

IRELAND'S HIDDEN HEARTLANDS

YOURS TO UNCOVER



Ireland's Hidden
HEARTLANDS

At the heart of Ireland lies a vibrant core of peaceful lakes, rolling hills, dense forests, alluring peatlands, rich pastureland, and richly wooded islands. Known as Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, it is a magical water-world, with myriad land and water trails meandering through pastoral, architectural and geological beauty, rare ecological biospheres, and vibrant communities.

There are endless opportunities to create authentic and meaningful experiences. A simple pedal or walk on one of the many walking and cycling trails can lead to a 2000-year-old Iron Age Bogroad, Palladian Mansion or cutting-edge art sculptures through rehabilitated peatlands. Adventure seekers can mountain bike or hike their way through plush forest trails and explore diverse terrains, from rolling hills and tree-lined tracks to winding mountain paths. Move by paddle to the beat of a birdsong or cruise along cool silverly waters. Be inspired by the unexpected mix of culinary styles and stories or take time to sip, savour and seek knowledge behind our world class gin and whiskey, craft beer, vodka or poitín. Relax and unwind while glamping, caravanning or camping under glorious wide skies, or simply rest in a hotel or B&B and get to know the locals. Expansive nature and immersive culture are moments from anywhere, so get active in nature and explore the Hidden Heartlands, at a pace that suits you.



IRELAND'S HIDDEN HEARTLANDS 7-DAY ITINERARY

TO HELP YOU PROGRAMME IRELAND'S HIDDEN HEARTLANDS, HERE IS A SUGGESTED ITINERARY FOR YOU TO CONSIDER WHICH WILL HELP YOUR CLIENT, BE THEY GROUP OR FIT, TO NAVIGATE THIS AREA. FOR OTHER SAMPLE ITINERARIES ON IRELAND'S HIDDEN HEARTLANDS PLEASE EMAIL BUSINESSDEVELOPMENT@FAILTEIRELAND.IE

DAY 1

DONERAILE TO KILLALOE

Kick off your adventure with a delightful coffee break at [Praline Pastry and Chocolate in Mitchelstown](#), where you can savour a variety of delicious treats and beverages. Once you're energised, head over to [Eight Degrees Brewing](#) to experience the passion behind their award-winning ales during an insightful tour of the brewing process. From there, continue driving to the heart of Ballyhoura where on the banks of the Awbeg River, lies the beautiful [Doneraile Court and Estate](#). It offers the perfect spot for a brisk walk through 400 acres of lush greenery, 19th century pleasure grounds, charming walled garden and Tearooms. Relish the old-world charm and delicious food at the nearby [Townhouse Doneraile café](#). Just a short distance away, [Annes Grove Gardens](#) features a 19th century Robinsonian styled garden with an exotic collection of plants.

From Doneraile or Annes Grove Gardens, head towards the [Ballyhoura Mountains](#), where a world of outdoor adventure, history, and cultural heritage awaits. Walkers, hikers, and nature lovers can explore 21 waymarked trails that crisscross through glens and scale majestic peaks. Cyclists can tackle the [Ballyhoura Mountain Bike Trails](#), Ireland's largest trail network spanning 98km through the forest. Bike rental is available too at [Trailriders](#) located at the trail centre. If relaxation is what you prefer, visit the [Lough Gur Visitor Centre](#) and delve into the rich history and archaeology of the area or spend a couple of hours at [Lough Gur Pottery](#) near Bruff, Co. Limerick, for the perfect stress-relieving activity.

Break for lunch at [Vines Grill and Wine Bar](#), located at Ballyneety Golf Club, host to the 2027 Junior Ryder Cup.

In the afternoon, make your way towards Lough Derg and the lakeside "twin towns" of Killaloe, Co. Clare (western shore) and Ballina, Co. Tipperary (eastern shore). The picturesque towns are linked by an 18th century, 13 arch bridge - one of the most photogenic bridges in the country. The lake can be enjoyed in numerous ways, from various water sport activities to simply watching local comings and goings while sipping a cuppa at a lakeside café.

