150 Secrets of the Wild Atlantic Way

...Go where the locals go

2014 / 2015 Edition
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 cafes 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.

HORSE RIDING ON BERTRA BEACH, CO MAYO
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MULLAGHAMORE HEAD, CO SLIGO

SIGNATURE DISCOVERY POINTS

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 Ballymastocker 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.

SILLAB LIAG, CO DONEGAL

Some of the highest and finest marine cliffs in Europe, County Donegal’s Sillab Liag (Silieve 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 Sillab 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. Sillab Liag was also the site of a Christian pilgrimage for more than 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.
**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 Slab Liag or watch the waves crash under Classie-bawn 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 Stags 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 Croaghauin 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 routes. The sharks were targeted for oil which was used as a lubricant in the aerospace industry.

**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 Connamara’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.
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 Carrigholm, or follow the road from Kilrush to Aylevarro Point to see them playing.

Dursey 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.

Dursey 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 Skelligs 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.

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 cliffs 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.

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 cormorants, 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.
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.movillapottery.com

Fish for a feast at Culdaff Beach
Go Fish; Culdaff, Inishowen, Co Donegal
Contact: Oliver Ferran
Tel: +353 (0)38 676996
Email: info@gofish.ie
Web: www.gofish.ie

Go behind the scenes at Kinnegar Brewing
Kinnegar Brewing Ltd, Aughavannon, Rathmullan, Co Donegal
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Tel: +353 (0)74 9158874 / (0)86 8301392
Email: info@kinnegarbrewing.ie
Web: www.kinnegarbrewing.ie

Cycle to one of the world’s most beautiful lighthouses
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Email: info@grassroutes.ie
Web: www.grassroutes.ie

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

Experience the heritage of Lough Swilly
Rathmullan/Ramelton, Co Donegal
Contact: Deirdra Friel
Tel: +353 (0) 86 2421008
Email: donegalheritagetours@gmail.com
Web: www.donegalheritagetours.com

Go for a stroll on Trá na Rosann
Downings, Co Donegal
Go Fish; Culdaff, Inishowen, Co Donegal
Contact: Oliver Ferran
Tel: +353 (0)38 676996
Email: info@gofish.ie
Web: www.gofish.ie

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.

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.

Join Captain Neil 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, Knockabuick caves and Macnamara Fort. For a bit of romance, you can also choose an evening tour and watch the golden sun set on the Atlantic.

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.

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 Omna, travel the coastal road along the Rosgill Peninsula by car, bicycle or foot. Halfway around the Ukin 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.

In this exciting visitor centre you can explore the legends of Grianán Fort and the people of Dáini (Tadhg D’Dannann 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 Niall 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.

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Escape at Ards Forest Park
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Gallap Donegal's Wild Atlantic Way
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Email: gallahastables@hotmail.com
Web: www.dunfanaghystables.com

Meet the King of Tory Island
Cormacbradagh Thoragh Tea, Tory Island, Co Donegal
Contact: Bridget McGee
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Email: cctorrey@Ircom.net
Web: www.oileanthorai.com

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

Be a castaway on Ollaín Gabhla
Gola Island, Co Donegal
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Email: arc@arc.net
Web: www.doonagilslandis.com

Rock and Roam
Derrybeg, Sweedore, Co Donegal
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Tel: +353 (0)83 1205029
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Web: www.mng.ie

Paddle the day away
Rapid Kayaking, Anenny, Co Donegal
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Adventure through Donegal
Mill Road, Dunfanaghy, Co Donegal
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Web: www.uniquequeen.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 400 hectares (100 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. Befor you tuck into your food, cool down with a dip in the Atlantic, if you dare.

Leaver your cares behind as you cater to the sound of the roaring Atlantic in the seaside resort of Ballybunion. Explore the region's famous terrain on horseback, trekking into the mountains, over sandy beaches and through areas where Irish is the primary language. Afterwards, stop into a local esttry and enjoy a relaxing cup of tea, specially made crockery and a few slices of bread and butter. And don't forget to chat with the locals, who will no doubt share ideas for your next thrilling holiday experience.

Torry 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, Paddy Don Rodgers, will be there to greet you with a ‘fiddle romp’. You can then cycle round the island, visiting its many archaeological sites and checking out the work of local artists in Gearruidh Dún. Don’t forget to ask about the sacred Tory Island cly, a gift suckers was payed down to them from St Càmomle.

