beautiful beach along the shore of Lough Swilly. On this tour marvel at the exciting tales of the Flight of the Earls and the kidnapping of Red Hugh O'Donnell.

Go behind the scenes at Kinnegar Brewing

Kinnegar Brewing Ltd, Aughavannon, Rathmullan, Co Donegal
Contact: Rick LeVert
Tel: +353 (0)74 9158874 / (0)86 8301392
Email: info@kinnegarbrewing.ie
Web: www.kinnegarbrewing.ie

Tucked away in the countryside near Rathmullan, Kinnegar Brewing is known for producing some of Ireland's best beers. The brewers draw inspiration from the invigorating landscape of the Wild Atlantic Way and open their doors for the public to see how they perform their craft. Not only can you peek behind the scenes at this small farmhouse operation but you can also enjoy a tasting at the taproom in nearby Rathmullan House. Visits take place on Saturdays from 12.00 noon to 3.00pm. Spaces are limited and advance booking is required.

Take a trip on the Swilly Explorer

Rathmullan, Co Donegal
Contact: Niall Doherty
Tel: +353 (0)74 9158131 / (0)87 2480132
Email: rathmullancharters@eircom.net
Web: www.rathmullancharters.com

Join Captain Niall on the Swilly Explorer for an unforgettable guided tour of Lough Swilly departing from the seaside town of Rathmullan. Listen as colourful tales of local history are shared, and birds and marine animals are pointed out. The journey will take you to Dunree, the site of the famous 'Flight of the Earls', as well as to Fanad Head Lighthouse, Knockalla caves and Macamish Fort. For a bit of romance, you can also choose an evening tour and watch the golden sun set on the Atlantic.

Cycle to one of the world's most beautiful lighthouses

Grassroutes, Co Donegal
Contact: Mary McGrenra
Tel: +353 (0)74 9119988
Email: info@grassroutes.ie
Web: www.grassroutes.ie

No matter where you are in Donegal, Grassroutes will deliver you a bike along with a fully mapped route that travels on and off the main roads. One of the most memorable bike trips in the area is no doubt a cycle to Fanad Head Lighthouse, renowned as one of the most beautiful lighthouses in the world. Picnics can be arranged, as can the provision of protective equipment, and buggies and bikes for children. All you need to bring is your sense of curiosity.

Go for a stroll on Trá na Rosann

Downings, Co Donegal

Trá na Rosann is a spectacular beach that forms a golden link between two headlands, making it ideal for a stroll, swim or sandcastle building competition. From the seaside village of Downings, travel the coastal road along the Rosguill Peninsula by car, bicycle or foot. Halfway around the 12km road, you'll find Trá na Rosann. At the nearby Singing Pub, treat yourself to a bowl of homemade seafood chowder and Guinness wheat bread while listening to some fine traditional musicians.

Escape at Ards Forest Park
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Gallop Donegal's Wild Atlantic Way
Dunfanaghy Stables, Dunfanaghy, Co Donegal
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Meet the King of Tory Island
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Web: www.oileanthorai.com

Learn céilí dancing after sunset
Teac Jack, Glassagh, Derrybeg, Co Donegal
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Web: www.teacjack.com

Be a castaway on Oileán Gabhla
Gola Island, Co Donegal
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Email: ancaire@eircom.net
Web: www.donegalislands.com

Rock and Roam
Derrybeg, Gweedore, Co Donegal
Contact: Moira Gallagher
Tel: +353 (0)83 1230529
Email: moira@mng.ie
Web: www.mng.ie

Paddle the day away
Rapid Kayaking, Annagry, Co Donegal
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Tel: +353(0)86 1510979
Email: rapidkayaking@gmail.com
Web: www.rapidkayaking.com

Adventure through Donegal
Mill Road, Dungloe, Co Donegal
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Email: uniqueascent@gmail.com
Web: www.uniqueascent.ie

Found on the sheltered western shore of Sheephaven Bay, Ards Forest Park offers a peaceful retreat for the whole family. This coastal park is an expanse of more than 480ha (1200 acres), incorporating a sandy beach, rocky shoreline and a diversity of habitats. Work up an appetite by tackling one of the many sign-posted trails in the park, and then head back to the sand dunes to find some picnic spots and a playground. Before you tuck into your food, cool down with a dip in the Atlantic, if you dare.

Leave your cares behind as you canter to the sound of the roaring Atlantic in the seaside resort of Dunfanaghy. Explore the region's varied terrain on horseback, trekking into the mountains, over sandy beaches and through areas where Irish is still the primary language. Afterwards, stop into a local eatery and enjoy a relaxing cup of tea, a specially made cocktail or a few scoops of ice cream. And don't forget to chat with the locals, who will no doubt share ideas for your next thrilling holiday experience.

Tory Island is a curious place, where residents endure the full fury of Atlantic winters in exchange for delightful summers. When you arrive off the ferry, King of Tory, Patsy Dan Rodgers, will be there to greet you with a 'fáilte romhat'. You can then cycle round the island, visiting its many archaeological sites and checking out the work of local artists in Gailearaf Dixon. Don't forget to ask about the sacred Tory Island clay, a gift islanders say was passed down to them from St Colmcille.

While travelling the Wild Atlantic Way, experience a breathtaking sunset over the rugged Bloody Foreland, known as 'Cnocfolá' in Irish. Afterwards, stop off at Teac Jack, where every Tuesday there's a traditional céilí with music by the renowned Tory Island musician Martin Duggan. Meet the friendly locals, who are sure to teach you a few Irish dancing tricks. On Thursday evenings you can also enjoy music from up-and-coming local musicians or listen in as the Irish language is spoken. You may even master a phrase or two.

Set foot on Gabhla (Gola Island), then stop and listen... to the silence. The sounds of the modern world rarely penetrate this unspoilt and tranquil oasis, even though it's less than 2km from the mainland at Gaoth Dobhair (Gweedore). The island's stunning scenery inspires artists and photographers, while its natural habitats delight walkers and birdwatchers. If you're more of an adrenaline junkie, there's something here for you too; simply head to the towering cliffs, which are known to challenge even the most daring rock climbers.

Blow away the cobwebs, step outside and feel alive. With Rock and Roam, you can visit some incredible remote and rarely seen places. Have your first taste of rock climbing on Cruit Island, or sea kayak along the wild Atlantic coastline; sail around the islands of the Donegal 'Gaeltacht' (Irish speaking area) in a traditional lug rig or go hill walking on the Poisoned Glen, where golden eagles soar. By night, meet the locals and try a 'cúpla focail' at a traditional céilí, or take a guided sunset walk along the Bloody Foreland.

To experience west Donegal's stunning Atlantic coastline from the water rather than land, join a sea kayaking tour of the region. Using a sit-on-top sea kayak, you'll paddle your way to isolated beaches, rugged islands and eerie caves, while also getting a close-up view of fascinating rock formations and sea arches that are accessible only from the water. You'll also want to keep your eyes peeled – and cameras ready – for wildlife sightings, as seabirds, seals, dolphins and even basking sharks can be spotted in this idyllic area.

See the Wild Atlantic Way from a completely different angle with Unique Ascent. Your expert guide will take you on a tailor-made adventure that can include everything from climbing and coasteering to abseiling and wild camping. All levels of experience are catered for, so if you're an outdoors novice, you can choose a more relaxed walking, hiking or climbing excursion. If you're a thrill seeker, though, opt for a more daring day out, like an ascent of a 120m high sea stack in one of Ireland's most remote locations.

Learn about Arranmore's American connection
Arranmore Island Co-op, Cloughcorr,
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Web: www.arranmoreco-op.com

Marvel at the Lough Doon Ring Fort
The Dolmen Centre, Kilcooney, Portnoo, Co Donegal
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Web: www.dolmencentre.com

Experience the artistry of Donegal
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See the Deserted Village at Port
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Tel: +353 (0)74 9730017
Email: folkvillage@eircom.net
Web: www.glenfolkvillage.com

Walk Siabh Liag's Pilgrim Path
Teelin, Co Donegal
Web: www.irishtrails.ie

Catch your dinner in Donegal
Killybegs, Co Donegal
Contact: Colin Campbell
Tel: +353 (0)86 4044040
Email: colin@duanaimaracharters.com
Web: www.duanaimaracharters.com

Skipper your own boat
Killybegs International Carpet Making & Fishing Centre,
The Carpet Factory, Killybegs, Co Donegal
Tel: +353 (0)74 9741944
Email: info@visitkillybegs.com
Web: www.visitkillybegs.com

Drive classic cars on the Wild Atlantic Way
Ardara Road, Killybegs, Co Donegal
Contact: Joseph McCloskey
Tel: +353 (0)87 2052853
Email: info@classiccarhire.ie
Web: www.classicarhire.ie

For generations, Donegal's Arranmore Island has been strongly linked with Beaver Island, found in Lake Michigan in the US. During the 'Great Hunger', thousands of Irish fled to escape poverty and starvation, setting their sights on America. Many from Donegal's Rosses region made their way to the Great Lakes, and those early Irish settlers left their mark on Beaver Island, with many places still bearing their surnames. A visit to the Beaver Island Monument on rugged Arranmore Island is a poignant reminder of the relationship between these two islands.

Lough Doon Ring Fort is found on a small island in Lough Doon, not far from the Portnoo to Rosbeg Road. In the summer, you can hire a boat and take a closer look at the impressive 4.8m high wall, which completely encloses the island and is thought to date back to 1000 BC. More evidence of the area's ancient heritage can be seen at the Dolmen Centre, which houses a replica of a gold Lunula, a piece of decorative jewellery from about 1600 BC that was found in the area.

Donegal Design Makers brings together some of the finest artisans and designers in the county. Many of them take inspiration from Donegal's awe-inspiring natural surroundings, whether it's the curve of the hills or the wild waves of the Atlantic. You can meet the makers along the group's Craft Trail, or see work from all the artists at once with a stop at their shop in Ardara. After you've perused and purchased some artwork, cross the street to Nancy's Bar, a cosy pub that's renowned for its seafood.

Just north of Glencolmcille lies the deserted fishing village of Port. It's a dramatic site, set next to a stony beach and filled with the sound of crashing waves and the cries of seagulls. Walk in the footsteps of those who once lived here. Try to imagine island life as you feel the fresh sea breeze on your skin and examine the stone structures the islanders built. At Glencolmcille Folk Village you can see how the houses once looked and learn just how villagers survived in this isolated place.

The Pilgrim Path at Siabh Liag (Sieve League) offers a different way of experiencing these spectacular cliffs, which are among the highest in Europe. This moderate walking route is only 2.8km long, but features views of the villages of Teelin and Carrick and finishes up looking down upon the cliffs. On your excursion, you'll also get a glimpse into the ancient history of this mystical location, passing church ruins and a holy well on the eastern summit of Siabh Liag.

There's no better way to indulge in fresh fish than catching it yourself. In the shadow of Siabh Liag's dramatic cliffs, under the green-tinged rock face, you can fish for your dinner. Then sit back and relax as Colin, skipper of 'An Duanai Mara', fillets your catch for you and arranges for it to be delivered to Kitty Kellys restaurant, where it'll be expertly cooked for your enjoyment. After dinner, you can savour an aged Irish whiskey as your foot keeps time to the music of a Donegal fiddle.

Bring the whole family to Killybegs International Carpet Making & Fishing Centre, where you can discover the art of maritime navigation. Learn all about fishing history and then try your hand at manoeuvring into port using a state-of-the-art audio-visual simulator – but remember to bring your sea legs, because it can get choppy. Afterwards, take a stroll down to the harbour and watch the busy fishing port in action. Look for trawlers landing their catch, which might just end up being your supper.

Take to the picturesque roads of southwest Donegal in a TR6, MGB Roadster or Mercedes 350SL. Along the way you can enjoy panoramic views from Siabh Liag or stretch your legs on the 99 steps down to Silver Strand beach at Malinbeg. Or, choose one of the region's many small roads, where you can discover pristine beaches, quiet country lanes, mountain passes and other hidden gems. With a classic car, picnic basket and all the time in the world, you're guaranteed an unforgettable adventure.

Stroll through the gardens of Donegal
Sea View, Salthill, Mountcharles, Co Donegal
Contact: Dorothy Jervis
Tel: +353 (0)97 35350 / (0)87 9131393
Email: dorothyjervis@gmail.com
Web: www.donegalgardentrail.com

Visit the wonders of Donegal Bay
Quay Street, Donegal Town, Co Donegal
Contact: Sean Quinn
Tel: +353 (0)74 9723666
Email: info@donegalbaywaterbus.com
Web: www.donegalbaywaterbus.com

Meet the makers of Donegal
Donegal Town, Co Donegal
Tel: +353 (0)74 9725928
Email: lyndseymcgonigle@yahoo.co.uk
Web: www.donegalcraftvillage.com

Celebrate guitar hero Rory Gallagher
Ballyshannon, Co Donegal
Tel: +353 (0)86 8772325
Email: roryfest@hotmail.com
Web: www.rorygallagherfestival.com

Learn to catch waves at Rossnowlagh beach
Rossnowlagh, Co Donegal
Tel: + 353 (0)71 9859020
Email: finmccools@gmail.com
Web: www.finmccoolssurfschool.com

Have a bit of fun at the Fairy Bridges
Bundoran, Co Donegal
Contact: Shane Smyth
Tel: +353 (0)71 9841350
Email: shane@discoverbundoran.com;
Web: www.discoverbundoran.com

Despite high seas and bracing winds, many species of exotic and tropical plants thrive in Donegal, and you can experience them all in the magnificent gardens that dot this wild stretch of coastline. Examine the beautiful natural colours as you stroll through the gardens, and then continue on to the sea, where the seagulls will be your only company. Let the children play hide and seek, sit down to enjoy a lingering picnic lunch, or hop on a bike and cycle from one gorgeous garden to the next.

Explore the many wonders of Donegal Bay with a cruise on the state-of-the-art waterbus. The journey will take you by the seal colony on Seal Island, the Bluestack Mountains and the many islands of Donegal Bay, all while you listen to informative commentary about these natural and historic wonders. On the return journey, you can relax in the boat's bar area and enjoy a live cabaret show. The waterbus departs three times daily from the pier in Donegal Town, depending on the tide.

Donegal Craft Village is a showcase for Ireland's many contemporary arts and crafts. Stop in and meet the makers in their workshops before picking up a unique item or two to bring home as a memento of your time on the Wild Atlantic Way. You can also rest and recharge at the award-winning, on-site restaurant, Aroma, which is known for its delicious homemade cakes and gourmet lunches. The beautiful grounds include a picnic area, charming courtyard and spacious car park that can accommodate coaches.

As the many tributes dotted across Ireland and beyond clearly show, Rory Gallagher was nothing short of a music legend. The biggest celebration of Gallagher's life however takes place where the star was born in Ballyshannon which hosts the annual Rory Gallagher International Tribute Festival each May. The town also boasts a commemorative life size bronze statue of the music legend. While in Ballyshannon why not enjoy a pint of the local beer in Dicey Reilly's – The Donegal Brewing Company?

With gentle, crumbling waves and an occasionally punchy beach break, Rossnowlagh is the perfect location to start off your surfing career. Sign up for lessons at Fin McCool Surf School, where experienced instructors will teach you all about safety before the real fun begins in the water. But don't worry; there are no rips, shore breaks or scary sea creatures – just an enjoyable and safe introduction to this exhilarating sport. The school caters for all skill levels, from first-timers to experienced surfers.