We head north, but it's up to you which side of Lough Derg you take – both the east side (County Tipperary) and the west side (County Clare) have their delights...so, take another sip of your cuppa and decide... If you opt for the west side of the lake, be sure to stop in Tuamgraney and visit [McKernan Woollen Mills](#), where colourful accessories are woven according to age-old techniques. Or at [Wilde Irish Chocolates](#), whose artisan chocolatiers produce an array of absolutely delicious delights. Other options include a sightseeing cruise with [Killaloe River Cruises](#), a walk in [Ballycuggeran Wood](#), or a visit to the newly opened Inis Cealtra (Holy Island) Visitor Centre from Mountshannon.

If you decide to explore the east side, start at the [Graves of the Leinsterman](#) in Ballina, which leads to a 6km looped trail offering stunning views from [Tountinna](#). Explore the charming village of Dromineer with its 10th century parish church or the marina in Garrykennedy. En route, discover winding streets, tiny shops, and historical sites like the 13th century [Nenagh Castle](#). Finally, visit [Brookfield Farm](#) in Tipperary, where you can enjoy farm walks, learn about biodiversity and beekeeping, and see farm animals, beehives, and wildflower meadows.

Overnight stay in many of the locations around Lough Derg.



DAY 2

PORTUMNA, BIRR AND FROM EAST GALWAY TO THE SLIEVE BLOOM MOUNTAINS

After breakfast, head towards the vibrant market town of Portumna where the River Shannon enters Lough Derg. Explore the 450 hectares of [Portumna Forest Park](#) with its marked trails and its own population of fallow deer and red squirrel. Portumna provides the perfect backdrop for many other walking and cycling routes, with remote trails that wind through farmland, alongside bogs and past serene lakes. Hire a river cruiser at the marina or a bike with [Dicks Bire Hire](#). For a dose of culture and history, a visit to the imposing [Portumna Castle and Gardens](#) with its formal gardens, walled kitchen gardens and tearooms is recommended. For a complete contrast, visit the [Irish Workhouse Centre](#), where the tragic stories of poor families during the Great Famine of 1846-1848 will rend your heart.

Have lunch in the tea rooms at Portumna Castle and Gardens.

From Portumna, you have several fantastic options to discover. Begin at [Brackloon Castle and Farm](#) for an exclusive, private tour with tea and refreshments as you explore five floors of rich history. Advanced booking is recommended for this unique experience. Next, head to [Ahasragh Distillery](#), Ireland's first zero energy emissions whiskey and gin distillery, where guided tours take you from grain to glass. Close by, the Battle of [Aughrim Visitor Centre](#) offers an insightful look into one of Ireland's most significant battles. For a different experience, travel to [Kylemore Farmhouse Cheese](#). Here you can experience educational farm and cheese tours and savour traditional afternoon tea at the farmhouse.

Or head east towards Tullamore and learn about how the much-loved [Tullamore Dew Whiskey](#) is made. If you prefer something more creative, stop off at [Glasshammer Studios](#) for a tour of their glass fusing workshop or if you have time, one of their half day workshops. Alternatively, hire a bike in Tullamore and experience the [Grand Canal Greenway](#) with its historic locks, castles and scenic countryside views.

Lunch in the [Old Warehouse Tullamore](#).

Just a short trip from Tullamore, you'll find [Lough Boora Discovery Park](#). You can explore the sculpture park by bike or on foot, immersing yourself in the peatlands landscape adorned with 24 large-scale sculptures. In the heritage town of Birr, [Birr Castle](#) Demesne spans 120 acres of stunning parklands and gardens, featuring over 5,000 species of trees and plants, wildlife, and scenic walking trails, making it a must-visit. Lastly, head to Kinnitty for world-class mountain biking and walking trails in the [Slieve Bloom Mountains](#), with guided tours available from [Mid Ireland Adventure](#).

Eat and Drink:

[JJ Killeen's](#) or [Luker's Bar](#) in Shannonbridge, [JJ Hough's](#) in Banagher or [Paddy Flynn's](#) in Cloghan.

Stay:

Overnight dine and stay at [County Arms Hotel](#) or [Kinnitty Castle](#).