While traveling the Wild Atlantic Way, experience a breathtaking sunset over the rugged coastline, known as 'Griphooly' in Irish. Afterwards, stop off at Teac Jack, where every Tuesday there’s a traditional cillí with music by the renowned Terry Island musician Martin Duggan. Meet the friendly locals, who are sure to teach you a few Irish dancing steps. On Thursday evenings you can enjoy music from up-and-coming local musicians or listen to 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 Ghotick Dhuathairn (Gweedore). The island’s stunning scenery inspires artists and photographers, while its natural habitats delight walkers and birdwatchers. If you’re more of an adventurous kind, there’s something here for you too; simply head to the towering cliffs, which are known to challenge even the most daring rock climbers.

Blew 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. You'll also get a chance to swim in up-and-coming local musicians or listen to the Irish language spoken. You may even master a phrase or two.

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, your expert guide will take you on a tailor-made adventure that can include fishing, wildlife spotting, as well as other activities. If you’re interested in seeing some wildlife, you’ll be able to spot many different species during your trip.

Learn about Arramore's American connection
Arramore Island Co-op, Clougharr, Arranmore Island, Co Donegal
Contact: Nõrín Maoldogain
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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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Email: info@dngeldesignmakers.com
Web: www.dngeldesignmakers.com

See the Deserted Village at Port
Port, Glencolmcille, Co Donegal
Contact: Colin McGee and Cieghern
Tel: +353 (0)74 9300107
Email: folkvillage@Irnet.com
Web: www.folkvillage.com

Walk Slíabh 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)74 9700107
Email: colin@dunaimaracharters.com
Web: www.dunaimaracharters.com

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

Drive classic cars on the Wild Atlantic Way
Ardara Road, Killybegs, Co Donegal
Contact: Joseph McCloskey
Tel: +353 (087) 2026583
Email: info@classiccarhire.ie
Web: www.classiccarhire.ie

For generations, Donegal’s Arramore Island has been strongly linked with Beaver Island, found in Lake Michigan in the US. During the ‘Great Hunger’, thousands of Irish people left Donegal in search of new homes outside of Donegal’s Dórsas region. Many of them set sail for the Great Lakes, and those early Irish settlers left their mark on Beaver Island, with many places still learning their stories. A visit to the Beaver Island Monument on rugged Arramore 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 and Killybegs 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 a 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 950 AD burial, a piece of decorative jewellery from about 1000 BC that was found in the area.

Donegal Design Makers brings together some of the finest artisans and designers in the county. They make it their own inspiration to own-imagine natural surroundings, whether it’s the curve of the hills or the wild waves of the Atlantic. You can meet the makers doing the group’s Craft Trail, or see work from all the artists at once with a stop at their shop in Ardara. If you’ve perused and purchased some artwork, cross the street to Nancy’s Bar, a cozy pub that’s renowned for its seafood.

The Pilgrim Path at Slíabh Liag (Slieve 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 Slíabh Liag.

There’s no better way to indulge in fresh fish than catching it yourself. In the shadow of Slíabh Liag’s dramatic cliffs, under the green-tinted rock face, you can fish for your dinner. Then sit back and relax as Colin, skipper of An Dhan Dara, fillets your fish for you and arranges for it to be delivered to Kitty Keen’s tea room, where it’ll be expertly cooked for your enjoyment. After dinner, you can savour an aged Irish whiskey as your foot steps time to the music of a Donegal fiddler.

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 own seats, because it can get choppy afterwards. Take a small 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.

Tackle the picturesque roads of southwest Donegal in a TIR, MBG Roadster or Mercedes STG. Along the way you can enjoy panoramic views from Slíabh Liag or stretch your legs on the 99 steps down to Silver Strand beach at Malahide. Or, if you prefer, explore 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

Learn to catch waves at Rossnowlagh beach
Rossnowlagh, Co Donegal
Tel: +353 (0)71 9859020
Email: hmccoolso@gmail.com
Web: www.hmccoolso.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 the 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 informato-
tive 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 beau-
tiful grounds include a picnic area, charming courtyard and spacious car park that
can accommodate coaches.