Bundoran's Tullan Strand is a place that combines natural wonders with Irish folklore. The so-called 'Fairy Bridges' are blowholes created by the area's rock formations. If the tidal conditions are just right, you'll see water splash up through the openings, which were once said to be haunted by fairies. Then, at the nearby 'Wishing Chair', you can follow in the footsteps of many famous figures. Sit down, make a silent wish and tap the seat twice as you rise to demonstrate that your wish is a genuine one.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Donegal Tourist Information Office

The Quay, Donegal Town, Co Donegal
Tel: +353 (0)74 9721148 Email: donegal@failteireland.ie

Letterkenny Tourist Information Office

Neil T. Blaney Road, Letterkenny, Co Donegal
Tel: + 353 (0)74 9121160 Email: letterkenny@failteireland.ie



SECRETS



Follow the Wild Atlantic Butterfly Route

throughout Co Leitrim

Contact: JJ O'Hara

Tel: +353 (0)86 0716968

Email: usgireland@gmail.com

Watch the Wild Atlantic salmon run in County Leitrim

Drowes Salmon Fishery, Lareen Estate,

Kinlough, Co Leitrim

Tel: + 353 (0)71 9841055 / (0)87 8050806

Email: info@drowessalmonfishery.com

Web: www.drowessalmonfishery.com

Take the plunge

Mullaghmore, Co Sligo

Contact: Fergus Callagy

Tel: +353 (0)86 8099898

Email: info@freediveireland.com

Web: www.freediveireland.com

See seals at play

Sligo Boat Charters, Rosses Point, Co Sligo

Contact: Daryl Ewing

Tel: +353 (0)86 8913618

Email: info@sligoboatcharters.com

Web: www.sligoboatcharters.com

Take a tour with Seatrails

Innovation Centre, Sligo IT, Ash Lane, Co Sligo

Contact: Auriel Robinson

Tel: +353 (0)87 2405071

Email: info@seatrails.ie

Web: www.seatrails.ie

Soak in VOYA's Seaweed Baths

Strandhill, Co Sligo

Tel: +353 (0)71 9168686

Email: reception@voyaseaweedbaths.com

Web: www.voyaseaweedbaths.com

Hang ten in Strandhill

Strandhill Surf School, Strandhill, Co Sligo

Contact: Paul Buchanan

Tel: +353 (0)71 9168483

Email: strandhillsurfschool@gmail.com

Web: www.strandhillsurfschool.com

Walk on water

Shore Road, Strandhill, Co Sligo

Contact: David O'Hara

Tel: +353 (0)87 9026000

Email: bookings@supforall.ie

Web: www.adventuresligo.ie / www.supforall.ie

The Wild Atlantic Butterfly Route, so called because of its shape, offers a rich diversity of activities and sights. Here, you can travel through Sligo's mystical Yeats Country, go on a guided tour of the archaeological site of the Burren or explore the impressive Marble Arch caves. Experience soaring cliffs and stunning waterfalls at Glencar and Fowley's Falls, or lose all sense of time wandering through Parke's and Hamilton's castles. You can also indulge in good, old-fashioned hospitality and experience the food and crafts of the region.

Leitrim may have the shortest coastline of any seaside county in Ireland, but that small stretch produces some truly spectacular sights. Two very important salmon rivers, the Drowes and Duff, flow into the ocean at the borders with counties Donegal and Sligo respectively, making these locations two perfect places to witness one of nature's great migrations. Both rivers are at their peak in the summer months, when the silver Atlantic salmon return to their native rivers. Watching them make this epic journey while the sun dips behind Sliabh Liag (Slieve League) is a moment you won't soon forget.

If you're an adventure lover, don't miss the chance to try free diving at Mullaghmore. While many people are familiar with snorkelling and scuba diving, free diving involves the challenge of holding your breath while you dive down and swim under water. Depths can range from 1m to 50m and require holding your breath for a few seconds or minutes at a time. Recreational free-divers love the relaxed feeling, sights and silence of being under water – no oxygen tanks, just a wetsuit, weight belt, mask, fins, snorkel and serenity.

Sligo Bay boasts an array of marine life, and the grey seal colony residing on the aptly named Seal Rocks is one of the highlights. From Rosses Point, you can take a short boat ride out to the rocks, passing the famous 'Metal Man' as well as Oyster and Coney islands along the way. If you're lucky, the seals might even come up to the boat and greet you. Dolphins, porpoises, sunfish, basking sharks and whales are also occasionally seen. Excursions are weather dependant, so pre-booking is essential.

In 1588, when the King of Spain attempted to invade England, many of his ships became stranded on Ireland's coast, including three at Streedagh Strand. With the help of Irish chieftains, though, Spanish Captain Francisco de Cuellar managed to escape. Today, you can relive his fascinating journey on a walk led by maritime archaeologist Auriel Robinson. You'll see rare wildflowers, visit a 5,000-year-old megalithic tomb and discover more about the Spanish Armada ships wrecked here all those centuries ago.

Generations of local wisdom bring you an organic beauty experience that will delight and purify your body. Taking inspiration from the time-tested local traditions of seaweed baths and treatments, VOYA offers a range of services to restore your body and mind. The treatments utilise the natural power of hand-harvested seaweed, a simple plant that carries the goodness of the ocean with it. Just imagine drifting away and dreaming as you soak in a seaweed bath or treat yourself to a rejuvenating facial. Don't you feel more relaxed already?

Located just steps from the water's edge at one of Ireland's most popular surfing spots, Strandhill Surf School is the ideal place to learn to surf or improve your skills. The school is owned by New Zealander Paul Buchanan, who offers lessons for all ages and skill levels. Students are provided with all the necessary gear and are grouped together for maximum learning and fun. Experienced instructors will be on hand to help you every step of the way, always sharing tips and tricks to make you a better surfer.

SUP, short for stand-up paddleboarding, is the fastest growing watersport in the world, not to mention a fun activity for all ages. Travelling on SUP craft through beautiful natural surroundings is like walking on water, and this magical experience is best when shared with friends and family. In Ireland, there are endless waterways to glide across, from rivers and canals to lakes and the sea. All equipment is provided, so the only thing you need to bring is your sense of adventure. Pre-booking is essential.

See salmon leap
Ballisodare, Co Sligo
Contact: Dermot Gleeson
Tel: + 353 (0)86 2515064
Web: www.fishinginireland.info

Breathe in the fresh Sligo air
Aughris, Co Sligo

Relax in a Kilcullen Seaweed Bath
Enniscrone, Co Sligo
Tel: +353 (0)96 36238
Web: www.kilcullenseaweedbaths.com

Get a different view at the Céide Fields & Cliffs
Ballycastle, Co Mayo
Contact: Greta Byrne
Tel: +353 (0)96 43325
Email: ceidefields@opw.ie
Web: www.heritageireland.ie/en/west/ceidefields/

Examine the Doonfeeny Ogham Standing Stone
Doonfeeney, Ballycastle, Co Mayo
Web: www.ballycastle.ie

Tour the Tír Sáile Sculpture Trail
various locations in north Mayo

Explore the deserted Inishkea Islands
Surgeview, Blacksod, Co Mayo,
Contact: Seán Lavelle, Dive West
Tel: +353 (0)86 8365983
Email: seanlavelle@eircom.net
Web: www.divewestireland.com

Meet the birds of the barony
Wild Atlantic Tours, Drom Ard, Belmullet, Co Mayo
Contact: Agatha Hurst
Tel: +353 (0)87 6482793
Email: agathahurst@hotmail.com

In a secret setting at Ballisodare Fishing Club you can enjoy the spectacular sight of wild salmon making their way upstream to their spawning grounds and place of birth. The Ballisodare River is one of the most prolific salmon rivers in Ireland, and in June and July you can find large numbers of grilse (young Atlantic salmon) returning from the sea to fresh water for the first time. Viewing is free, but daily fishing fees are €100. Rods can be purchased from the club.

If you're someone who prefers the road less travelled, Aughris Cliff Walk is the place for you. About 5km south from Ballisodare, follow the signposts until you come to the charming Beach Bar. Continue on and then turn right toward the pier. To the left of the slipway you'll find a path that you can follow on foot. This peaceful 5km walk will allow you take in some truly stunning Atlantic views and spot wildlife as you listen to the crashing waves and singing seabirds. Return along the same path.

Imagine relaxing in an enormous bath filled with luxurious oils, floating in warm amber-tinted seawater and feeling simply weightless. This is the experience of a true seaweed bath, considered by many to be the ultimate bathing experience. Here, the unpolluted waters of the Atlantic are pumped in from the shore, which is just a stone's throw away. Then the seawater combines with natural silky oils extracted from seaweed using a simple process. Together, they create an unforgettable experience that is sure to leave you feeling rejuvenated.

The Céide Fields are a remarkable neolithic site and home to the world's oldest known stone-walled field system, dating back nearly 6,000 years. Learn more about the history, archaeology and botany of the area in the visitor centre, which also contains a café and gift shop. The Céide Cliffs viewing platform is an often-overlooked attraction across the road from the Centre. Sitting hundreds of feet above the Atlantic this privileged vantage point allows you views across Bunatrahir Bay to Downpatrick Head, and all the way to Sligo and Donegal on a clear day. Look out for wildlife, as thousands of birds make their nests in the layers of these imposing cliffs.

Dating back to the 5th century, this nearly 7m tall stone stands guard at Doonfeeny graveyard, located along the R314. The second-tallest standing stone in Ireland, it is believed to have been Christianised in the 6th or 7th century with the carving of two crosses on its face. It also displays symbols of a wheel and sunburst, which are thought to represent the Resurrection. According to folklore, this stone aligns with clefts in neighbouring hills and solar positions.

'Tír Sáile', the North Mayo Sculpture Trail, is Ireland's largest public arts project. Installed in 1993, it features 14 site-specific sculptures in places that range from a disused quarry to sand dunes and agricultural land. These fascinating works bring together art and environment, and pay homage to the great cultural heritage of the region. As you travel along the north Mayo coastline from Ballina to Blacksod, you can discover each of the 14 sculptures, which are signalled by road signs.

Experience the rugged beauty of one of Europe's most westerly points on the Inishkea Islands. Steeped in rich history, the islands have been a whaling station since the arrival of more than 800 whales at the turn of the last century, and the site of an early Christian monastery famed for producing an unusual purple dye. On the islands, now home to more than 85 resident and migrating bird species, you can enjoy a fascinating tour from Seán, a direct descendant of the islanders themselves.

Have you ever heard the corncrake's call? Visitors the world over come to Erris to hear the elusive bird's legendary 'crex-crex' refrain. This region is home to a number of rare species, so you just might meet the beautiful phalarope or the elegant snowy owl. Agatha, your qualified tour guide, is sure to impress with her bird, marine and archaeological knowledge. Each year, she observes the migratory birds that have flown here from as far away as the African plains.

Fascinating folklore at Ionad Deirbhile Heritage Centre
Eachleim, Blacksod, Co Mayo
Contact: Jacqui D Uí Mhonacháin
Tel: +353 (0)97 85727
Email: eolas@ionaddeirbhile.ie

Light up the skies
Gaol Siar, Main Street, Belmullet, Co Mayo
Contact: Barbara Heneghan
Tel: +353 (0)87 2169625
Email: eolas@gaolsiar.com
Web: www.gaolsiar.com

A sea and sky high-octane rush
Erris, Co Mayo
Contact: Reiner Maat
Tel: +353 (0)86 2463358
Web: www.elementskitesurfing.com

Creative crafts
Lúnasa Handmade Crafts, Church Street, Belmullet, Co Mayo
Tel: +353 (0)83 1339797

An undersea discovery
Wavesweeper Sea Adventures, Belmullet, Co Mayo
Contact: David Tyrell
Tel: +353 (0)87 2312989
Email: info@wavesweeperseaadventures.com
Web: www.wavesweeperseaadventures.com

Indulge in a fishy feast
Keem Bay Fish Products Ltd., Pollagh, Keel, Achill Island, Co Mayo
Contact: Gerry Hassett
Tel: +353 (0)98 43265
Email: keembay@gmail.com

Discover the Deserted Village at Sliabh Mór
Achill Island, Co Mayo
Web: www.achilltourism.com

Ship ahoy on Clew Bay
Clew Bay, Co Mayo
Contact: Mary Gavin Hughes
Tel: + 353 (0)86 8062282

In the heart of the Mayo 'Gaeltacht' (Irish speaking area), a historical site of high emigration, the Ionad Deirbhile Heritage Centre provides fascinating insight into the harsh life its 19th century residents faced. Learn about James Hack Tuke's assisted emigration scheme, which in 1883 helped more than 3,300 people to depart Blacksod Bay on steamships bound for America and Canada. The centre's accounts of local history, folklore and archaeology, and its commemorative garden will leave you nothing short of impassioned and inspired.

The fantastic Guided Lighthouse Tour takes you out to the furthest tip of the Mullet Peninsula, where Ireland meets the mighty Atlantic Ocean. Enjoy the stories of the Blackrock and Eagle Island lighthouses and tales of their dutiful keepers (one of whom is your tour guide's own father). Take a guided walk along Luib Deirbhile (Deirbhile's Loop), which passes ancient Celtic and Christian sites, and discover the enchanting local folklore and mythology that surrounds them.

Feeling the need for speed? Then don't miss a chance to experience the ultimate adrenaline rush with kitesurfing, the world's fastest growing adventure sport. Elements Kitesurfing operates from the pristine lakes and vast beaches of the idyllic Mullet Peninsula. All of their instructors have qualifications recognised by the International Kitesurfing Organisation, and Elements Kitesurfing boast a superb 100% safety record. Expect some epic adventures and maybe the odd wind-swept hairstyle or two.

A delightful craft store and workshop, Lúnasa Handmade Crafts offers a unique opportunity to try your hand at a host of skills from their 'Give it a Go' menu. Learn traditional Irish knitting, patchwork, spinning, weaving and many more vintage techniques from Rosaleen Bond, who loves sharing her passion for traditional craft revival. A treasure trove of original products from gifted crafters, and with a superb selection of craft materials to get you inspired, the shop offers weekly, weekend and holiday courses throughout the year.

One of Mayo's best-kept secrets is tucked away down an old bog road. Nestled between imposing, rugged cliffs is Muingreena Harbour – a little enclave that hasn't seen a boat in more than 40 years. Suit up and discover the Atlantic's exceptional waters on an unforgettable snorkelling experience. Explore seldom-seen caves, kelp forests, rock walls and reefs that host all elements of marine life. Wavesweeper Sea Adventures provide fully qualified and insured guides, wetsuits, fins and masks, while Mother Nature does the rest.

In 1985 Gerard and Julie Hassett started smoking sumptuous wild Atlantic salmon, along with tasty mackerel, herring, cod and pollock, in their Achill Island smokehouse, and have practically remained the fish of the day ever since. Between their company, Keem Bay Fish Products, and their renowned family-run Chalet Seafood Restaurant, established in 1963, do not miss an opportunity to indulge your taste buds in some incredible, locally produced, artisan food, fresh from the depths of the Atlantic.

Perched on the southern slopes of Sliabh Mór (Slievemore Mountain) are the ruins of 80 to 100 stone cottages that make up Achill Island's eerie 'Deserted Village'. While some of these dwellings were occupied within living memory as 'booley' homes ('booleying' being the summer grazing of cattle on lower mountain slopes), the area itself is rich in archaeological artefacts including striking 5,000-year-old megalithic tombs. For a fascinating step back in time, explore stunning Sliabh Mór, the largest and most recently abandoned of the island's 'booley' settlements.

Enjoy a half-day boat trip on Clew Bay with renowned skipper, Mary Gavin Hughes. Watch out for the bay's seal colony and beautiful Dorinish Island, once owned by none other than John Lennon. Cast your line out for some fresh Atlantic mackerel, then tuck in, after cooking your catch on board. A fourth-generation sea angler, Mary has learned the tricks of the trade from her seafaring forefathers and is always happy to share her vast marine knowledge.

Follow the Greenway to the Seaway

Distillery Road, Westport, Co Mayo
Contact: Clew Bay Bike Hire
Tel: +353 (0)98 37675
Email: info@clewbaybikehire.ie
Web: www.clewbaybikehire.ie

Jump into the wild Atlantic... literally

Adventure West, Westport, Co Mayo
Tel: +353 (0)87 3627828
Email: info@adventurewest.ie
Web: www.adventurewest.ie

Cruise Clew Bay

Westport Harbour, Westport, Co Mayo
Tel: +353 (0)87 6066146
Email: info@clewbaycruises.com
Web: www.clewbaycruises.com

Languish in luxury at Clare Island Lighthouse

Clare Island, Co Mayo
Contact: Roie McCann
Tel: +353 (0)87 6689758
Email: info@clareislandlighthouse.com
Web: www.clareislandlighthouse.com

Be seduced by Silver Strand

Louisburgh, Co Mayo

Swap four wheels for two on the Wild Atlantic Way

Bertra, Westport, Co Mayo
Tel: +353 (0)87 9199152
Email: www.westportcycletours.com
Web: info@westportcycletours.com

For a truly memorable trip, discover the Wild Atlantic Way by land and sea. After cycling 30km from Westport to Mulranny on the stunning Great Western Greenway route, you then board a local fishing boat which takes you on a scenic tour of breathtaking Clew Bay. Spot the dolphins and seals, enjoy a little sea angling or just sit back and take in the unrivalled view of Croagh Patrick, before the boat delivers you back to Westport Quay with a lifetime of memories.