Clonmacnoise monastic site, Co. Offaly



Athlone Castle, Co. Westmeath

DAY 3

OFFALY, ATHLONE AND LOUGH REE

After a delicious breakfast, take the road north up towards **Athlone**. While on the way, you can decide to travel south towards **Clonmacnoise**, an ancient 6th century monastic site, located along the River Shannon. With its intricately carved stone crosses, two round towers and even a 'whispering' doorway, **Clonmacnoise** and its ruins make for a stunning eye-catching backdrop for any photo opportunity. If nature is more your thing, then swing by **Clara Bog Nature Reserve**. Covering 464 hectares, it is one of the best remaining examples of a raised bog in Western Europe. Its boardwalk and viewing point bring you right into nature at its best with butterflies, dragonflies, frogs and birdsong for company. Alternatively, why not witness the creation of 5000-year-old bog wood sculptures and jewellery with a visit to **Celtic Roots Studio**, a workshop, gallery and interpretative centre in the craft village of Ballinahown, before heading north towards Athlone.

Lunch in The Left Bank Bistro or Bastion Kitchen, Athlone.

Athlone is a large, bustling town, right on the River Shannon and at the heart of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. Tour the 13th century **Athlone Castle** to hear the story of the town and its people, from ancient through to modern times, or step aboard a replica Viking ship with **Viking Mike** and enjoy a cruise to Lough Ree or through the Shannon water meadows or 'callows' towards **Clonmacnoise**. You can also visit the stunning riverside **Luan Gallery** to view works by local and national artists, then call into Ireland's oldest pub, **Sean's Bar** or to **Dead Centre Brewing**, which is one of Ireland's leading craft breweries. **The Old Rail Trail** is a fantastic 42km cycling and walking path that begins in Athlone and stretches all the way to Mullingar and follows the historic Midlands Great Western Railway track.

In Co. Roscommon, the other side of Lough Ree in Athlone, you can avail of a water taxi and guided tour of the lake with **Hidden Heartland Tours** or experience something unique with family or friends - a **Hot Tub Boat**! Or if you're in need of some sheer fun, the lake is home to **Baysports**, which has a large collection of floating slides, rockers and challenges, entertaining visitors of all ages and abilities.

Eat and Drink:

Dinner can be enjoyed in one of the many quality restaurants in Athlone such as **Thyme** and **The Fatted Calf**.

Stay:

Overnight Athlone has a great choice of hotel, guesthouse and B&B accommodation.

DAY 4

ATHLONE TO LONGFORD OR WESTMEATH

After breakfast in Athlone, head east toward **Dún Na Sí Heritage Park**, where you can immerse yourself in Irish culture and heritage through interactive exhibits and live demonstrations. Next, visit Kilbeggan Distillery, one of the world's oldest distilleries, and witness traditional whiskey-making methods. Finish with a taste of Kilbeggan's finest. The Hill of Uisneach had historically been used as a political, cultural, religious, mythological and geographical identifier for the Irish, spanning five millennia. It is here on your next stop that you can take a tour of the hill with expert guides and walk in the footsteps of High Kings and the Goddess Ériu while you immerse yourself in the history, culture, and mythology of Uisneach.

Lunch in Red Earth, Wholesome Kitchen or Mullingar Pewter.

In the afternoon, spend an hour or two at **Belvedere House, Gardens & Park**. The estate comprises of a restored Georgian Villa and a Victorian Walled Garden within 160 acres of parkland and visitors can explore 10km of magnificent woodland and lakeshore walks. Several follies adorn the landscape too, including Ireland's largest folly, 'The Jealous Wall', as well as 3 play areas and a 30-metre zipline for the kids. For the more active, why not hire a bike at **Mullingar Bike Hire** or **Outdoor Escape** by the Royal Canal and cycle the **Old Rail Trail**, a 42km tarmacked trail which runs along a disused railway from Mullingar to Athlone. Or take a gentle scenic stroll or cycle along the **Royal Canal Greenway**, and experience 46km views of rolling fields, old bridges and working locks though the many towns and villages in County Westmeath.