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 be-
fore 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 total 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 OF THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY – MULLAGHAMORE HEAD TO KEEM STRAND

Follow the Wild Atlantic Butterfly Route throughout Co Leitrim.
Contact: JJ O’Hara
Tel: +353 (0)86 0716968
Email: usgreland@gmail.com

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 County; go on a guided tour of the archaeological site of the Burney or explore the impressive Marble Arch caves. Experience soaring cliffs and stunning waterfalls at Glenveagh and Foyles’ Falls, or lose all sense of time wandering through Parkes and Hamilton’s castles. You can also indulge in grand old-fashioned hospitality and experience the food and crafts of the region.

Leitrim may have the shortest coastline of any 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 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 Sligo’s great 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 Mullaghamore. 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 underwater. 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 resting 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 Cuéllar 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 stone dike, and find ancient wooden boats in seal caves. Visit the sanctuary of outhouses and old stone structures and learn about the history of the last major invasion of Ireland.

The Drowes Salmon Fishery 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.

Take the plunge into Strandhill Surf School.
Contact: Auriel Robinson
Tel: +353 (0)87 2405071
Email: info@seatrails.ie
Web: www.seatrails.ie

Auriel Robinson, from the Innovation Centre at Sligo IT, leads a group of experts who provide guided tours and educational talks. You’ll see rare wildflowers, visit a 5,000-year-old stone dike, and find ancient wooden boats in seal caves. Visit the sanctuary of outhouses and old stone structures and learn about the history of the last major invasion of Ireland.

Take a tour of the Sligo Earland.
Contact: Paddy Buchanan
Tel: +353 (0)71 9168483
Email: strandhillsurfschool@gmail.com
Web: www.strandhillsurfschool.com

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. Traveling on a SUP craft through beautiful natural surroundings is like walking on water, and this magical experience is at its finest when shared with friends and family. In Ireland, there are endless waterways to glide across, from rivers and canals to bays and the sea. All equipment is provided, so the only thing you need to bring is your sense of adventure. Pre-booking is essential.
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 gilts (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 cliff walk will allow you to 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.

The Ceide 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, architecture and botany of the area in the visitor centre, which also contains a café and gift shop. The Ceide Fields viewing platform is an often-overlooked attraction across the road from the Centre. Setting hundreds of feet above the Atlantic, this privileged vantage point allows you views across Buncrana 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.

Experience the rugged beauty of one of Europe’s most westerly points on the Wild Atlantic Way – Mullaghmore Head to Keem Strand.

If you have never heard the corncrake’s call, you are missing one of the most haunting bird songs in Ireland. Look out for this elusive bird’s legendary ‘crex-crex’ refrain. This region is home to a number of rare species, so you just might meet the beautiful sheldrake 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 elegant snowy owl. Agatha, your qualified tour guide, is sure to impress with her bird, marine and archaeological knowledge.

In 1985 Gerald 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 Chapel Seafod Restaurant, established in 1868, do not miss an opportunity to indulge your taste buds in some incredible, locally produced, artisan food, fresh from the depths of the Atlantic.

On a clear day you can see caves, kelp forests, rock walls and reefs, that host all elements of marine life. Exceptional waters on an unforgettable snorkelling experience. Experience the magic of being underwater, face to face with the largest and most recently abandoned of the island’s ‘booley’ settlements. For a fascinating insight into 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 (Deirbhile’s Loop), which passes ancient Celtic and Christian sites, and discover the enchanting local folklore and mythology that surrounds them.

In the heart of the Mayo’s Gaeltacht (Irish speaking area), a historical site of high emigration, the Ionad Deirbhile Heritage Centre provides fascinating insight into the history of the 19th century emigrants. Learn about James Jock Tuke’s celebrated emigration scheme, which in 1883 helped more than 3,300 people to depart Blackrock 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 impressed and inspired.

Enjoy a half-day boat trip on Clew Bay with renowned skipper, Mary Gavin. Watch out for the bay’s seals colony and beautiful Dorinish Island, once home to the last shipwrights on this part of the coast. Clew Bay is one of Ireland’s most popular fishing grounds. It also provides some of the finest sailing opportunities in the country.

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One of Mayo’s best-kept secrets is tucked away down an old bog road. Nestled between imposing, rugged cliffs at Murrinagarro 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. Experience the magic of being underwater, face to face with the largest and most recently abandoned of the island’s ‘booley’ settlements.