For adrenalin junkies who just can't be satisfied, coasteering offers an exciting combination of rock scrambling, cliff jumping and exhilarating adventure swimming, all in one action-packed session. Get face to face with the rugged west coast, its impressive landscape and the might of the wild Atlantic while indulging your adventurous streak and pushing your energy levels to their very limits. Ready to dive in? Coasteering participants must be over 14 years of age and booking is essential.

Embrace the raw beauty of the west coast on a cruise around Clew Bay. See the thriving seal colony, beautiful secluded beaches and breathtaking views of Croagh Patrick, Murrisk Abbey and Bertra Beach. Sail by many of Clew Bay's reputed 365 sheltered islands, Inishgort Lighthouse and the shores of Dorinish Island, formerly owned by John Lennon. Enjoy on-board commentary guiding you through the bay's history, from battles to tragedies, from the ice age to the present day.

Clare Island stands guard at the entrance of idyllic Clew Bay, off the breathtaking Mayo coast. For almost two centuries, the island's lighthouse has been a nautical landmark perched high on the craggy cliffs, watching over Achill, Westport and beyond. Once a safe haven for sailors, it now offers sanctuary of a different kind. A majestic structure as well as a listed building, this lovingly transformed, luxury lighthouse is a truly magical retreat and an overnight stay is an absolute must.

Follow the 20km stretch of road southwest of Louisburgh along the Atlantic coast to discover the string of beaches best described as the diamonds in County Mayo's veritable treasure chest of sandy shores. From Louisburgh, passing Carrowniskey, Cross and White Strand beaches, drive until the road disappears, to stunning Silver Strand. Then breathe deep and take it all in – with Mayo's highest peak, Mweelrea Mountain, and Connemara's rolling hills across the waters of Killary Harbour, you're practically in paradise.

Westport Cycle Tours offer a hands-on way to discover the best of the west with tours for all abilities. Based at the foot of monumental Croagh Patrick, it's the ideal location to begin your wild Atlantic adventure from. Half- and full-day tours can lead you from the epic Atlantic coastline to the pictorial lakes and valleys of the Sheeffry Mountains, or to the shores of Killary Fjord and the serene Aasleagh Falls. A two-wheeled trip to treasure.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Sligo Tourist Information Office

Old Bank Building, O'Connell Street, Sligo Town, Co Sligo
Tel: +353 (0)71 9161201 Email: northwestinfo@failteireland.ie

Westport Discover Ireland Centre

Bridge Street, Westport, Co Mayo
Tel: +353 (0)98 25711 Email: westport@failteireland.ie



NATIONAL PARKS ON THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

Ireland's wealth of national parks provides unique opportunities to interact with and observe some incredible wildlife, plant life and rare natural habitats. With five of Ireland's six national parks on or close to the Wild Atlantic Way, prepare to be captivated by the great outdoors. With an invitation like that, how could you refuse?

Glenveagh National Park, Co Donegal

Just 10km from the Wild Atlantic Way in the wilds of Donegal, Glenveagh National Park is an impressive 16,000ha of picturesque lakes, glens and woods in the heart of the Derryveagh Mountains. At this former private deer forest, which gained National Park status in 1975, visitors can explore stunning rich bog and woodland, and observe animals such as majestic red deer, wild hare, golden eagles and peregrine falcons.

The historic Glenveagh Castle is an alluring late 19th century castellated mansion, surrounded by the renowned Glenveagh Gardens. The castle's construction in the remote mountain setting was inspired by the Victorians' love of romantic highland retreats. Be sure to take a guided tour of the castle and roam through its idyllic gardens.

The award-winning Glenveagh Visitor Centre boasts a living heather roof mimicking the surrounding landscape and complementing the park's scenery. The centre's extensive displays provide an introduction to the park's natural and constructed history, as well as offering information on walking trails and activities. Guides provide information and tickets for the park buses.

Additional facilities include car park, toilets, baby changing facilities and restaurant. Open Easter to September.

See www.glenveaghnationalpark.ie for more information.

Ballycroy National Park, Co Mayo

Located on Ireland's western seaboard, breathtaking Ballycroy National Park offers vast and varied uninhabited terrain spanning 11,000ha. Visitors can traverse Owenduff blanket bog, one of the last intact active blanket bog systems in Ireland and western Europe, and admire the landscape of the imposing Nephin Beg mountain range.

The park also provides habitats for and protects species such as Greenland white-fronted geese, golden plover, red grouse and otter, and is part of the Owenduff / Nephin Complex Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area.

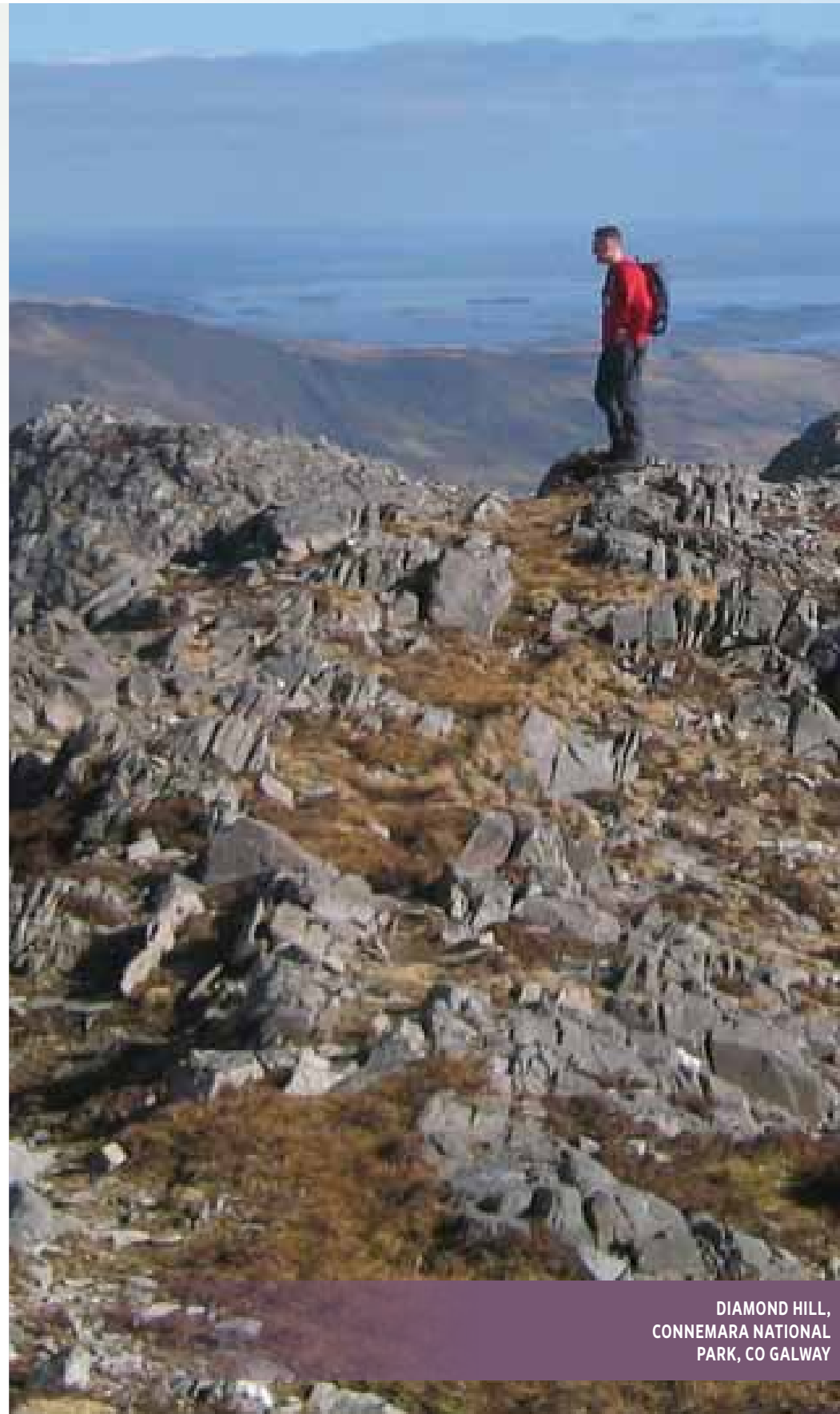
The Ballycroy National Park Visitor Centre, located on the Wild Atlantic Way in Ballycroy village, houses an interpretative exhibition of the landscape, habitats and species found in the park, as well as information on the surrounding area. Don't forget to embrace the superb views of Achill Island and the Nephin Beg Mountains at the summit of the park's short nature trail.

Additional facilities include toilets, a coach car park, outdoor picnic areas and a coffee shop. Disabled access is available at the visitor centre.

See www.ballycroynationalpark.ie for more information.



WILD GOATS IN
BURREN NATIONAL
PARK, CO CLARE



DIAMOND HILL,
CONNEMARA NATIONAL
PARK, CO GALWAY

Connemara National Park, Co Galway

Nestled right in the heart of Connemara, Connemara National Park covers some 2,957ha of impressive bog, heath, grass and woodland, as well as striking mountain scenery. Four of the park's mountains are also part of the famous Twelve Bens or 'Beanna Beola' range, known for their sharp quartzite peaks.

Explore the exceptional landscape on one of the many scenic walking and nature trails that begin at the park's visitor centre. Admire the stunning vistas from the 400m Diamond Hill, including the distant islands of Inishbofin, Inishturk and Inishshark, and the turreted Kylemore Abbey. A diversity of wildlife calls the park home, including lively Connemara ponies, regal red deer and an enormous variety of bird life, such as skylarks, stonechats and peregrine falcons.

In the visitor centre you can enjoy exhibits such as 'The Man & the Landscape', a multi-lingual audio-visual display, and relax in the pretty, seasonal tea room.

Additional facilities include car park, picnic areas (indoor and outdoor), nature trails, children's playground, walks, toilets and tea room.

See www.connemaranationalpark.ie for more information.

The Burren National Park, Co Clare

Tucked away on the southeastern corner of the magnificent Burren, the Burren National Park encompasses a remarkable 1,500ha of limestone pavement, calcareous grassland, hazel scrub, woodland, turloughs, petrifying springs and cliffs. Originating from the Irish word 'Boireann' meaning rocky place, the Burren boasts a unique environment with an unusual lack of soil cover, yet an abundance of exposed limestone pavement and nutrient-rich floral species.

In 1651 a Cromwellian Army Officer remarked, "Of this barony it is said that it is a country where there is not water enough to drown a man, wood enough to hang one, nor earth enough to bury them. This last is so scarce that the inhabitants steal it from one another... the grass grows in tufts of earth of two or three foot square which lies between the limestone rocks and is very sweet and nourishing."

The park's highest point is Knockanes (207m), which continues as a curving terraced ridge right down to Mullaghmór. East of this ridge visitors can observe low-lying limestone pavement and semi-permanent lakes, while west of it sees the pavement sweep up and down. Visitors will be awed by the park's truly mesmeric landscape.

Additional facilities include parking areas, guided walks, free bus service from the information point in Clare Heritage Centre, Corofin, Co Clare.

See www.burrennationalpark.ie for more information.

Killarney National Park, Co Kerry

Discover an expanse of rugged mountain landscape, including the country's highest mountain range McGillicuddy's Reeks (1000m), in Killarney National Park. Roam its spectacular 10,236ha, stroll the shores of Killarney's world-renowned lakes and explore a distinctive combination of pictorial woodlands, waterfalls and unspoiled nature.

Beautiful Muckross House & Gardens have long been the park's most popular attraction where you can delight in the splendid late 19th century mansion's fine period furnishings and fascinating artefacts. The former Kenmare Demesne, close to Killarney town, is also part of the national park and features Killarney House and Gardens, as well as Knockreer House, home to the park's education centre.

Visitors can embrace the park's exceptional habitats, with plant life and nature of national and international significance, including native oak woods, yew woods, bryophytes and lichens, and native red deer unique to Ireland since the last ice age.

Additional facilities include jaunting cars, pony trekking, boating and fishing.

See www.killarneynationalpark.ie for more information.

EXPLORE THE ISLANDS OF THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

Download the
**FREE Wild Atlantic
Way App** now
- your official guide
to the journey of a
lifetime!

Nothing says 'escape' like an Irish break, but a getaway on one of Ireland's stunning islands? Now that's the trip of a lifetime. With each one boasting its own unique charm, you're sure to discover a little slice of paradise.

Roaming the islands is as close to exploring an open-air museum as you'll get, as they all simply brim with ancient tales, treasure and history. Enjoy a voyage of discovery with spectacular 4,000-year-old forts like Dún Chonchúir (Conor's Fort) on Inis Meáin (Inishmaan), Bere Island's impressive military fortification of Lonehort, or the fascinating remains of St Molaise's 6th century monastery on Inishmurray Island.

Long considered the jewel in the crown, the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Skellig Michael is a must-see. Early Christian monks built beehive huts on the jagged and inhospitable rock, carving hundreds of steps into its foreboding terrain.

County Galway's Dún Aonghusa (Dún Aengus) is one of three prehistoric forts found on Inis Mór (Inishmore). Featured among other forts on the World Heritage Tentative List, the ancient semi-circular stone fort clings to the island's 90m high cliffs while the Atlantic crashes below. Delve into the past and explore Inishfree's ancient mass rock, or examine the medieval wall paintings adorning the ruins of Clare Island's Cistercian Abbey.

For an active dose of history, trek the ancient tetrapod trackways on Valentia Island, which are a remarkable 385 million years old. And don't forget to get your hands dirty on a dig with the Achill Archaeological Field School.

Walkers will be enamoured by the offshore islands' wealth of trails, short looped walks and hefty hikes that blast away the cobwebs.

Off County Cork's coast, Bere, Dursey and Cape Clear islands all boast picturesque looped walks. From the 6km Rerrin route on Bere to the 14km loop on Dursey (accessed by cable car), there's something for everyone. If you're taking on the wild islands of County Donegal, don't miss Tory's 4km loop where you can roam the unusual sites of everything from shipwrecks to poitín smuggling.

Clare Island is home to the Fawnglass (3km) and Knocknaveen (8km) loops which take in historic ruins and ancient bronze age cooking sites. Inishturk's Lough Coolaknick Loop (5km) will introduce you to the island's wild birds, while Achill's Dooagh Loop will bring you to the idyllic Keem Bay.

Enjoy incredible vistas on County Galway's island routes, including Inishbofin's two loop walks, one of which, the 8km Westquarter Loop, charms with views of blowholes, sea stacks and occasionally even the resident seal colony. The Aran Islands also boast a number of loop walks including the 10km Lúb Cill Cheannannach walk on Inis Meáin (Inishmaan), which takes in Dún Chonchúir (Conor's Fort) and Teampall na Seacht Mac Rí (Church of the Seven Sons of the King), once Connacht's revered place of pilgrimage.

The islands' exceptional landscapes are home to all manner of undisturbed nature and wildlife. Quiet cliffs, empty beaches, abundant hedgerows and untamed stretches of grassland provide perfect habitats for an array of birds including meadow pipits, curlews, kittiwakes and puffins. Explore the world's second largest gannet colony on the Skelligs or spot the endangered corncrake on Inishbofin, County Galway. Don't forget Ireland's only manned bird observatory on stunning Cape Clear, a veritable bird-watcher's paradise.