Just a short drive away, you'll find Cloughan **Farm & Cookery School** in Co. Longford. Accessible by foot or bike from the **Royal Canal Greenway**, this special place offers visitors the chance to experience authentic Irish farm cuisine and enjoy guided farm tours. Nearby, rent a bike at **Ballymahon Greenway Cycles** and ride along the Greenway to the **Corlea Visitor Trackway Centre**, where a monumental timber roadway from early Ireland was uncovered. For more adventure, join a tour with **Ethical Tours** or **Midland Cycle Tours**, or embark on a walking tour with **Walking Ireland Tours**. If kayaking is your thing, head to Ballymahon for a thrilling experience with **Alan's Yippee Kayaking**. Or go to **Lough Ree Access for All** and partake in a fishing trip or guided cruise of the Shannon.

If you are a book lover, or wish you were, a trip to the **Maria Edgeworth Centre** is a must-see. Housed in one of the oldest schools in Ireland, built in 1840, visitors are inspired by an interactive tour showcasing the rich history of Ireland's early education system and the role played by the Edgeworth family, as well as the life and works of novelist Maria Edgeworth. Further north, the **Knights and Conquests Heritage Centre**, located in the picturesque town of Granard, invites you to pick up the Gauntlet of our Norman ancestors and walk on an interactive journey through time in the shadow of Ireland's highest Motte and Bailey Castle.

Eat and Drink:

Dinner at the **Richmond Inn Clondra** or **Keenan's Hotel**, Tarmonbarry.

Stay:

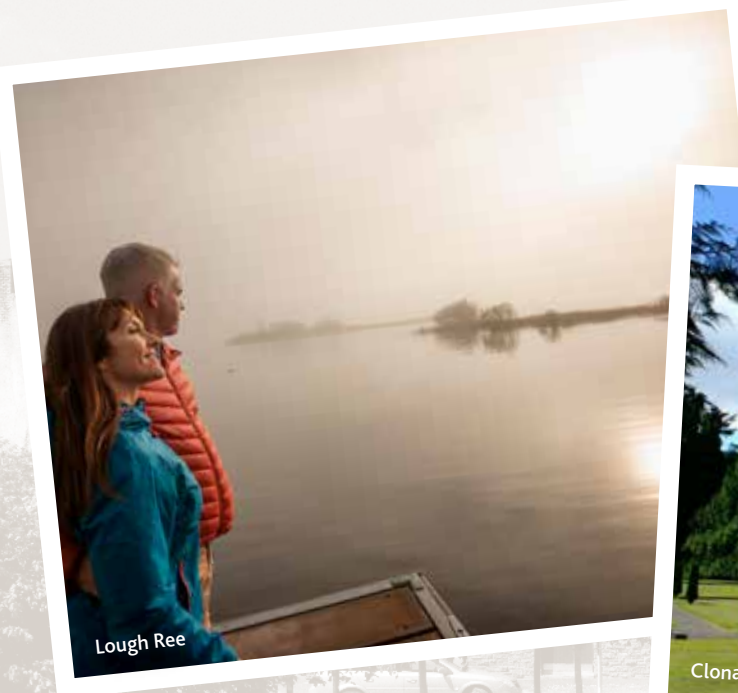
Stay in the many B&B's, hotels and guesthouses in the county.



Corlea Trackway, Co. Longford



Royal Canal Greenway



DAY 5

LANESBOROUGH, ROSCOMMON AND CARRICK-ON-SHANNON

Lanesborough is a good stop for a riverside picnic, where you're likely to meet locals and visitors alike out for a stroll or a cycle. It is here that [Lough Ree Access for All](#) offers wheelchair-accessible fishing tours and guided cruises of the Shannon, allowing everyone to enjoy the beauty of the river. A liquid of another sort – Slingshot Gin – is being distilled nearby by the Lough Ree Distillery. As curious as the name may sound, it reveals yet another layer of the Heartlands – the fabulous tapestry of mythological people and events connected with the landscape. The legendary Queen Medb (about which you will hear more at the visitor centre at Rathcroghan) met her demise while bathing on the island of Inchcleraun in Lough Ree, when she was hit by a single slingshot. The rest is history as they say! A new Distillery Visitor Centre is planned.