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Follow the Greenway to the Seaway
Distillery Road, Westport, Co Mayo
Contact: Cléw Bay Bike Hire
Tel: +353 (098) 37675
Email: info@clewbaybikehire.ie
Web: www.clewbaybikehire.ie

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.

Jump into the wild Atlantic… Literally
Adventure West. Westport, Co Mayo
Tel: +353 (087) 3627828
Email: info@adventurewest.ie
Web: www.adventurewest.ie

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 bookinig is essential.

Cruise Cléw Bay
Westport Harbour, Westport, Co Mayo
Tel: +353 (087) 6066146
Email: info@clewbaycruises.com
Web: www.clewbaycruises.com

Embrace the raw beauty of the west coast on a cruise around Cléw Bay. See the thriving seal colony, beautiful secluded beaches and breathtaking views of Croagh Patrick, Murrisk Abbey and Berea Beach. So by many of Cléw Bay’s reputed 365 sheltered islands, Inishport Lighthouse and the shores of Donnich 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.

Languish in luxury at Cléar Island Lighthouse
Clare Island, Co Mayo
Contact: Róisín McCann
Tel: +353 (0)87 6689758
Email: info@clareislandlighthouse.com
Web: www.clareislandlighthouse.com

Clare Island stands guard at the entrance of scenic Cléw 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.

Be seduced by Silver Strand
Louisburgh, Co Mayo

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 Carraroe, Croy 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.

Swap four wheels for two on the Wild Atlantic Way
Bertra, Westport, Co Mayo
Tel: +353 (087) 9199152
Email: info@westportcycletours.com
Web: www.westportcycletours.com

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 picturesque 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 (071) 9161201 Email: northwestinfo@failteireland.ie

Westport Discover Ireland Centre
Bridge Street, Westport, Co Mayo
Tel: +353 (098) 25711 Email: westport@failteireland.ie
NATIONAL PARKS
ON THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

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 hares, 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 stately 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 on 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 unhabitied 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 car park, toilets, baby changing facilities and restaurant. Open Easter on September.

See www.ballycroynationalpark.ie for more information.

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, Inishark and Inishoe, and the turfed 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, tufas, petrified springs and cliffs. Originating from the Irish word ‘Bóireann’ 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 1981 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 Mullaghmore. 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 McGillycuddy’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.

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?

See www.burrennationalpark.ie
See www.connemaranationalpark.ie
See www.connemaranationalpark.ie
See www.burrennationalpark.ie
See www.burrennationalpark.ie
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 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 Cisterian Abbey.

For an active dose of history, trek the ancient tetrapod trackways on Valenta 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.

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 pictoral 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 W.B. Yeats, who said “Give up Paris... go to the Aran Islands...”. Yeats 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 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 Festival and October’s International Storytelling Workshop will also satisfy those who love a good yarn.

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.
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 their 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 / Renysile and Leenane is the peaceful hamlet of Glassilaun. This idyllic horseshoe beach is a firm favourite with families and watersports 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. In the late 16th century, The Spanish Armada sank off the Connemara coast and the ponies were later used as a defensive strategy and saw service during the 1691 Jacobite War.

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 1605 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?
Enriannan Manor, Clifden, Co Galway
Tel: +353 (0)91 574282
Email: enriannanmanor@com.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 daunting bogs. Legend has it that the ponies are descended from Arab stallions that swam ashore after 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
Inbheoir, Rosmuck (Ros Muc), Co Galway
Tel: +353 (0)91 555703
Email: heritageireland.ie/West/PatrickPearcesCottage
For an authentic dose of Irish culture and west of Ireland charm, Cnoc Suain is a small, restored house overlooking the spectacular Connemara landscape. Irish poet, 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
Overlooking beautiful Galway Bay on the fringe of Galway City, walking the Prom, Ireland’s longest seawall 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?

Kick the wall on the Saltbhill Prom
Saltbhill Promenade, Galway City, Co Galway
Overlooking beautiful Galway Bay on the fringe of Galway City, walking the Prom, Ireland’s longest seawall 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.
Tucked away inside Thomas Dillen’s jeweller, 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 Burke, Richard Joyce and George Robinson, here you can also see the world’s smallest Claddagh ring, perchéd remarkably atop a tailor’s pin. Learn about the various stages of ring productions, 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 voyage 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 seasons of the area, creating dishes that are as delicious as they are ever-changing.