These same pristine environments also cultivate beautiful flora and fauna. County Cork's Heir Island boasts a marsh that grows 200 varieties of wildflower, while the rare and endangered rock rose calls Inishturk home. Inis Oírr (Inisher) hosts a porous limestone landscape similar to that of the Burren, and blooms a vibrant mix of Mediterranean, Arctic and Alpine flowers during the spring and summer.

For a real taste of island life an overnight stay is a must. Soaking up the twilight just before the sun sets, indulging in gourmet food and relaxing by a fire to the rhythms of traditional music are the joys a day visitor will never know.

With guided walks, boat trips, sea kayaking and a lively festival or two, you'll feel practically local by the end of your stay. Whatever your inclination or budget there's accommodation to suit.



DÚN AENGUS CLIFFS, INIS MÓR, ARAN ISLANDS, CO GALWAY

From luxury hotels to lighthouses, Gaeltacht B&Bs to pet-friendly self-catering cottages, fun-filled hostels, eco-minded yurt villages and well-ordered campsites, your island holiday will be one to remember.

Renowned author Graham Greene was a regular visitor to Achill Island in the 1940s but wasn't the only writer drawn to this pictorial hideaway. Nobel laureate Heinrich Böll spent time on the island in the 1950s and was so charmed by it, he lovingly documented his time there in his travelogue, 'Irish Journal'.

Peaceful Inis Meáin (Inishmaan) was lauded playwright JM Synge's island of choice. Following sage advice from WB Yeats, who said "Give up Paris... go to the Aran Islands...", Synge hopped the boat and penned his seminal work 'The Playboy of the Western World' there. In a fitting twist, the acclaimed Druid Theatre Group recently performed the play on the island itself.

Of course, the islands boast local storytellers and writers too. Ireland's modern love of the story grew right from the historic oral tradition kept alive by people like Peig Sayers, Tomás Ó Criomhtháin and Muiris Ó Suilleabháin, all of whom were natives of Na Blascaodaí, the Blasket Islands. Discover more about their fascinating lives at the Blasket Centre.

This storytelling tradition looks set to continue with the islands inspiring more tales at gatherings like the Heinrich Böll Memorial Weekend on Achill in May, and the July Achill Summer School which hosts a workshop on the art of creative writing. While Clare Island's July Bard Summer School explores the contemporary meaning of myth through story, poetry and music at the ancestral home of Ireland's own Pirate Queen, Granuaile. Cape Clear's September Storytelling Festival and October's International Storytelling Workshop will also satisfy those who love a good yarn.

Whichever you choose, these islands are sure to leave you with a few tales of your own and a lifetime of memories to take home.



SECRETS



See the salmon leap at Aasleagh Falls Leenane, Co Galway

On the County Mayo border just outside the village of Leenane, these awe-inspiring 6m high waterfalls are quite a sight. Nestled in an area of outstanding natural beauty, it's the ideal spot for a relaxing picnic and during the summer, the perfect place to watch the salmon leaping up the falls after they have returned from far flung feeding grounds in the Faroe Islands and Greenland. The waterfall also featured in the 1990 movie *The Field*, starring the late Richard Harris.

Stroll the shores of Glassilaun Beach Lettergesh, Co Galway

Located on the coast road between Tully / Renvyle and Leenane is the peaceful hamlet of Glassilaun. This idyllic horseshoe beach is a firm favourite with families and watersport enthusiasts alike. At low tide, take a stroll to the tiny island at the end of the beach and discover an old lobster holding pool, a little wall built between rocky granite outcrops, which is a great place for a dip when sea temperatures are low. Serene and sheltered, you'll be enamoured by these sandy shores.

Roam Cromwell's Barracks Inishbofin Island, Co Galway

Discover the remarkable and imposing star-shaped, 17th century fort at the entrance to Inishbofin Harbour. Walk from the old pier, where you can spot the barracks, and follow the coastline right around to the entrance. Built by Cromwell's regime, it housed captured Catholic clergy from all over the country after the English Statute of 1655 declared them guilty of high treason. The barracks were later used as a defensive strategy and saw service during the 1691 Jacobite War.

Trek through Connemara on a Connemara pony, what else?

Errislannan Manor, Clifden, Co Galway
Telephone: +353 (0)95 21134
Email: errislannanmanor@eircom.net
Web: www.connemaraponyriding.com

The sure-footed Connemara pony – the only horse breed native to Ireland – is the perfect form of transport across the region's blanket bogs and dazzling beaches. Legend has it that the ponies are descended from Arab stallions that swam ashore when the Spanish Armada sank off the Connemara coast in the 16th century. The pony treks take place hourly each morning from Monday to Friday. Private groups and longer treks can be arranged but booking is essential.

A slice of Irish history at Pearse's Cottage Inbhear, Rosmuck (Ros Muc), Co Galway Tel: +353 (0)91 574292 Email: tanphiarsaigh@opw.ie Web: heritageireland.ie/West/PatrickPearsesCottage

Pearse's Cottage is a small, restored house overlooking the spectacular Connemara landscape. Irish political activist, teacher and Easter Rising leader Patrick Pearse first visited pictorial Ros Muc in April 1903, and the place made such an impression on him that he built his beloved holiday cottage there. Pearse used the cottage as a summer residence and summer school for his Dublin pupils. The cottage interior has been completely reconstructed and houses an excellent exhibition. Open Easter and May to September.

Experience real Irish culture in the Gaeltacht Cnoc Suain, Spiddal, Connemara, Co Galway Tel: +353 (0)91 555703 Email: info@CnocSuain.com Web: www.cnocsuain.com

For an authentic dose of Irish culture and west of Ireland charm, Cnoc Suain ('Restful Hill') is your first port of call. A restored, 17th century hill-village set upon 80ha of ancient bogland in the heart of the Gaeltacht (Irish speaking area), its raw beauty is unrivalled. Dearbhail Standún, musician and native speaker, and Charlie Troy, natural scientist and teacher, offer one-of-a-kind immersion in Irish culture, nature and heritage through Connemara's lively traditions of music, song, storytelling, céilí dancing and food.

Kick the wall on the Salthill Prom Salthill Promenade, Galway City, Co Galway

Overlooking beautiful Galway Bay on the fringes of Galway City, walking the Prom, Ireland's longest seaside promenade, is a proud local tradition. Take a stroll and be sure to kick the wall across from the Blackrock diving boards, before turning around and going all the way back again. No one knows just where the tradition of kicking the wall started, but it's now considered to bring good luck and fortune to those who kick it. So why not give it a go?

Get Galwegian at the Galway City Museum Spanish Parade, Galway City, Co Galway Tel: +353 (0)91 532460 Email: museum@galwaycity.ie Web: www.galwaycitymuseum.ie

Galway City Museum is a terrific place to spend an afternoon, not least for its incredible views of the Claddagh, where the River Corrib's waters meet Galway Bay. With a full-sized Galway hooker sailboat suspended from the museum's atrium, it makes quite the impression. The boat was custom-made by traditional craftsmen from An Cheathrú Rua (Carraroe) and was named in honour of the last King of Claddagh village, Máirtín Oliver. The museum is open Tuesday to Saturday from 10.00am - 5.00pm, and also on Sundays during the summer from 12.00 noon - 5.00pm.

Say ‘I do’ to the Claddagh Ring Museum

Quay Street, Galway City, Co Galway
Contact Jonathan Margetts
Tel. +353 (0)91 566 365
Email: info@claddaghring.ie
Website: www.claddaghring.ie

Delight in Michelin-star dining

53 Lower Dominick Street, Galway City, Co Galway
Contact JP McMahon
Tel. + 353 (0)91 535947
Email: food@anairrestaurant.ie
Website: www.anairrestaurant.ie

Enjoy opulent oysters at Moran’s Oyster Cottage

The Weir, Kilcolgan, Co Galway
Tel. +353 (0)91 796113
Web: www.mornasoystercottage.com

Celebrate the gathering of the boats

Kinvara, Co Galway
Web: www.kinvara.com/cruinniu

The Burren Nature Sanctuary

Cloonasee, Kinvara, Co Galway
Contact: Mary Bermingham.
Tel: +353 (0)91 637444 / (0)87 4129701
Email: info@bns.ie
Web: www.bns.ie

Taste the Burren with Hazel Mountain Chocolates

Oughtmama, Bellharbour, Co Clare
Tel: +353 (0)87 9903000
Email: info@hazelmountainchocolates.com
Web: www.hazelmountainchocolates.com

Try and spy a sea monster

Inis Mór, Aran Islands, Co Galway

Literature and landscape on Inis Meáin

Inis Meáin, Aran Islands, Co Galway

Tucked away inside Thomas Dillon’s Jewellers, the original manufacturers of the world-famous Claddagh Ring, is this unique, bijou museum. Housing some of the very first Claddagh rings made by 18th century goldsmiths Nicholas Burge, Richard Joyce and George Robinson, here you can also see the world’s smallest Claddagh ring, perched remarkably atop a tailor’s pin. Learn about the various stages of ring production, from wax blanks to the finished product, and peruse fascinating photographs of the historic former fishing village of Claddagh.

Indulge in gastronomic luxury at the only Michelin-starred restaurant in the west of Ireland, Aniar. Showcasing the best of Galway and the west’s fine ingredients and fresh produce, Aniar’s menu is a veritable gourmet tour unlike any other, revealing the distinct and unusual foods that the area’s landscape, farms and shores provide. The rich and diverse menu is dictated by the natural course of the seasons, making for dishes that are as delicious as they are ever changing.

This cosy traditional thatched cottage is more than 250 years old and is well into its 7th generation of the family with Catherine Moran now at the helm. Renowned the world over for its superb seafood, the restaurant has long delighted diners with its combination of fresh Galway oysters, delicious home-baked brown bread and of course, a cool, creamy pint of Guinness. A traditional dish in this cosy setting is one temptation that’s simply too hard to resist.

Come see the gathering of the boats at Kinvara’s annual Cruinniú na mBád Festival. The sturdy hooker, a boat synonymous with Connemara and south Galway, was used for 200 years to transport turf from the Connemara bogs to the stunning Aran Islands and Burren. The hooker’s last voyage was in 1962, carrying turf across Galway Bay from Connemara to Kinvara. Join in the spectacle and celebrate Ireland’s maritime heritage, with singing, dancing, music and more.

Discover a place where rare orchids, Alpine, Mediterranean and Arctic plants flower side by side, at the Burren Nature Sanctuary. With idyllic Burren walks leading you through unique limestone terrain, past the rare turlough or ‘disappearing lake’ that fills and empties twice a day, and an array of beautiful botany, this landscape never fails to awe. Young ones can also visit the farm animals and go wild in the adventure playground, making it a sanctuary for everyone.

Nestled in the foothills of the Burren Mountains in the heart of the historical village of Oughtmama, enjoy hand-crafted delights courtesy of Hazel Mountain Chocolates. After renovating their granny’s 1950s house into a boutique chocolate factory with an eco grass roof, Kasha and John Connolly now deliver a modern taste of the Burren from a farm boasting a 300-year-old heritage. Discover the art of traditional praline making and indulge in delicious pairings like chocolate and Burren juniper berries or even violet petals.

The Wormhole or ‘Poll na bPéist’ in Irish, is a striking natural rock formation on the southern coast of Inis Mór (Inishmore). This large, almost perfectly rectangular hole in the rocky coastline demonstrates the sea’s incredible force wearing away the limestone, and reveals the joints and right angles that form limestone itself. The ‘péist’ (worm) in question is the reptilian sea monster of Irish folklore. The water that rushes into the hole during high tide or stormy weather is said to conceal the mythical creature.

On the beautiful island of Inis Meáin (Inishmaan) sits Teach Synge, celebrated playwright JM Synge’s beloved coastal cottage. Retreating there on the advice of WB Yeats, the 300-year-old house is now restored as a museum dedicated to his life and work, including his 1907 masterpiece ‘The Playboy of the Western World’. About 1.5km from the cottage is a stone chair on which Synge spent many an hour staring out at the epic Atlantic Ocean.

Teampall Chaomhán (St Kevin’s Church)

Inis Óirr, Aran Islands, Co Galway

Hang out on an Atlantic cliff face

Ben’s Rockclimbing, Fanore, Co Clare
Tel: +353 (0)86 8448622
Email: info@benssurfclinic.com
Web: www.benssurfclinic.com/rockclimbing

Catch a wave in Fanore

Aloha Surf School, Fanore, Co Clare
Tel: +353 (0)87 2133996
Email: enquiries@surfschool.tv
Web: www.surfschool.tv

Go sky to sea on a Burren tour

Burren Way Mountain Bike Tours, Doolin, Co Clare
Contact: Patrick & Kelly O’Regan
Tel: +353 (0)85 1195489
Email: burrenwaymountainbiketours@gmail.com
Web: www.burrenwaymountainbiketours.com

Meet the Music Makers of west Clare

Miltown Malbay, Co Clare
Tel: +353 (0)65 7085785
Email: eolas@oac.ie
Web: www.themusicmakers.ie

Take a dip in the Pollock Holes

Kilkee, Co Clare

Relax in a seaweed spa

Grattan Street, Kilkee, Co Clare
Tel: + 353 (0)65 9056742
Email: info@kilkeethalasso.com
Web: www.kilkeethalasso.com

Run wild on Kilkee’s Atlantic coast road

Kilkee, Co Clare

Nestled on idyllic Inis Óirr (Inisheer), the smallest of the Aran Islands, are the stone ruins of St Kevin’s Church dating back to at least the 10th century. Atlantic storms regularly coat the little church in mountains of sand, which locals clear away each year. Don’t miss the opportunity to visit the grave of St Kevin, the patron saint of the island, or to celebrate his annual feast day there on 14 June. Explore this island haven for an intriguing dose of history and Atlantic panoramas.

The ideal spot for climbers of all levels, Ballyryan, on the edge of the Burren, boasts impressive sea cliffs with phenomenal Atlantic Ocean and Aran Island views. With more than 300 climbing routes in the area, it’s the secret jewel of rock climbing in County Clare. Scale the impressive cliffs with Ben’s Rock Climbing Clinic. No experience is required, all equipment is provided and all instructors are fully qualified and insured. With two-hour lessons, you’ll know the ropes in no time.

Remote and picturesque Fanore Beach is a surfer’s hideaway, and you can enjoy the space, sea and scenery of this little known County Clare gem. Perfect for those looking to escape the usual crowds and learn to surf, Aloha Surf School offers a unique Atlantic adventure. With professional instruction for learners of all ages and abilities, no experience is required and all equipment is provided. So you can get on with grabbing a board and catching that wave.

Explore the unparalleled beauty of the rugged Burren on the Sky to Sea Mountain Biking / Kayaking Tour. Discover this famous landscape from a new perspective with fantastic coastal views, fun off-road cycling and a great paddle to top it all off. The ideal energy-burning day out, the tour also showcases incredible panoramas of Clare and Galway. With a dynamic mix of activities, this hands-on experience leaves you with lasting memories and some great photos too.

Discover the magic of traditional Irish music, song and dance in the home of renowned uilleann piper Willie Clancy, at The Music Makers of west Clare Visitor Centre. Read first-hand accounts of the area’s renowned musicians and watch a specially commissioned film showcasing the locality’s most accomplished musicians playing the tunes most beloved by Clare’s great musical masters. Nestled between Loop Head and the Cliffs of Moher, you’re also guaranteed some wonderful sounds and scenery.

A renowned spot for outdoor swimming, Kilkee’s Pollock Holes consist of three sea pools which are only revealed at low tide. While the Atlantic waves may batter the rocks that lie about 100m beyond you, these pools remain a calm and protected swimmer’s haven. Take a dip in seawater teeming with starfish, crabs and tiny creatures, while seagulls and oystercatchers linger overhead. Enjoy this unusual Atlantic adventure before indulging in a tasty reward of tea and hot scones in the town.

Get thoroughly pampered with some thalassotherapy in beautiful Kilkee, County Clare, one of Ireland’s oldest holiday resorts. Indulge in a luxurious natural bath of heated seawater and freshly harvested seaweed after a long day’s sightseeing on the Wild Atlantic Way. With only five places on the entire route offering this authentic natural treatment, it’s certainly an unusual find. Nature’s ingredients are sure to leave you feeling refreshed, rejuvenated and ready for more incredible Atlantic adventures.