A little north of Roscommon town and located on a historic 300-acre estate, the [National Famine Museum](#) at Strokestown Park draws on an archive of images and original documents (including letters written by tenants on the Strokestown Estate at the time of the famine) that tells the history, politics, circumstances and stories of hunger, eviction and migration during the Great Irish Famine of the 1840s. Visitors can also visit both the Six Acre Walled Garden and Strokestown Park House, an impressive, Georgian Palladian mansion, with original furnishings and interesting insights into the Pakenham Mahon family who lived at Strokestown from the mid-1600s to the late 1970s. Or, go by foot or by bike and follow in the footsteps of the famine emigrants who left Strokestown and walked 165km to Dublin Port along [The National Famine Way](#). Guided tours of the house are provided in English and audio guide downloads are available in French, German, Spanish and Mandarin.

Lunch in Strokestown Park.

After lunch in the café at Strokestown Park, travel on to the medieval village of Tulsk and the [Rathcroghan Visitor Centre](#). The centre interprets the rich archaeology and mythology of a prehistoric royal site, which was home to the Iron Age Warrior Queen Medb (Maeve) and the nearby starting place for the epic Táin Bó Cuailnge (Cattle Raid of Cooley), the oldest vernacular epic in European literature. Rathcroghan is also the site of entry to, and (one hopes!) exit from, the Otherworld. Take a guided tour from the Centre to uncover this hidden landscape of the Heartlands. Definitely a site not to be missed.

Equally enthralling is the splendid [Clonalis House](#) in Castlerea, home to the family of the last High King of Ireland, Rory O'Connor. Take a guided tour or even spend a night or three!

Overnight in [Carrick-on-Shannon](#), where there's a wide choice of accommodation. Dine in the award winning [Oarsman Pub](#) or [Redbank Restaurant](#) or the wonderful [Cottage Restaurant](#), located on the River Shannon just a few kilometres south of the town.

Carrick-on-Shannon is vibrant and bustling with a wonderful calendar of festivals happening over the summer. In the heart of the town, the [Moon River Cruise](#) provides stunning panoramic views of the local countryside that simply cannot be accessed through any other form of transport! You can also rent a 100% electric day boat for a couple of hours, which is a fun way to enjoy the beauty of the River Shannon. Carrick-on-Shannon is also a central spot for renting cruises for three, four, or seven days, with a variety of delightful destinations to choose from. Don't miss a visit to [Costello Chapel](#), Ireland's smallest church, nestled between two shops on one of the main streets. Be sure to check out the latest exhibition at [The Dock Arts Gallery](#) and visit the [Leitrim Design House](#) shop where you can find beautifully displayed original local crafts and artworks for sale. Just down the road is the picturesque Leitrim Village and while you're there, rent a bike from [Electric Bike Trails](#) and cycle the 20km car-free [Shannon Erne Blueway](#) all the way to Drumshambo.



DAY 6

NORTH ROSCOMMON AND NORTH LEITRIM

It's a 15 minute drive from Carrick-on-Shannon to Boyle, or [King House Historical & Cultural Centre](#) to be precise.

A magnificently restored Georgian mansion, the King family home holds varied collections of furniture, artefacts, exhibitions, and art, and every Saturday, hosts the award-winning [Boyle Farmer's Market](#) in its walled courtyard. Right beside King House, you'll find [Boyle Abbey](#), a powerful Cistercian monastery founded in the 12th century by monks from Mellifont Abbey under the patronage of the MacDermotts. After exploring, you can choose between an adrenaline rush or enjoying the views at [Lough Key Forest and Activity Park](#), with options like a relaxing boat trip with [Lough Key Boats](#) or a [Zipit Forest Adventure](#). There's enough to keep you engaged for the whole day.

Lunch at the Lough Key Forest Park.

After lunch, a trip to [Arigna Mining Experience](#) is a must. Here, you will be given a fascinating guided tour from a former miner who'll share his unique insights into what coal mining life was like in the area since its beginning in the 1700s, until its closure in 1990. [The Miner's Way](#) walking trail follows the paths the miners travelled on their journey to work, and hints at an industrial past that is belied by the rural, serene beauty of the landscape. Other more notable attractions to visit after your tour in Arigna are [The Shannon Pot](#), the source of Ireland's magnificent River Shannon and [Cavan Burren Park](#), part of the [Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark](#) which is a fascinating place – both geologically and archaeologically. It has five walking trails, including the [Cavan Way](#), that you can explore at your own pace, or learn about the secrets of the landscape from a knowledgeable Geopark guide.