This candy traditional thatched cottage is more than 250 years old and is well into its 73rd generation of the family with Catherine Moran now at the helm. Reverted 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 the candy setting is one temptation that’s simply too hard to resist.

Celebrate the gathering of the boats Kinvara, Co Galway

Come see the gathering of the boats at Kinvarra’s annual Cruinniú na hÁthair 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 Burrow. The hooker’s last voyage was in 1962, carrying turf across Galway Bay from Connemara to Kinvarra. Join in the spectacle and celebrate Ireland’s maritime heritage, with singing, dancing, music and more.

The Burren Nature Sanctuary Clonona, Kinvara, Co Galway

Discover a place where rare orchids, Alpine Mediterranean and Arctic plants floor each other, at the Burren Nature Sanctuary. With stately Burren walks leading you through unique limestone terrain, past the rare turloughs or ‘disappearing lakes’ that fill and empty 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.

The Burren with Hazel Mountain Chocolates Oughterbally, Ballyvaughan, Co Clare

Nestled in the foothills of the Burren Mountains in the heart of the historical village of Dugginsiana, enjoy hand-crafted delights courtesy of Hazel Mountain Chocolates. After removing their grains’ 1960s house into a boutique chocolate factory with an eco grass roof, Rosaleen and John Connolly now deliver on modern tastes 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 of course, a cool, creamy pint of Guinness. A traditional dish in the candy setting is one temptation that’s simply too hard to resist.

Stay wild on Kilkee’s Atlantic coast road Kilkkee, Co Clare

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 peregrine falcons soar overhead. Enjoy the unusual Atlantic adventure before indulging in a savoury reward of tea and hot coffee in the town.

The Burren with Hazel Mountain Chocolates Oughterbally, Ballyvaughan, Co Clare

Taste the Burren with Hazel Mountain Chocolates Oughterbally, Ballyvaughan, Co Clare

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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 Finn MacCumhaill, 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 (095) 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 (091) 537700 Email: irelandwestinfo@failteireland.ie
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 3596113
Email: info@ecotrekballybunion.com
Web: www.ecotrekballybunion.com

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

Tralee, Co Kerry
Contact: Catriona Fallon
Tel: +353 (0)66 712055
Email: info@siasmatire.com
Web: www.siasmatire.com

Get back to nature at Tralee Bay Wetland Centre

Tralee Bay, Co Kerry
Contact: Joanne McAuliffe
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 7138113
Email: jamsmatire@eircom.net
Web: www.jamieknox.com

Feel the beat of rural Ireland with traditional music

Tír na nÓg, Clarecastle, Co Clare
Contact: Michael O’Dowd
Tel: +353 (0)65 7098910
Email: oconnorsguesthouse@eircom.net

Uncover Ireland’s ancient past at Sás Creek

Halle le Châtel, Brandon, Co Kerry
Contact: Michéal O’Dowd
Tel: +353 (0)66 7138113
Email: oconnorsguesthouse@eircom.net
Follow the footsteps of St Brendan the Navigator
Contact: Linda Woods, Southwest Walks
Tel: +353 (0)66 718613
Web: www.southwestwalksinireland.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 (066) 9151444
Email: dinglebaycharters.com
Web: www.dinglebaycharters.com

Walk the Path of the Saints
Cusán na Naomh, Ballydwyck, Co Kerry
Contact: Tí O Conghail
Email: info@dingleactivities.com or tipile@e
Tel: +353 86 8191942
Web: 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 (064) 6644412
Email: enquiries@originalkerry.com
Web: www.originalkerry.com

Take a run and jump off an Atlantic cliff
Mór Active, Killarney, Co Kerry
Contact: Michael Crawford
Tel: +353 (086) 3890171
Email: enquiriess@originalkerry.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 (087) 2379110
Web: www.beachtrek.ie

Lose yourself among the ferns
Kells Gardens, Kells, Co Kerry
Contact: Billy Alexander
Tel: +353 (064) 9477979 / (087) 7776666
Email: info@kellsgardens.ie
Web: www.kellsgardens.ie

Get following 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 the Virgin Mary. The pilgrimage takes place every day from May to September and attracts pilgrims from all over the world.