This amazing cliff run from Kilkee takes you south along the coast road towards Loop Head Lighthouse, taking in the breathtaking sea cliffs and sea stacks en route. In summer the long coastline provides safe breeding and wintering grounds for a large number of birds from Europe and Africa, including the common yellow-throat, Canada warbler, and red-eyed and Philadelphia vireos. If you’re really lucky you might even spot a puffin, so keep those eyes peeled.

Embrace the view from Knocknagarhoon Hill Kilkee, Co Clare

Just off Loop Head Drive between Kilkee and Cross, discover a spectacular vantage point known locally as Knocknagarhoon Hill. Embrace exceptional vistas all the way to Loop Head Lighthouse, some 20km away, and the unique views of the nearby villages, townlands and the mouth of Ireland's longest river, the Shannon. With these unrivalled panoramas, stunning Atlantic cliff scenery and a welcome slice of tranquil seclusion, you'll find that Knocknagarhoon Hill is a special spot indeed.

See the rock of the leaping lovers, Diarmuid and Gráinne Loop Head, Co Clare

Just north of Loop Head's magnificent headland you'll find a ruggedly majestic sea stack known as Diarmuid and Gráinne's Rock. The imposing rock is named after two lovers from Irish mythology, Diarmuid and Gráinne. The couple are said to have leapt from land's end onto the sea stack while escaping the mighty warrior Fionn Mac Cumhaill, to whom Gráinne was betrothed. With romance, Celtic legends and one incredible view, there's plenty to discover in the wonderful wilds of west Clare.

Keep watch over the Atlantic on a lighthouse holiday Loop Head Lighthouse, Kilbaha, Co Clare Tel: +353 (0)1 6704733 Email: bookings@irishlandmark.com Web: www.irishlandmark.com

Perched proudly at the tip of majestic Loop Head stands the lighthouse station. Surrounded by birds, wild flowers, scenery and surf, Loop Head offers unique self-catering holiday accommodation with all of the spectacular appeal of the rugged west coast. The lighthouse is a major landmark on the northern shore of the River Shannon and commands panoramic views of the sea down to Kerry Head and Dingle, and up the Clare coast to the Cliffs of Moher. Your lighthouse awaits!

Get creative at Loop Head Summer Hedge School Loop Head, Co Clare Tel: +353 (0)86 8197726 Email: ctmadigan@eircom.net Web: carmelmadigangallery.com/hedgescheventbooking

Combining an exploration of the unusual flora of the Loop Head Peninsula with food foraging, poetry, art and creativity workshops, visitors can revel in this unique hedge school experience. Under the guidance of artist, author, native, naturalist and tour guide Carmel Madigan, discover the difference between the Loop Head's flora and that of the Burren, or taste fresh leaf and berry tea combinations foraged directly from the peninsula's hedgerows. Expect shoreline poetry readings, philosophy and art sessions, explorations and guided botanical walks.

Go two by two to The Little Ark Kilbaha, Co Clare

When 19th century landlords refused to give a site for a Roman Catholic church in Kilbaha, Fr Michael Meehan had a spark of imagination. He began celebrating mass on the seashore, considered no man's land. Fr Meehan had a wheeled wooden box that contained an altar – a little ark – which was rolled onto the beach for the next five years to celebrate mass. When a site was granted, the preserved wooden ark was stored inside the church, where it can still be seen today.

Walk in the Vikings footsteps on Scattery Island Kilrush, Co Clare Tel: +353 (0)65 6829100 (Ennis Friary) Email: scatteryisland@opw.ie Web: www.heritageireland.ie

Located approximately 1.5km off the Kilrush coastline, Scattery Island is home to a monastic settlement founded early in the 6th century by St Senan who was born locally. Visit the ruins of six churches and one of the highest round towers in Ireland (approx 40m) with the unusual feature of its door at ground level. Scattery was subjected to many invasions down through the centuries; the Vikings invaded during the early 9th century but Brian Boru later recaptured the island. It is believed that Scattery is a derivation of the Norse word for treasure, which is 'scatty'.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Clifden Tourist Information Office

Galway Road, Clifden, Co Galway
Tel: +353 (0)95 21163 Email: clifdentouristoffice@failteireland.ie

Aran Islands Tourist Information Office

Aran Islands Tourist Information Office, Kilronan, Inis Mór, Aran Islands, Co Galway (seasonal office)

Galway Discover Ireland Centre

Forster Street, Galway City, Co Galway
Tel: +353 (0)91 537700 Email: irelandwestinfo@failteireland.ie



SECRETS



Reach for the sky at Foynes Flying Boat & Maritime Museum

Foynes, Co Limerick
Contact: Margaret O'Shaughnessy
Tel: +353 (0)69 65416
Email: info@flyingboatmuseum.com
Web: www.flyingboatmuseum.com

Cycle and stroll through history

Eco Trek, Ballybunion, Co Kerry
Contact: Danny Houlihan
Tel: +353 (0)87 3539613
Email: info@ecotrekballybunion.com
Web: www.ecotrekballybunion.com

Do the time without the crime

Tarbert, Co Kerry
Contact: Mary O'Connell
Tel: +353 (0)68 36500
Email: tarbertbridewell@eircom.net
Web: www.tarbertbridewell.com

Learn a jig or a tune at Ireland's National Folk Theatre

Tralee, Co Kerry
Contact: Catriona Fallon
Tel: +353 (0)66 7123055
Email: info@siamstire.com
Web: www.siamstire.com

Get back to nature at Tralee Bay Wetland Centre

Tralee Bay, Co Kerry
Contact: Joanie Mc Auliffe
Tel: +353 (0)66 7126700
Email: manager@traleebaywetlands.com
Web: www.traleebaywetlands.org

Fun, frolics and a surfing safari on the wild Atlantic waves

Jamie Knox Watersports, The Maharees, Co Kerry
Contact: Jamie Knox,
Tel: +353 (0)66 7139411
Email: jamieknox@eircom.net
Web: www.jamieknox.com

Feel the beat of rural Ireland with traditional music

Tinteán Ceoil, Cloghane, Co Kerry
Contact: Micheál O'Dowd
Tel: +353 (0)66 71381113
Email: oconnorsguesthouse@eircom.net

Uncover Ireland's ancient past at Sás Creek

Halle le Cheile, Brandon, Co Kerry
Contact: Micheál O'Dowd
Tel: +353 (0)66 71381113
Email: oconnorsguesthouse@eircom.net

Take a step back in time to that romantic era from 1937-1945 when a small Irish village became the epicentre of commercial aviation. Board the world's only replica Boeing 314 Clipper, housing an exhibit which allows you to experience just what it was like to fly in the 1940s. You can even explore the original transatlantic terminal where the renowned tippie, Irish coffee, was invented in 1943. Discover the beverage's history and be sure to consult the recipe to perfect your own version.

Unearth the stories and history of picturesque Ballybunion with a guided walk or cycle courtesy of local historian Danny Houlihan. Not only a knowledgeable historian and guide, Danny is also an All-Ireland Piping Champion who happily serenades visitors during the tour. Discover County Kerry's abundant hidden treasures from its lush glens and valleys to its exceptional wildlife. Pre-booked tours include one-hour, half- or full- day walks or cycles, which can also include visits to the scenic countryside of Beale and Asdee.

Built in 1831, Tarbert Bridewell Courthouse and Jail saw justice served for more than 100 years. The jail ceased operation in 1874 but the courthouse continued sentencing for a further 75 years. Explore the visitor centre's entertaining exhibition of 19th century Ireland's rough justice, and an exhibition on Tarbert's famous poet, Thomas McGreevy. The visitor centre also details the history of Tarbert House along with its intriguing list of visitors, including Charlotte Brontë, Winston Churchill and Daniel O'Connell.

Siamsa Tíre, Ireland's National Folk Theatre turns 40 in 2014 and is hosting a series of authentic Irish folk performances inviting visitors worldwide to enjoy the best of Irish culture, music, song and dance. Enjoy one of their lively classes that teach our cultural traditions, such as Irish dance, language and even bodhrán playing. Get immersed in all things Irish while embracing views of the Slieve Mish Mountains and the Dingle Peninsula. Activities are seasonal and require pre-booking.

Take a boat tour and discover the wild flora, fauna and stunning natural habitat of Tralee Bay, a natural Irish wetlands adjacent to the Wild Atlantic Way. The boat trip guides you through the pictorial wetlands and includes a visit to a viewing tower that boasts panoramic views over Tralee Bay and out to the thrashing Atlantic Ocean. The centre's on-site restaurant and café offer special wild Atlantic dishes so you can indulge in the best of local produce.

Enjoy some of west coast's top surfing on the sandy shores of Maharees. Tucked away at the base of beautiful Mount Brandon along the Wild Atlantic Way, you can catch some exceptional waves and revel in the Dingle Peninsula's raw beauty. With the salt in your hair, a board in your hand and a few lessons with an experienced instructor under your belt, you'll feel like quite the pro. Lessons are seasonal and should be pre-booked to avoid disappointment.

Immerse yourself in a unique cultural experience at the Tinteán Ceoil, a traditional Irish fireside music session. Local musicians lead the evening, incorporating any and all who want to contribute through music, dance, singing and recitation. Local children feature regularly, practising their jigs, reels and musical pieces. With a cup of tea and a hot scone in front of you, you'll feel practically local. The session takes place every Monday from 7.30 - 9.30pm and in summer, every Monday and Thursday from 7.30 - 9.30pm.

Walk to the edge of the world along the dramatic U-shaped inlet of Sás Creek. The Irish word 'sás' means a noose-style trap and in this case describes the sea's entrapment within the steep-sloped creek. Three families lived in the area during the last century, one of which remained until only a few years ago. Explore the remnants of deserted village Arraglen, where the cultivation ridges of past farmers are still visible beneath the heather. Pre-booking with a local guide is essential.

Follow the footsteps of St Brendan the Navigator

Contact: Linda Woods, Southwest Walks
Tel: + 353 (0)66 7186181
Email: info@southwestwalksireland.com
Web: www.southwestwalksireland.com

Get the catch of the day on the Wild Atlantic Way

Dingle Bay Charters, Dingle, Co Kerry
Contact: Mary and Michael O'Neill
Tel: +353 (0)66 9151344
Email: info@dinglebaycharters.com
Web: www.dinglebaycharters.com

Walk the Path of the Saints

Cosán na Naomh , Ballydavid, Co Kerry
Contact: TP O'Conchuir
Email: info@dingleactivities.com or tp@iol.ie
Tel: +353 86 8191942
www.dingleactivities.com

Get crafty with County Kerry's creative trails

Original Kerry, c/o Kerry Woollen Mills, Listry, Co Kerry
Contact: Andrew & Yvonne Eadie
Tel: +353 (0)64 6644122
Email: enquiries@originalkerry.com
sales@kerrywoollenmills.ie
Web: www.originalkerry.com

Take a run and jump... off an Atlantic cliff

Mór Active, Killarney, Co Kerry
Contact: Michael Crawley
Tel: +353 (0)86 3890171
Email: info@moractive.com
Web: www.moractivetours.com

The Seven Ages art collection in Killorglin

Library Building, Library Place, Killorglin, Co Kerry
Contact: Pauline Bewick
Email: studio@paulinebewick.ie

Go for a gallop on Rossbeigh Beach

Rossbeigh (near Glenbeigh on the Ring of Kerry), Co Kerry
Contact: Gerard Burke
Tel: +353 (0)87 2379110
Web: www.beachtrek.ie

Lose yourself among the ferns

Kells Gardens, Kells, Co Kerry
Contact: Billy Alexander
Tel: +353 (0)66 9477975 / (0)87 7776666
Email: billy@kellsgardens.ie
Web: www.kellsgardens.ie

Following in the footsteps of ancient pilgrims up to the summit of majestic Mount Brandon. Originally an act of worship to the Celtic god Lughnasa, the pilgrimage was later Christianised and dedicated to St Brendan, a 6th century monk who sailed to America long before Columbus. By the 12th century the story of his voyage had been translated into every European language and Brendan became renowned as a seafaring saint.

Ireland's rugged west coast, and County Kerry in particular, boasts unparalleled access to some of the country's superb sea angling spots. Ride the Atlantic's currents and enjoy an exhilarating boat trip in the fresh salty air, all with a professional guide at the helm as you cast out your line. The boat departs from Dingle Pier and all equipment is provided, leaving you to get on with the important business of enjoying the seafaring life.

'Cosán na Naomh' or the Path of the Saints, is a fascinating and beautiful old pilgrim path that encompasses breathtaking scenery and rich early Christian history, archaeology and myth. This special path is situated at the end of the Dingle Peninsula and goes right through the Gaeltacht (Irish speaking area) to Mount Brandon, Ireland's second highest mountain. An 18km walk, it waves its way up and down through incredible landscape with a glorious and constant view of the sea and mountains.

County Kerry's acclaimed coastline is dotted with craft studios and workshops where the wild spectacle of sky, sea and land are reflected in the work of the area's craft masters. On the west and south Kerry Craft Trails experience craft-making unique to this part of the Wild Atlantic Way, with intricately designed, handmade pieces. Marvel at the maker at work, touch the raw materials, and wonder at the sheer skill that takes inspiration and marries it with form and technique.

Mór Active (Mountain Ocean River Active) has a unique philosophy and passion for adventure, providing incredible outdoor experiences and memories that last a lifetime. Feel the adrenalin rush of coasteering – jumping (supervised) right off a cliff and into the epic Atlantic Ocean. Or for the less extreme, try some rock climbing, abseiling, kayaking, kayak surfing, guided Carrauntoohil hikes, lake tours and even sea eagle hiking tours. Where better to get adventurous than on the mighty Wild Atlantic Way?

The Seven Ages collection by the world-renowned artist Pauline Bewick is an exciting cultural treasure and an internationally unique art exhibition. No other artist boasts a range of work that explores seven decades of an artist's and a woman's life. On turning 70 in 2005, Pauline donated her master collection to the Irish State and it is now permanently exhibited in Killorglin. Pauline drew much inspiration from the seascape and landscape of her County Kerry home on the Wild Atlantic Way.

Gallop the glorious 11km shore of Rossbeigh Beach with the wind in your hair and the refreshing spray of the Atlantic on your face. This is an exhilarating day out that horse riders of all levels will long treasure. Rossbeigh Beach is a beautiful, Blue Flag-awarded beach on the unrivalled Ring of Kerry and it showcases the spectacular scenery that makes the west so beloved by visitors and locals alike. To avoid disappointment book at least 48 hours in advance.

Covering more than 17ha of varying terrain, Kells Bay Gardens are home to one of the finest collections of southern hemisphere plants in Europe. They include species from Australia, New Zealand and South America, which thrive here due to the warming influences of the Gulf Stream. You can extend your visit to the gardens by exploring more than 3km of graded walking routes on site and taking in beautiful views of the Atlantic. Afterwards, continue to soak up the stunning panoramas while recharging at the Conservatory Café.

Get a bird's eye view of the Wild Atlantic Way

Beentee Looped Walk, Cahersiveen, Co Kerry
Web: www.discoverireland.ie/Activities-Adventure/beentee-loop

Meet a pirate in Portmagee

Portmagee, Co Kerry
Contact: Gabriel Butler
Tel: +353 (0)85 1008545 / (0)66 9477108
Email: captainmagee@outlook.com
Web: www.captainmagee.com

Discover the internet of the 19th century

Valentia Island Heritage Centre, School Road, Knightstown, Valentia Island, Co Kerry
Tel: +353 (0)66 9476411
Email: valentiaislandheritagecentre@gmail.com
Web: vhc.cablehistory.org

See the bright lights of Valentia

Valentia Island Lighthouse Tours, Cromwell Point, Valentia Island, Co Kerry
Contact: Joanne Cahill
Tel: +353 (0)66 9476985
Email: info@valentiaisland.ie
Web: www.valentiaisland.ie/explore-valentia/visit-cromwell-point-lighthouse

Live like Willy Wonka at Skelligs Chocolate Factory

Skelligs Chocolate Factory - Visitor Centre, St Finian's Bay, Ballinskelligs, Co Kerry
Contact: Colm Healy
Tel: +353 (0)66 9479119
Email: info@skelligschocolate.com
Web: www.skelligschocolate.com

See art and nature collide

Cill Rialaig Art Centre, Dun Geagan, Ballinskelligs, Co Kerry
Tel: +353 (0)66 9479277
Email: crsiopa@gmail.com
Web: <http://cillrialaigartscentre.org>

Gaze up at the sun, moon and stars

Kerry Dark-Sky Reserve, Waterville, Co Kerry
Tel: +353 (0)87 7845688
Email: kerrystargazingguide@gmail.com
Web: www.kerrydarksky.com

Walk in the footsteps of Charlie Chaplin

Waterville, Co Kerry

In his song 'The Boys of Barr na Sraide', the famous Kerry writer Sigerson Clifford captures Cahersiveen, describing it as 'the town that climbs the mountain, and looks upon the sea'. Take inspiration from Clifford's work by following the Beentee Loop, which begins in the centre of town and follows an ancient mass path before rising along gentle mountain slopes. The climb takes you to the summit of Beentee Mountain (376m), which overlooks the town, harbour and marina.