If you decide to venture north-west from Arigna, there is a lovely 3km walk that runs adjacent to the Glenaniff River to Fowley's Falls. Known as the Fowley Falls Trail, this walkway has been created to be as natural as possible with minimum interference to the natural ecosystem. Viewing points marked along the trail allow you to take in the best views of the river. It leads to Fowley's Falls, where the Glenaniff River cascades in a series of levels over the exposed bedrock to form a spectacular torrent of water rushing through the steep valley towards Lough Melvin. Not to forget Glencar Waterfall, 30km away on the north side of Glencar Lake, one of the most enchanting areas in Ireland and the inspiration for WB Yeats' poem The Stolen Child. The well defined, popular path is accessible for those who use wheelchairs or mobility aids and leads to the base of the 50ft high waterfall via a number of viewing platforms and a picnic area.

Or why not do something different and go on an adventure with a guided tour of the waterways in Canadian Canoes with [Adventure Gently](#)?

Eat and Drink:

The [Riverbank Restaurant](#), Dromahair or [Osta W8](#), Manorhamilton.

Stay:

Overnight in [Kilronan Castle](#) or the many B&Bs and hotels in the area.



Tullnally Castle, dining room



Cavan County Museum, Co Cavan

DAY 7

LEITRIM TO CAVAN AND NORTH WESTMEATH

Before you leave Co. Leitrim and head east toward Co. Cavan, you must visit The Shed Distillery where Gunpowder Gin is crafted in the Drumshanbo Food Hub, right on the shore of Lough Allen. The Shed Distillery is a fully guided distillery tour and tasting experience, where the distillation of one of Ireland's most popular gins takes place alongside vodka and whiskey.

For those seeking adventure, [Slow Adventure Leitrim](#) offers breathtaking journeys through wild, open, and natural landscapes. Whether you choose the Slow Adventure [Jackalope Cycle Tour](#) or Irish Basket Making at [Drumhierney Woodland Hideaway](#), there's something for everyone. You can even embark on a 30 minute guided canoe trip from Drumshanbo to O'Connor's Island with [Lough Allen Adventure](#), complete with yoga, breathwork, meditation, and an island retreat.

Just an hour away from Leitrim and on the shore of Lough Oughter is [Killykeen Forest](#). A real hidden gem with wonderful forest walking trails and views of the ruins of Clough Oughter Castle, located on its own island in the middle of the lake. Explore the area by bike or on water by renting a bicycle or a kayak from the [Cavan Adventure Centre](#).

Lunch in [Murph's Gastro-Pub](#) in the Derragarra Inn or [The Old Post Inn](#) in Butlersbridge.

After a delicious lunch, head for Ballyjamesduff, Co. Cavan, where you can take a magical walk back through time in the historic wonderland that is [Cavan County Museum](#)! This exciting and vibrant museum takes history off the page and brings it to life with larger-than-life outdoor exhibitions such as the World War I Trench Experience and Battle of the Somme Installation, giving you the opportunity to walk around the largest replica trench in Ireland and Britain and experience how it felt to fight in "the war to end all wars".

Then on towards Castlepollard in Co. Westmeath, where you can visit [Tullnally Castle Gardens](#) - an 18th century Gothic revival castle and family home of the Pakenhams, later Earls of Longford. Discover 12 acres of terraced lawns and 19th century woodland and walled gardens, including two ornamental lakes which encompass a grotto of eroded limestone from nearby Lough Derravaragh. Guided tours of the Victorian kitchens and laundries also take place throughout the year. Save some time to visit [Fore Abbey](#), the nearby ruins of a Christian monastery where visitors can learn about the seven wonders of the Fore Valley, as well as [Fore Distillery](#), the esteemed home of exceptional Irish poitín and rum. Pop in for a tour or enjoy a delicious bite to eat in the café before departing for Dublin.



The Shed Distillery, Drumshanbo, Co Leitrim