Kells Gardens, Kells, Co Kerry
Contact: Mary and Michael O'Neill
Tel: +353 (066) 9151444
Email: dinglebaycharters.com
Web: www.dinglebaycharters.com

Get the catch of the day on the Wild Atlantic Way
Dingle Bay Charters, Dingle, Co Kerry
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Contact: Billy Alexander
Tel: +353 (064) 9477979 / (087) 7776666
Email: info@kellsgardens.ie
Web: www.kellsgardens.ie

Get a bird’s eye view of the Wild Atlantic Way
Beenterpe Looped Walk, Cahersiveen, Co Kerry
Web: www.discoverireland.ie/Activities-Adventure/beenterpe-loop

Meet a pirate in Portmagee
Portmagee, Co Kerry
Contact: Gabriel Butler
Tel: +353 (0)85 1008645 / (066) 9477108
Email: captainmages@outlook.com
Web: www.portmagee.com

Discover the internet of the 19th century
Valentia Island Heritage Centre, School Road, Knightstown, Valentia Island, Co Kerry
Tel: +353 (064) 9476411
Email: valentiaslandheritagecentre@gmail.com
Web: www.valentiaisland.ie/explore-valentia/visit-cromwell-point-lighthouse

Live like Willy Wonka at Skellig Chocolate Factory
Skellig Chocolate Factory - Visitor Centre, St Finian’s Bay, Ballinskelligs, Co Kerry
Contact: Calm Healy
Tel: +353 (064) 9479119
Email: info@skelligschocolate.com
Web: www.skelligschocolate.com

See art and nature collide
Cultra Art Centre, Dun Geasan, Ballinskelligs, Co Kerry
Tel: +353 (064) 9479277
Email: crsiopa@gmail.com
Web: http://cultraartcentre.org

Gaze up at the sun, moon and stars
Kerry Dark-Sky Reserve, Waterville, Co Kerry
Tel: +353 (087) 7845688
Email: kerrydarkskyring@gmail.com
Web: www.kerrydarksky.com

Walk in the footsteps of Charlie Chaplin
Valentia Island, Co Kerry

In his song 'The Boys of Ball na Sraide', the famous Kerry writer Seán Óg Ógahon captures Cahersiveen, describing it as 'the town that climbs the mountain, and looks upon the sea'. Take inspiration from Ógahon's work by following the Beenterpe Loop, which begins in the centre of town and follows an ancient path before rising along gentle mountain slopes. The climb takes you to the summit of Beenterpe Mountain (715m), which overlooks the town, harbour and marina.

On Wednesday evenings in July and August, it’s possible to catch sight of the infamous smuggler and pirate Captain Theobald Wolfe in the small fishing village of Portmagee. Complete with cutlasses and pistols, Captain Wolfe wanders the streets and quayside of his namesake village. You can also join him aboard his ship, the 'White Swan', to hear the story of how he got his 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 is what the reality for communication between Europe and North America was like in the 19th century. As messages were sent by telegraph – that is, until the Transatlantic Cable changed it all. Completed in June 1857, the cable connected Ireland’s Valen—a 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 Valen—a harbour since the 18th. The beautiful structures are on historic land that once fea—ured a Cromwellian fort thought to have been built in the late 17th 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 1946, 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 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 “Seachtir”, Cultra Arts Centre features year-round exhibitions produced by Irish and international artists whose stayed and been inspired by Cúltra Artists’ Retreat. Over the years, more than 3,000 artists have visited the retreat, and the results are stunning, with well 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, and bar.
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.

Explore a magical fairy kingdom
Fairy Trails, Caherdaniel, Co Kerry
Contact: Vincent Hyland
Tel: +353 (0)83 1992560
Email: hylandvincent@gmail.com
Web: www.derrynane.ie

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.

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

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.

Travel back in time at Staigue Fort
Staigue Fort, Castlecove, Co Kerry

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 thick. Entrance is free, but visitors are encouraged to leave a contribution.

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

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 and 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.

Uncover the secrets of Kenmare Bay
Kayak on Kenmare Bay, Dauros (near Kenmare), Co Kerry
Contact: PJ O’Sullivan
Tel: +353 (0)64 6441222
Email: info@staroutdoors.ie
Web: www.staroutdoors.ie

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 mermaids 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 are also available.