On Wednesday afternoons in July and August, it's possible to catch sight of the infamous smuggler and pirate Captain Theobald Magee in the small fishing village of Portmagee. Complete with cutlasses and pistols, Captain Magee wanders the streets and quayside of his namesake village. You can also join him aboard his ship, the 'White Swan', to hear how the village got its name and other exciting tales of pirate life. You might even learn a sea shanty or two.

Can you imagine waiting two weeks to receive a message from distant friends or family? This was once the reality for communication between Europe and North America, as messages were sent by boat – that is, until the Transatlantic Cable changed it all. Completed in June 1857, the cable connected Ireland's Valentia Harbour with Trinity Bay in Newfoundland, and was the first man-made link of its kind. The station on Valentia operated for more than 100 years, until satellites provided a new, faster means of communication in the 20th century.

Valentia Lighthouse has guided vessels through the northern entrance of Valentia Harbour since 1841. The beautiful structure sits on historic land that once featured a Cromwellian fort thought to have been built in the 16th century. Today, the outline of the fort can still be seen just inside the enclosure wall of the lighthouse. Although the lights have been automated since 1947, you can still imagine what it was like to be a keeper here by climbing to the top of the lighthouse and looking for ships on the horizon.

If you have a sweet tooth, Skelligs Chocolate Factory is a must for your itinerary. At this friendly, family-run business, you can see chocolates being made, ask questions and taste plenty of treats. Don't miss the opportunity to learn to make your own sweets at one of the factory's workshops, which are available for both children and adults. Afterwards, stop into the on-site café, sit back and relax with a delicious cup of hot chocolate or some other chocolatey treats.

Located in the south Kerry 'Gaeltacht', Cill Rialaig Arts Centre features year-round exhibitions produced by Irish and international artists who've stayed at and been inspired by Cill Rialaig Artist's Retreat. Over the years, more than 3,000 artists have visited the retreat, and the results are stunning, with wild Atlantic seascapes and landscapes depicted in their work. At the centre, you can view the art and treat yourself to something at the on-site café / restaurant, where locally sourced produce and foraged ingredients combine for some truly delicious and stylish dishes.

There's no better place for stargazing than the Kerry International Dark-Sky Reserve, which is one of only three Gold-Tier reserves in the world. Covering an impressive 70,000ha, this region affords amazing views of astronomical sights, including the band of the Milky Way, star clusters, nebulae and constellations. Here, you can learn all about astronomy in an introductory class, or go on an unforgettable moonlight guided tour, with use of binoculars and small telescopes included. Contact the Kerry Dark-Sky office for more information on these events.

In the 1960s, Waterville became a favourite holiday spot for the great Charlie Chaplin and his family. Decades later, it's still easy to see why the iconic actor was so enamoured with this town. During your visit, walk along the promenade, breathe in the air of the Atlantic and take in the same beautiful views Chaplin once enjoyed. Don't forget to pose for a picture beside the filmmaker's life-sized bronze statue, or indeed visit Waterville during the annual Charlie Chaplin Comedy Film Festival, which takes place in August.

SECRETS OF THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY – BLASKET VIEW TO BRAY HEAD

Discover the secrets of the sea

Marine Education, Derrynane, Derrynane, Co Kerry

Contact: Vincent Hyland

Tel: +353 (0)83 1992560

Email: hylandvincent@gmail.com

Web: www.derrynane.ie

Explore a magical fairy kingdom

Fairy Trails, Caherdaniel, Co Kerry

Email: ginnymargot@gmail.com

Web: www.irishfairytrails.com

Kayak without paddling on the Wild Atlantic Way

Sunfish Explorer, Caherdaniel, Sneem & Parknasilla, Co Kerry

Contact: Noel Donnelly

Tel: +353 (0)87 9474616

Email: info@sunfishexplorer.com

Web: www.sunfishexplorer.com

Travel back in time at Staigue Fort

Staigue Fort, Castlecove, Co Kerry

Go on safari in Kenmare Bay

Seafari Cruises, Kenmare, Co Kerry

Contact: Raymond Ross

Tel: +353 (0)64 6642059

Email: book@seafari.ie

Web: www.seafariireland.com

Uncover the secrets of Kenmare Bay

Kayak on Kenmare Bay, Daurós (near Kenmare), Co Kerry

Contact: PJ O'Sullivan

Tel: +353 (0)64 6641222

Email: info@staroutdoors.ie

Web: www.staroutdoors.ie

Experience nature on the Wild Atlantic Way with exciting outings ranging from rock pooling and snorkelling to wild flower walks. There are two-hour, half-day and full-day guided trips available for individuals, families and larger groups. During the excursion, you'll learn all about the flora and fauna of the region from a knowledgeable guide. You'll certainly want to bring your camera along on this adventure. Please note, this is a seasonal operation and availability is subject to weather conditions. Advance booking is recommended.

Did you know that there are two magical fairy trails in Kerry? You can discover one in the woodlands of Derrynane House, located near Caherdaniel, and the other in the Parknasilla Demesne near Sneem. The Irish Fairy Trails are sure to provide lots of fun for the whole family, as you discover fairy homes and enjoy the great outdoors in this beautiful and historic region. Plus, tall trees offer shelter along the way, so don't let the rain deter you from this exciting and free activity.

There's no need to paddle when you join Sunfish Explorer on a motorised kayak tour. Fast, stable, comfortable and eco-friendly, these kayaks are perfect for touring and fishing in the waters around Kerry and Cork. On your excursion, you'll be led by an experienced guide, who will start things off with safety information and a brief lesson in how to operate the craft. Then you'll get in the water and begin exploring. Trips start from different locations depending on the tide and weather conditions, so booking is essential.

More than 2,500 years old, Staigue Fort is one of Ireland's best examples of a stone fort. You can discover this fascinating structure just 5km from Sneem, where it sits on a low hill. There, get a closer look at the imposing fort, which uses local stone and was likely constructed for protection. It measures 27m in diameter and has impressive walls which stand up to 1.5m tall and are 4m thick at the base. Entrance is free, but visitors are encouraged to leave a contribution.

Join Seafari on a family-friendly cruise that will show you some of Kenmare Bay's amazing wildlife. The comfortable passenger boat departs from Kenmare Pier and travels into the tranquil waters of the bay, where you'll visit one of the largest seal colonies in Ireland. On the journey, you'll also spot secret castles, playful otters and sea eagles, while your captain and guides share details about the sites and history of the area. Two- and three-hour cruises are available, and refreshments are served on board. Reservations are recommended.

Get close to Kenmare Bay's stunning flora and fauna with a kayaking excursion. You can pair up in a double kayak or go solo in a single, and guide yourself on an adventure around the bay. Look for seabirds and herons as you paddle to parts of the bay that aren't accessible by land or on larger vessels. Following your trip, don't miss the chance to taste the local smoked salmon at Con's Marina Bar and Restaurant, located just beside the pier. Other water and land based activities also available.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Tralee Tourist Information Office

Ashe Memorial Hall, Denny Street, Tralee, Co Kerry

Tel: +353 (0)66 7121288 Email: traleetio@failteireland.ie

Dingle Tourist Information Office

The Quay, Dingle, Co Kerry

Tel: +353 (0)66 9151188 Email: dingletio@failteireland.ie



SECRETS



Take a ride on Ireland's only cable car

Dursey Island, Co Cork

Contact: Beara Tourism and Development Association

Tel: +353 (0)27 70054

Email: office@bearatourism.com

Web: www.bearatourism.com / www.westcorkislands.com

Fancy beating the rat race for a little while? Dursey Island is just the place for you. Lying across a narrow sound off the tip of the Beara Peninsula, this quiet island can be reached via Ireland's one and only cable car. The cabin travels 250m above the sea and can carry six people at a time. Once you reach land, you can continue on foot, following a stretch of the Beara Way walking route. Please note, islanders have priority for use of the cable car.

Learn about the mining trade in Allihies

Allihies Village, Beara, Co Cork

Contact: Tadhg O'Sullivan

Tel: + 353 (0)27 73218

Email: info@acmm.ie

Web: www.new.acmm.ie

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the townland of Allihies was home to a copper mining community. Today, you can dig into this history at the Allihies Copper Mine Museum, which displays exhibits devoted to the Cornish miners who came here to work, as well as the miners who left for jobs in Butte, Montana. You can also explore the fascinating story of the Puxley family, who owned the mines in the 19th century and inspired the book 'Hungry Hill', written by English author Daphne du Maurier.

Enjoy a cosy piano concert

David Syme Piano, near Adrigole, Beara Peninsula, Co Cork

Tel: +353 (0)27 71070

Email: sympiano@aol.com

Web: www.sympiano.com

David Syme is an American concert pianist who, for much of the year, calls the Beara Peninsula home. He has performed in Carnegie Hall and at Lincoln Centre as well as in major venues around Europe. In the intimate surroundings of their stunning seaside home, David and his wife Suzanne welcome guests for about 20 recitals each year. Suzanne prepares a selection of desserts and savouries while David entertains visitors with everything from classical to popular numbers. Reservations are required.

Experience Eden in an interactive sculpture garden

The Ewe Experience, Kenmare Road,

Glengarriff, Co Cork

Contact: Kurt Lyndorff

Tel: +353 (0)27 63840

Email: art@theewe.com

Web: www.theewe.com

The Ewe combines nature, art and narrative in one inspiring experience. Here, you'll find an interactive sculpture garden and artist's residence set in some of the most beautiful natural surroundings of the southwest. Often described as Ireland's Eden, the Ewe features four separate gardens and a spectacular mountain waterfall. As you walk around, stop for a quick game of chess or take some time to build your own sculpture using sticks and stones. There is also a café and bead workshop on site.

See the colours of Garinish Island (Innacullin)

Glengarriff, Bantry, Co Cork

Tel: + 353 (0)27 6304020

Web: www.heritageireland.ie/en/south-west

Innacullin, the 'Island of Holly' or Garinish Island, was once a barren rock covered with rough furze and heather. Since being purchased by John Annan Bryce in 1910, though, it has become an oasis of colour and life. On the small island, you can view rich rhododendrons and azaleas that reach their peak during May and June. Or, come in mid-summer to see climbing plants, herbaceous perennials and shrubs. Later, during the early-autumn months, the magnificent heather bank is the centre of attention.

Take a trip to Garnish Island with Harbour Queen Ferries

The Pier, Glengarriff, Co Cork

Contact: Brendan O Sullivan

Tel: +353 (0)27 63116

Email: info@harbourqueenferry.com

Web: www.harbourqueenferry.com

You can visit the wonderful gardens of Garinish Island in comfort with Harbour Queen Ferries. During the season (1 April to 31 October), the company's purpose-built waterbuses leave from Glengarriff Pier every 30 minutes. En route to the island, you will enjoy magnificent views of the bay and a visit to Seal Island, with its colony of happy harbour seals. You're also likely to catch glimpses of wild birds, such as swans, herons and waders, before you reach the small but unforgettable island.

Learn all about the gardens of Bantry Bay

Wanderlust, Ardnaturrish Beg, Glengarriff, Co Cork

Contact: Eliane Zimmermann

Tel: +353 (0)87 4181001 / (0)27 63609

Email: info@wanderlust.ie

Web: www.wanderlust.ie

If you're a garden enthusiast, you'll want to carve some time out of your schedule to visit the Bantry Bay area. This region boasts semi-tropical vegetation thanks to the influence of the Gulf Stream, and you can explore the highlights on a guided tour with Eliane Zimmerman. An expert in the world of trees, plants and aroma botany, Eliane will share her extensive knowledge while leading you on an informative tour in the beautiful gardens of Garinish Island or the fascinating old demesnes of Bantry Bay.

Go island hopping

Wanderlust, Ardnaturrish Beg, Glengarriff, Co Cork

Contact: Markus Baeuchle

Tel: +353 (0)87 4181001 / (0)27 63609

Email: info@wanderlust.ie

Web: www.wanderlust.ie / www.westcorkislands.com

In just a week, you can visit seven Atlantic islands with a walking holiday off West Cork. Over the course of the journey, you'll meet the people, see the wildlife and experience the culture on some of Ireland's most unique islands. You'll walk across Bere Island, Cape Clear, Dursey, Garinish, Long Island, Sherkin and Whiddy, and are sure to leave with peace of mind and lots of special memories. All you need to bring are walking boots and rain gear for this one-of-a-kind adventure.

Escape to historic Whiddy Island

Whiddy Island Ferries, Bantry, Co Cork

Contact: Tim O Leary

Tel: +353 (0)86 8626734

Web: www.whiddyislandferry.com

Nestled in Bantry Bay harbour, Whiddy Island is a fascinating place. The US Navy used this 5km long island as a base during the First World War, when seaplanes patrolled Fastnet Rock. It was also here in 1979 that the greatest maritime disaster in Irish history took place: the explosion of French tanker Betelgeuse. Beyond the heritage, you can enjoy scenic walks and cycles, or take out the binoculars for a spot of birdwatching. Be sure to round off the day with a well-earned drink at the Bank House pub.

Find inspiration on the Sheep's Head Peninsula

Kilcrohane, Sheep's Head Peninsula, Co Cork

Contact: Siobhán Burke

Tel: +353 (0)86 3030991

Email: info@livingthesheepsheadway.com

Web: www.livingthesheepsheadway.com

Recognised as a European Destination of Excellence, the Sheep's Head Peninsula is an oasis for travellers. Here, you can experience unspoilt natural landscape as you explore the Sheep's Head Way, a 90km coastal walking route. If you prefer to be on the water, you can spend your time kayaking, fishing or sailing. There's also something for culture and history buffs, with exciting festivals and markets as well as a number of heritage sites. No matter your chosen activity, you're sure to be inspired in this vibrant part of west Cork.

Learn to carve letters in stone

Ahakista, Sheep's Head Peninsula, Co Cork

Contact: Victor Daly

Tel: +353 (0)86 0514116

Email: info@thestonecarver.com

Website: www.thestonecarver.com

Take a piece of Kilcrohane limestone in your hands and learn to carve it under the tutelage of Victor Daly, a stone carver and sculptor equipped with great creativity and an incredible knowledge of Ireland's stone-carving traditions. Inside Victor's workshop, overlooking Dunmanus Bay, you'll rely on traditional tools and learn techniques that have been passed down through the generations. By the end of the day, you'll have your own little piece of the Atlantic landscape to take home with you.

Meet the cheese makers at Durrus Dairy

Durrus, Sheep's Head Peninsula, Co Cork

Contact: Jeffa Gill

Tel. +353 (0)27 61100

Email: jeffagill@eircom.net

Web: www.durruscheese.com

In the late 1970s, Jeffa Gill began making Durrus cheese in her farmhouse kitchen using milk from her own small herd of cows. Today, this award-winning cheese is one of Ireland's culinary treasures, with its flavours drawn from the rich milk of herds that graze the salt-drenched pastures along Dunmanus Bay. You can visit the dairy at Coomkeen to see the cheese-making process first hand (Tuesday to Thursday, 11.00am - 1.00pm), or roll up your sleeves alongside Jeffa and her team in a morning workshop (by appointment).

See blacksmithing traditions come to life

Durrus, Sheep's Head Peninsula, Co Cork

Contact: Carmel Cronin

Tel: +353 (0)87 2314258

Email: info@croninsforge.ie

Website: www.croninsforge.ie

Found outside Durrus on the shores of Dunmanus Bay, Cronin's Forge brings together age-old blacksmithing skills and modern touches. Here, Brian Cronin creates a range of beautiful pieces, like toasting forks and iron lamps with hand-blown glass shades. They are made in his distinctive style, which uses Celtic-inspired shapes with a very fluid quality. Call into the forge to see the work for yourself (Monday to Saturday, 10am-5pm). There, you'll meet Carmel, who will explain how the tradition of blacksmithing has been passed down through generations of the Cronin family.

Wild Atlantic Way 3 Bay Cruise

Carbery Sailing, Ahakista, Durrus, Co Cork

Tel: + 353 (0)27 29101

E-mail: booking@carberysailing.com

Web: www.carberysailing.com

This cruise takes three days and begins in Ahakista on west Cork's rugged Sheep's Head Peninsula. Sail out of Dunmanus Bay and explore Bantry Bay and Roaring Water Bay calling at Glengarriff, Bere Island, Crookhaven, Schull, Sherkin Island and Baltimore Harbour en route. Enjoy 2 days and nights aboard 'Merlin' with food sourced from local producers, experience a myriad of different views and make many sailing memories before returning to Ahakista on the third day. With luck, you'll see local dolphins, minke whales, sunfish and leatherback sea turtles along the way, so keep your cameras at the ready!

Walk out to Mizen Head Signal Station

Mizen Head, Co Cork

Contact: Stephen O'Sullivan

Tel: +353 (0)28 35115 / 35225

E-mail: info@mizenhead.ie

Web: www.mizenhead.ie

You'll know you've reached dramatic Mizen Head when you can go no further south or west in the whole of Ireland. At the end of the peninsula climb down the steps and cross the iconic bridge high above the gorge as the sea swells below. On the other side you'll find the Fog Signal Station which houses an exhibition about its keepers' lives. Then, look out to the horizon and admire Fastnet lighthouse, which stands on a rock known as Ireland's Teardrop; for millions of emigrants to the new world it was their last sight of their native land.

Learn about the pirates of the Wild Atlantic Way

Dún na Séad Castle, Baltimore, Co Cork

Contact: Bernadette McCarthy

Tel: +353 (0)28 20735

Email: bernadetteemccarthy_1@hotmail.com

Web: <http://www.baltimore.ie/dun-na-sead-castle.html>

For a look back at Baltimore's piratical history, stop at Dún na Séad Castle, a 13th century building that stands watch over the harbour. Take a tour inside the castle and learn all about its turbulent past. You'll also see an exhibition detailing the famous Sack of Baltimore in 1631. It was in June of that year that Algerian pirates, led by a former Dutch captain, attacked the west Cork village in the largest single assault by the Barbary pirates on Ireland or Britain.

See Cork's Wild Atlantic Way on two wheels

West Cork Cycles, Skibbereen, Co Cork

Contact: Don Davis

Tel: +353 (0)87 3921894

Web: www.cyclewestcork.com

Do you prefer to travel on two wheels instead of four? On arrival in west Cork, you will be fitted with safety equipment and bikes, which will be delivered and collected to and from your accommodation. You have a choice of traditional or electric bicycles, and you can also decide between guiding yourself and allowing an expert to lead the way. If you choose the latter, your guide will show you the sights of the region while also arranging for any additional services you require.

Explore marine life and Irish history in Skibbereen

Old Gasworks Building, Skibbereen, Co Cork

Contact: Terri Kearney

Tel: +353 (0)28 40900

Web: www.skibbheritage.com

Tour the fascinating exhibits at the Skibbereen Heritage Centre, which is located in an award-winning old gasworks building. Here, you'll learn about the Great Famine and can enjoy an informative talk given by an expert guide (pre-booking required). You can also discover nearby Lough Hyne, Ireland's first Marine Nature Reserve. At the visitor centre, you'll find information on the history and formation of the reserve. Afterwards, you can travel the short distance to the lake and enjoy walking trails or a kayaking trip (by prior arrangement).

Kayak under the stars on Lough Hyne

Atlantic Sea Kayaking, Reen Pier, Union Hall, Co Cork

Contact: Jim Kennedy

Phone: +353 (0)28 21058

Email: info@atlanticseakayaking.com

Web: www.atlanticseakayaking.com

As dusk fades to darkness, kayaks are launched onto Lough Hyne, the only inland saltwater lake in Europe. This marine nature reserve is beloved by kayaker Jim Kennedy, who leads the evening excursions. If you close your eyes and listen, you'll hear the splash of jumping fish, the lowing of nearby cattle and the hoot of owls. As you kayak through the lake, the waters come alive with bioluminescence, creating a truly magical experience that feels as if you're paddling through the stars.

See the old west Cork railway line – in miniature

West Cork Model Railway Village, Clonakilty, Co Cork

Contact: Kim McNamara

Tel: +353 (0)23 8834843

Email: modelvillage@eircom.net

Web: www.modelvillage.ie

At the west Cork Model Railway Village, you can get an idea of how life was in the 1940s in many of the towns and villages along the Wild Atlantic Way. Take a step back in time as you view the now-defunct railway line and the towns it served, all portrayed in miniature. While here, sit in an original train carriage and enjoy a snack from the tea rooms, or visit the outdoor playground where the kids can have a bit of fun.

Learn all about the life of The Big Fella

Michael Collins Centre, Castlevew, Clonakilty, Co Cork

Contact: Tim & Dolores Crowley

Tel: +353 (0)23 8846107

Email: info@michalecollinscentre.com

Web: www.michaelcollinscentre.com

At the Michael Collins Centre, you can explore the life of the famous leader, including his childhood days in west Cork, and his efforts in the 1916 rebellion and War of Independence. His tragic death at Béal na Bláth in 1922 and the legacy he left behind are also detailed. The centre features engaging audio-visual displays, live talks and life-size replicas. It also boasts a spectacular exhibition of photographs, documents and historic military items donated by members of the Collins family.

Catch the waves at Inchydoney

Inchydoney Island Surf School, Inchydoney,

Clonakilty, Co Cork

Contact: Colum McCauley

Tel: +353 (0)86 8695396

E-mail: info@inchydoneyurfschool.com

Web: www.inchydoneyurfschool.com

Cork's premier surf school along the Wild Atlantic Way is found at Inchydoney, a Blue Flag beach located just a few kilometres from Clonakilty. Backed by dunes and overlooked by Inchydoney Island Lodge and Spa, the beach is lifeguarded during the bathing season and offers excellent surfing conditions for beginners. Inchydoney Surf School provides expert instructors who will stay in the water with you the whole time to help you make the most of your lesson. Board and wetsuit hire are also provided.

Have a whale of a time in Kilbrittain

Kilbrittain, Co Cork

Email: info@kilbrittainwhale.com

Web: www.kilbrittainwhale.com

See one of the world's largest creatures in Kilbrittain, where the dramatic skeleton of an 18m fin whale is found in the local park. The animal was stranded and subsequently died on a nearby beach in 2009, after becoming disoriented by unusually high tides. The locals organised to keep the whale's remains, have them cleaned and then put the skeleton on display. In addition to the enormous skeleton, the village park has picnic tables, making it a great place to stop for a slice of science and a bite to eat.

Swim out to Sandycove Island

Email: sandycoveswimmers@gmail.com

Web: www.sandycoveswimmers.com

On the south coast of Kinsale, not more than 200m from the shore, you'll find Sandycove Island. This small island is inhabited only by a herd of feral goats, which have grazed here for generations. Each year, the Sandycove Island Challenge invites brave swimmers to race from the mainland, around the island and back – a total distance of 1.6km, swum in the company of the occasional seal as well as sea bass, sprats and shellfish. Visitors are advised not to swim alone.

SECRETS OF THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY – DURSEY ISLAND TO OLD HEAD OF KINSALE

Sea kayak through the caves of the Old Head

H2O Sea Kayaking, Coolbawn, Garrettstown,
Kinsale, Co Cork
Contact: Jon Hynes
Tel: +353 (0)21 4778884 / (0)87 3931633
E-mail: info@h2oseakayaking.com
Web: www.h2oseakayaking.com

Remember the victims of 9/11 at Ringfinnan

Ringfinnan, Kinsale, Co Cork
Web: <http://www.kinsaleheritage.com/911.html>

See what's under the waves of the Wild Atlantic

Ocean Addicts, Main Pier, Kinsale, Co Cork
Contact: Anne Ferguson
Tel: +353 (0)87 7903211
Email: anne@oceanaddicts.ie
Web: www.oceanaddicts.ie

Feel the Spirit of Kinsale

Kinsale Harbour Cruises,
Kinsale, Co Cork
Contact: Jerome Lordon
Tel: + 353 (0)86 2505456
Email: harbourcruises@gmail.com
Web: www.kinsaleharbourcruises.com

Be skipper for a day

Kinsale Boat Hire, Kinsale, Co Cork
Contact: Daragh Keating
Tel: +353 (0)87 1747585
Email: info@kinsaleboathire.ie
<http://www.kinsaleboathire.ie>

Meet the ghosts of Kinsale

Tap Bar, Kinsale, Co Cork
Contact: Brian O'Neill
Tel: 353 (0)87 9480910
Email: marytap@iol.ie
Web: kinsale.ie/category/things-to-do/historical-kinsale/

Even if you're a novice kayaker, you can still get in the water and explore the coves and caves of Cork's coastline. H2O Sea Kayaking in Kinsale run beginners' expeditions out to the Old Head of Kinsale, where you can paddle under the headland and travel through sunlit sea arches. Look down and you'll see shoals of small fish swimming around, or maybe you'll spot a seal or basking shark in the clear, shallow water. During the trip you'll travel to a tiny, secluded beach for a picnic lunch.

Kinsale native Kathleen Cáit Murphy was a nurse in New York City for more than 30 years. During that time she came to admire the work of the city's firemen and was shocked by the deaths of 343 of them on 9/11. Moved by their sacrifice, she created a memorial on her land at Ringfinnan, with a tree for each fireman who died plus one for their chaplain, her personal friend Fr Michael Judge. Many of the victims' relatives and friends have left prayers, photographs and flowers here.

Explore the Wild Atlantic Way from a different perspective, with a diving boat trip along the southwest coast. You'll experience the underwater world that stretches from the Ling Rocks near Kinsale to the 78 Rock near Glandore. Later, you'll pass Fastnet Rock before rounding Mizen Head, travelling past Dunmanus and Bantry bays, and going by sites like the Bullig and South Bullig. On this unforgettable adventure, you'll experience sheer wall dives and see wonderful reefs teeming with colour.

They say the best way to see Kinsale is from the sea, and perhaps the best way to understand this busy port is with a former fisherman and history scholar at the helm. Local man Jerome will share his knowledge of the area as he takes you on a tour in 'The Spirit of Kinsale'. You'll journey across the harbour, past Charles Fort and right up to the harbour's edge where you will get a view of the Old Head of Kinsale before heading back to port passing James Fort on the way. Sit back with a cup of Barry's Tea and listen as Jerome shares stories about his beautiful and historic hometown.

You can tour the coast in your own boat, stopping to fish or see the local wildlife whenever you wish. Boats are available to hire by the hour, day and half-day, from sunrise to sunset. All vessels are licensed, insured, fully equipped and include life jackets for all passengers. No license, permit or experience is required, as full training is provided. Alternatively, you can sit back and relax on a guided tour of Kinsale Harbour (by appointment). Booking is preferred but not essential for the boat hire.

In the beer garden of Kinsale's Tap Bar, in the shadow of St Multose Church, you'll find a 15th century well. Although its origins are unknown, it may have been part of a cloister next to the church, or perhaps it was one of the many wells in the centre of the old town. From here, you'll depart on the Ghost Tour, which is an exciting way to explore Kinsale alongside authors David Peare and Brian O'Neill. The tour is available six nights a week during the summer season.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Kenmare Tourist Information Office

Heritage Centre, Kenmare, Co Kerry (seasonal office)
Tel: +353 (0)64 6641233 Email: kenmare.kenmaretouristoffice@failteireland.ie

Skibbereen Discover Ireland Centre

North Street, Skibbereen, Co Cork
Tel: +353 (0)28 21766 Email: skibbereen@failteireland.ie

Clonakilty Tourist information Office

Ashe Street, Clonakilty, Co Cork
Tel: +353 (0)23 8833226 Email: clonakiltytio@failteireland.ie

Kinsale Tourist information Office

Pier Road, Kinsale, Co Cork
Tel: +353 (0)21 4772234 Email: kinsaletio@failteireland.ie

BEACHES & BLUEWAYS OF THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

Ireland's beaches bring together all the ingredients for an unforgettable holiday. Whether you're looking for a quiet sandy spot or a famous surf break, the Wild Atlantic Way is the perfect place to experience the diversity of our coastline. Plus, many beaches around the country have been awarded Blue Flag or Green Coast awards, attesting to their water quality, safety and environmental status.

What is a Blue Flag Beach?

The Blue Flag is one of the world's most recognised eco-labels. Beaches and marinas that achieve this accolade must meet a specific set of criteria relating to water quality, information provision, environmental education, safety and beach management. More than 3,000 beaches and marinas around the world boast Blue Flag status and there are 53 Blue Flag Beaches* along the Wild Atlantic Way at:

Co Donegal

1. Shroove, 2. Culdaff, 3. Lisfannon, 4. Port-salon 5. Downings, 6. Marblehill, 7. Killahoey, 8. Carrickfinn, 9. Portnoo / Naran, 10. Fintra, 11. Murvagh, 12. Rossnowlagh, 13. Bundoran

Co Sligo

1. Rosses Point, 2. Enniscrone

Co Mayo

1. Ross (Killala), 2. Elly Bay, 3. Mullaghroe, 4. Golden Strand, 5. Dugort, 6. Keel, 7. Keem, 8. Dooega, 9. Carrowmore, 10. Clare Island

Co Galway

1. Trá an Doilín, 2. An Trá Mór, 3. Silverstrand, 4. Salthill, 5. Traught, 6. Cill Muirbhte (Aran)



CARRICKFINN BEACH, CO DONEGAL

Co Clare

1. Fanore, 2. Lahinch, 3. Doonbeg, 3. Kilkee, 4. Cappa Pier, 5. Lahinch

Co Kerry

1. Ballybunion North, 2. Ballybunion South, 3. Ballyheigue, 4. Banna, 5. Fenit, 6. Magherabeg, 7. Ventry, 8. Inch, 9. Kells, 10. White Strand (Cahersiveen), 11. Ballinskelligs, 12. Derrynane,

Co Cork

1. Barleycove, 2. Tragumna, 3. Owenahincha, 4. Inchydoney, 5. Garrylucas

Download the
**FREE Wild Atlantic
Way App** now
- your official guide
to the journey of a
lifetime!



DUNMORAN BEACH, CO SLIGO



SNORKELLING ON THE BLUEWAY IN MAYO & GALWAY

What is the Green Coast Award?

The Green Coast Award is a symbol of environmental excellence that was established to promote and protect rural beaches in Ireland, Northern Ireland and Wales. Beaches bearing the award boast excellent water quality as well as a 'natural, unspoilt environment', meaning they may not be compatible with the level of infrastructure and management generally associated with traditional, urban resort beaches.