FURTHER INFORMATION
Tralee Tourist Information Office
Ashe Memorial Hall, Denny Street, Tralee, Co Kerry
Tel: +353 (066) 7121288 Email: traleetio@failteireland.ie

Dingle Tourist Information Office
The Quay, Dingle, Co Kerry
Tel: +353 (066) 9151188 Email: dingletio@failteireland.ie
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 only 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.

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.

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.

Inside Allihies Museum, you can work your way through the lives of the Cornish miners who lived and worked here in the 19th century and inspired the book ‘Hungry Hill’, written by English author Daphne du Maurier.
Visit the historic ships and see the life at Mizen Head - A公式に従って、以下のテキストを自然にリーディングできるような形式に変換してください。
Sea kayak through the caves of the Old Head
H20 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
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.

Remember the victims of 9/11 at Ringfinnan
Ringfinnan, Kinsale, Co Cork
Web: http://www.kinsaleheritage.com/911.html
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 prayer, photographs and flowers here.

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
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.

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
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.

Be skipper for a day
Kinsale Boat Hire, Kinsale, Co Cork
Contact: Daragh Keating
Tel: +353 (0)87 9480910
Email: marytap@iol.ie
Web: kinsale.ie/category/things-to-do/historical-kinsale/
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.

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/
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
Ash Street, Clonakilty, Co Cork
Tel: +353 (0)23 8833236 Email: clonakiltytio@failteireland.ie
Kinsale Tourist information Office
Pier Road, Kinsale, Co Cork
Tel: +353 (0)21 4772234 Email: kinsaletio@failteireland.ie
**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**

- **Co Sligo**
  1. Rosses Point, 2. Enniscrone

- **Co Mayo**

- **Co Galway**

- **Co Clare**

- **Co Kerry**

- **Co Cork**

**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 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**

- **Co Sligo**

- **Co Mayo**

- **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**
  1. Dugart Strand, Achill Island – kayak trail
  2. Keem Strand, Achill Island – snorkel trail
  3. Old Head Beach, Louisburgh – kayak trail & snorkel trail

- **Co Galway**
  1. Inisheer Island - kayak trail & snorkel trail
  2. Killary Fjord - kayak trail & snorkel trail
  3. Mannin Bay - kayak trail & snorkel trail

*Information correct as of June 2014
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, bottlenose 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.

Which species can be seen in Irish waters?

- Harbour porpoise
- Common dolphin
- Bottlenose dolphin
- Risso’s dolphin
- Killer whale
- Minke whale
- Humpback whale
- Fin whale

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
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**

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**

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 Feetwood 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**

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.

**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**

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.

**Acton’s Beachside Camping**

Clifden, Connemara, Co Galway

Web: www.actonsbeachsidecamping.com

Fancy a 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 Gaeltacht Ireland. Engaging learning experiences are offered with warm hospitality and fun.

**-cycleWest Ireland**

Co Galway

Web: www.cycletour.ie

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.

**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

Dolphins & nature boat trips to the mouth of the River Shannon, Ireland’s longest river, to watch wild bottlenose 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!

**Doolin Smokehouse**

Lisdoonvarna, Co Clare

Web: www.doolinsmokehouse.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 product at the visitor centre.

**Burren Smokehouse**

Lisdoonvarna, Co Clare

Web: www.doolinsmokehouse.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 product at the visitor centre.

**The Boghill Centre**

Burren, Co Clare

Web: www.boghill.ie

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

In addition the European Union has developed the EU Ecolabel in a bid to help European consumers to distinguish greener, more environmentally-friendly, products of high quality. The following businesses along the Wild Atlantic Way have this EU Ecolabel status:

**Creery & District Community Development**

Ballyshannon, Co Donegal

Web: www.creeryexperience.com

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

**Cliffs of Moher Experience**

Co Clare

Web: www.cliffs-of-moher.ie

The Cliffs of Moher Experience has set the standard for the way tourist information is delivered in Ireland, and it is widely acknowledged that the Centre is one of the most informative and comprehensive visitor centres in the world.

**The Benwiskin Centre**

Hostel & Self-Catering Accommodation, Ballintubber, 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.