Along the Wild Atlantic Way you will find Green Coast Award beaches* at:

Co Donegal

1. Dooey Beach, 2. Port Arthur, 3. Magheroarty, 4. Drumnatinney, 5. Ballyheirnan, 6. Rathmullan

Co Mayo

1. White Strand, 2. Cross, Louisburgh 3. Carrowniskey, 4. Silver Strand, 5. Termon, 6. Cross, Erris Peninsula, 7. Srah, 8. Portacloy, 9. Ballycastle

Co Sligo

1. Enniscrone, 2. Dunmoran, 3. Rosses Point, 4. Streedagh, 5. Mullaghmore

Co Galway

1. Trá Inis Oirr, 2. Trá gCaorach Inis Oirr, 3. Salthill, 4. Silver Strand, 5. Aillebrack, 6. East End Inisbofin, 7. Dumhach Beach, 8. Renvyle

Co Kerry

1. Béal Bán

Discover Blueways along the Wild Atlantic Way

Blueways are an invitation to stop and discover an inviting network of water trails on the Wild Atlantic Way. From northwest Mayo to south Galway, these beautiful trails offer kayaking and snorkelling in safe environments making most suitable even for beginners.

Each of the five Blueway sites has an on-site information board with trail maps, safety details and information on where to hire equipment and get tuition locally. So what are you waiting for? Whether you drop by just one of the locations or plan an exciting odyssey that takes in all five, it's time to take the trip of a lifetime on Ireland's Blueway.

Co Mayo

Dugort Strand, Achill Island – kayak trail
Keem Strand, Achill Island – snorkel trail
Old Head Beach, Louisburgh – kayak trail & snorkel trail

Co Galway

Inishbofin Island - kayak trail & snorkel trail
Killary Fjord - kayak trail & snorkel trail
Mannin Bay - kayak trail & snorkel trail

* information correct as of June 2014

WHALE & DOLPHIN WATCHING

ALONG THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

Almost one third of the world's species of whales, dolphins and porpoises, collectively known as cetaceans, have been recorded in Irish waters. In 1991 the Irish government declared Irish waters a whale and dolphin sanctuary - the first of its kind in Europe – and the Wild Atlantic Way is at the very heart of Ireland's whale and dolphin sanctuary.

Cetaceans tend to prefer wild and pristine habitats, and Irish whales and dolphins are no different. The rich and diverse waters along the 2,500km route provide both year-round sanctuary for some species and a seasonal refuge for others migrating through Irish waters.

The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group's website www.iwdg.ie can be used by visitors to learn more about which species can be seen, where and when, as well as daily updates on the very latest sightings along the Wild Atlantic Way.

Of the 24 cetacean species that have been recorded in Ireland, 17 have been seen along the Wild Atlantic Way and 8 can be considered either common or occasional visitors, and in the right weather, with a little luck, may be viewed along the route. These range in size from the small harbour porpoise to the planet's second largest animal, the giant fin whale.

The 8 species most likely to be encountered are the harbour porpoise, common dolphin, bottle-nose dolphin, Risso's dolphin, killer whale, minke whale, humpback whale and fin whale. Many wildlife enthusiasts are particularly interested in sightings of the large whales, namely the fin and humpback whales, and while these can be seen from June onwards along the Kerry and Cork coastline, the trends suggest that they are more common off Co Kerry between July and September and off west Cork between October and December.

Our waters are also among the best in the world for sightings of the planet's second largest fish, the plankton feeding basking shark, which arrives in late spring, but can be seen throughout the summer in settled weather.

The list on page 47 details some of the great viewing points along the Wild Atlantic Way which potentially offer some of the best land-based whale watching in the northeast Atlantic. For those of you with a little more time on your hands who want to feel the Wild Atlantic spray on your face and perhaps get closer to whales and dolphins, then you might consider one of the whale watching boat trips offered along the route.

Dolphinwatch	Carrigaholt, Co Clare Tel: +353 (0)65 9058156 Web: www.dolphinwatch.ie
Dolphin Discovery	Kilrush, Co Clare Tel: +353 (0)65 9051327 Web: www.discoverdolphins.ie
Blasket Islands Eco Marine Tours	Ventry Harbour, Co Kerry Tel: +353 (0)86 3353805 Web: www.marinetours.ie
Dingle Dolphin Boat Tours	Dingle, Co Kerry Tel: +353 (0)66 9152626 Web: www.dingledolphin.com
Whale Watch West Cork	Baltimore, Co Cork Tel: +353 (0)86 1200027 Web: www.whalewatchwestcork.com
Cork Whale Watch	Reen Pier, nr Union Hall, Co Cork Tel: +353 (0)86 3850568 Web: www.corkwhalewatch.com



BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS, SHANNON ESTUARY, CO CLARE



HUMPBACK WHALE TAIL-FLUKING
OFF THE STAGS, WEST CORK

The following 38 sites are not exhaustive, as whales and dolphins can, and do, occur in any coastal area. But these locations have a proven track record of sightings:

Co Donegal

1. Malin Head, 2. Fanad Head, 3. Bloody Foreland, 4. Dawros Head, 5. Malin More Head, 6. Slieve League, 7. St. John's Point.

Co Sligo

1. Mullaghmore Head, 2. Aughris Head

Co Mayo

1. Kilcummin Head, 2. Downpatrick Head, 3. Erris Head, 4. Annagh Head, 5. Achill Island, 6. Old Head/Clew Bay

Co Galway

1. Killary Harbour, 2. Aran Island ferry

Co Clare

1. Black Head, 2. Hags Head, 3. Kilkee cliffs, 4. Loop Head, 5. Shannon Estuary

Co Kerry

1. Ballybunion Cliffs, 2. Kerry Head, 3. Brandon Point, 4. Slea Head Peninsula, 5. Blasket Islands, 6. Bray Head/Valentia Island, 7. Skellig Island

Co Cork

1. Dursey Island (via cable car), 2. Sheep's Head, 3. Mizen Head, 4. Cape Clear Island (Gleann Loop), 5. Baltimore Beacon, 6. Toe Head, 7. Galley Head, 8. Seven Heads, 9. Old Head of Kinsale

Courtesy of Pádraig Whooley, Irish Whale and Dolphin Group

LIGHTHOUSES

OF THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

CROMWELL POINT LIGHTHOUSE, CO KERRY

Lighthouses and other aids to navigation go back a long way in Ireland. Well over a thousand years ago, perhaps in the 5th century, the monks of Rinn Dubháin in Co Wexford (now known as Hook Head) lit a beacon to warn shipping away from dangerous rocks. After many interesting developments, the history of the Commissioners of Irish Lights began over 200 years ago.

The Commissioner of Irish Lights is a maritime organisation delivering an essential safety service around the coast of Ireland, protecting the marine environment, and supporting the marine industry and coastal communities. In recent years they have transformed how they deliver their services, putting the emphasis on efficiency, cost-effectiveness and sustainability, while exploiting new technology and new opportunities wherever possible.

Take a guided tour, learn all about the fascinating history and enjoy the marvellous views!

LIGHTHOUSES WITH VISITOR EXPERIENCES

Loop Head Lighthouse, Co Clare

see www.loophead.ie for more information

Located within a walled enclosure at the tip of the Loop Head Peninsula, marking the northern shore of the Shannon Estuary you will find Loop Head Lighthouse. Enjoy a guided tour of the operational lighthouse with its exhibition on 'Lighthouses and Lightkeepers' and breath-taking views of the Atlantic and dramatic coastal cliffs of the Loop Peninsula

Cromwell Point Lighthouse, Co Kerry

see www.visitvalentiaisland.ie for more information

Cromwell Point Lighthouse on Valentia Island stands guard over the entrance to Valentia Harbour guiding vessels past Harbour Rock to the Harbour. The site was originally home to a Cromwell Footwood Fort believed to have been built in the 16th century. Enjoy a guided tour of the lighthouse tower after which you can take in the dramatic Atlantic seascape from the balcony.

Mizen Head Visitor Centre, Co Cork

see www.mizenhead.ie for more information

At the most southerly point of Ireland is Mizen Head Lighthouse in a spectacular location on high cliffs, with swirling Atlantic Ocean tides below. Cross the iconic bridge high above the gorge and watch for seals and their pups in the swell below. Exhibits include the Fastnet Hall, the Geology of the Mizen and a Navigational Aids Simulator. Take a break in the Mizen Café and take in the spectacular location.

LIGHTHOUSE HOLIDAY HOMES IN STUNNING LOCATIONS

Fancy staying in a lighthouse property? The Irish Landmark Trust manages some magnificent lighthouse properties as self-catering holiday accommodation. The accommodation on offer is of high quality and surrounded by stunning seascapes and landscapes with spectacular, panoramic views, dramatic cliffs, seabirds and wild flowers. Havens of peace to refresh and inspire.

see www.irishlandmark.com for more information

Loop Head, Co Clare

The detached former Principal Keeper's house, available as visitor accommodation, is surrounded by cliffs, Atlantic surf, seabirds and wild flowers. All the spectacular appeal of the rugged west coast, with dramatic cliffs sculpted by Atlantic storms which rock ledges and caves are home to seabirds and seals.

Galley Head, Co. Cork

see www.irishlandmark.com for more information

Close to Clonakilty, two semi-detached lightkeepers' houses are situated on spectacular cliffs overlooking the Celtic Sea. They are an ideal location for a quiet break and the views from every angle are quite simply breathtaking.

ECOTOURISM

ON THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY



TAKE TO THE WAVES ON THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

The unspoilt nature of Ireland's landscape has encouraged tourism businesses to adopt 'green' ecotourism practices. Ecotourism Ireland works to develop these resources further and establish Ireland as a world class ecotourism destination. To achieve this Ecotourism Ireland developed a quality label to stimulate the development of new ecotourism experiences and defend the ethical values of existing ecotourism operators. The label has been designed to guide your travel choices and help you to choose promoters of ecotourism products and the experiences they have on offer.

The Gold Label members are listed below. For more information including details of the Silver and Bronze Label members visit www.ecotourismireland.ie

Acton's Beachside Camping

Clifden, Connemara, Co Galway

Web: www.actonsbeachsidecamping.com

Clifden's unique ecological 'Private Beach' camping & caravanning park offers a sustainable, clutter free, 'real camping' experience on 8 hectares of coastal Machair habitat with unparalleled panoramic Atlantic seascape views.

Cnoc Suain

Spiddal, Co Galway

Web: www.cnocsuain.com

At Cnoc Suain hill-village, guests are offered an enjoyable and active immersion in the local culture & nature of Gaelic Ireland. Engaging learning experiences are offered with warm hospitality and fun.

CycleWest Ireland

Co Galway

Web: www.cyclewest.com

Immerse yourself in the magnificent landscape of Connemara, the limestone hills and stunning plateaus of the Burren. Premier family adventures, tailor-made and private biking adventures.

The Boghill Centre

Burren, Co Clare

Web: www.boghill.com

The Boghill Centre is a residential venue for courses, events & conferences for traditional Irish music, holistic workshops and eco training activities.

Creedy & District Community Development

Ballyshannon, Co Donegal Web: www.creevyexperience.com

Traditional Irish cottages, boat trips and coastal walks in southwest Donegal between Ballyshannon and the seaside resort of Rosstown along the dramatic Atlantic coastline.

Burren Smokehouse

Lisdoonvarna, Co Clare

Web: www.burrensmokehouse.ie

Fans of good food can experience a range of delightful locally-sourced products and crafts, including 100% Burren organic smoked Irish salmon and see how the Smokehouse creates its produce at the visitor centre.

Doolin Cave

Doolin, Co Clare

Web: www.doolincave.ie

Doolin Cave is one of Europe's most compelling cave attractions and a truly authentic experience. This is your opportunity to see the largest free hanging stalactite anywhere in the world and is one of Ireland's most important eco-tourist attractions.

Dolphinwatch

Carrigaholt, Co Clare

Web: www.dolphinwatch.ie

Dolphin & nature boat trips to the mouth of the River Shannon, Ireland's longest river, to watch wild bottle-nose dolphins. Eco-diversity, dolphins, whales, seals, wildlife, sea life and more.

Purecamping

Querrin, Co Clare

Web: www.purecamping.ie

Step back in time, make time for yourself, slow down and get close to nature with a Bell Tent Bliss experience. Prepare a homemade pizza in the clay oven, check out the outdoor sauna and rejuvenate!

The Benwiskin Centre

Hostel & Self-Catering Accommodation, Ballintrillick, Co Sligo

Web: www.benwiskincentre.com

The Benwiskin Centre prides itself on its eco-friendly credentials and is an ideal base for families or groups to explore the Wild Atlantic Way.

FÁILTE IRELAND OFFICES

FÁILTE IRELAND

Head Office

Áras Fáilte

88-95 Amiens Street, Dublin 1, Ireland

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Email: waw@failteireland.ie

Web: www.failteireland.ie/waw

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Email: waw@failteireland.ie

FÁILTE IRELAND

WEST

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Email: waw@failteireland.ie

FÁILTE IRELAND

MIDWEST

Limerick Office,

The Granary, Michael Street, Limerick.

Email: waw@failteireland.ie

FÁILTE IRELAND

SOUTH WEST

Unit 2 Nesson House, River View Business Park,

Bessboro Road, Blackrock, Co.Cork

Email: waw@failteireland.ie

TOURISM IRELAND OFFICES WORLDWIDE

TOURISM IRELAND USA

Email: corporate.usa@tourismireland.com

Address: 345 Park Avenue, 17th Floor,

New York, NY 10154, USA.

Telephone: +1 212 418 0800

Fax: +1 212 371 9052

Website: www.ireland.com

TOURISM IRELAND CANADA

Email: corporate.canada@tourismireland.com

Address: 2 Bloor Street West, Suite 3403,

Toronto M4W 3E2, Canada.

Telephone: +1 416 925 6368

Fax: +1 416 925 6033

Website: www.ireland.com

TOURISM IRELAND NORDIC REGION

Email: info.nordic@tourismireland.com

Address: Store Kongensgade 31,

1264 Copenhagen K, Denmark.

Telephone: +45 33 15 80 45

Website: www.ireland.com

TOURISM IRELAND NETHERLANDS

Email: info@ierland.nl

Address: Spuistraat 104, 1012VA

Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Telephone: +31 (0) 20 530 6050

Fax: +31 (0) 20 620 8089

Website: www.ierland.nl

TOURISM IRELAND BELGIUM

Email: corporate.belgium@tourismireland.com

Address: Louizalaan 66 Avenue Louise,

1050 Brussels, Belgium.

Telephone: +32 2 643 2124

Fax: +32 2 642 98 51

Website: www.ireland.com

TOURISM IRELAND FRANCE

Email: corporate.france@tourismireland.com

Address: 33 rue de Miromesnil,

75008 Paris, France.

Telephone: +33 1 53 43 12 35

Fax: +33 1 47 42 01 64

Website: www.irlande-tourisme.fr

TOURISM IRELAND GERMANY

Email: corporate.germany@tourismireland.com

Address: Gutleutstrasse 32,

60329 Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Telephone: +49 69 92 31 85 0

Fax: +49 69 92 31 85 88

Website: www.ireland.com

TOURISM IRELAND GREAT BRITAIN - GLASGOW

Email: corporate.glasgow@tourismireland.com

Address: James Millar House, 7th Floor,

98 West George Street, Glasgow G2 1PJ, Scotland.

Telephone: +44 141 572 4030

Fax: +44 141 572 4033

Website: www.ireland.com

TOURISM IRELAND GREAT BRITAIN - LONDON

Email: corporate.london@tourismireland.com

Address: 103 Wigmore Street, London W1U 1QS,

London.

Telephone: +44 207 518 0800

Fax: +44 207 493 9065

Website: www.ireland.com

TOURISM IRELAND ITALY

Email: corporate.italy@tourismireland.com

Address: Turismo Irlandese, Piazza Cantore 4,

20123 Milano, Italy.

Telephone: +39 02 58 17 73 11

Fax: +39 02 58 17 73 09

Website: www.irlanda.com

TOURISM IRELAND SPAIN

Email: corporate.spain@tourismireland.com

Address: Pº de la Castellana, 46 -2ª Planta,

28046 Madrid, Spain.

Telephone: +34 91 5775 458

Fax: +34 91 5776 934

Website: www.turismodeirlanda.com

AUSTRALIA AND DEVELOPING MARKETS

UK INBOUND

Tourism Ireland Great Britain - London

Email: sbyrne@tourismireland.com

Address: 103 Wigmore Street, London W1U 1QS, London.

Telephone: +44 207 518 0800

Fax: +44 207 493 9065

Website: www.ireland.com

TOURISM IRELAND AUSTRALIA

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