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INTRODUCTION

Alan English
Group Editorial Director,
Iconic Newspapers

A big welcome to our Spring Breaks supplement, which is brought to you by the teams behind 10 of Ireland's leading local newspapers. It follows on from the publication we brought to you in autumn, which received much positive feedback.

Once again, journalists from the Iconic group of local titles have joined forces in this special publication which highlights what's on offer in their respective counties.

Our papers have the privilege of providing news, sport and more for communities across the country, both in print and – increasingly — online. Doing justice to that important responsibility requires deep local knowledge — and we thought it would be a nice idea to share some of these insights with readers around the country.

Readers have told us that the Autumn Breaks publication was the inspiration for many an enjoyable weekend or midweek getaway. We now proudly present this companion supplement, which is packed with great options for a relaxing break.

Journalists on the ground have highlighted the very best things about their counties - the must-see attractions and the festivals and events coming your way soon.

We hope you get some ideas from these special features and that you're inspired to explore these beautiful parts of Ireland over the coming months.

Once again, we'd like to thank the advertisers who have supported this publication. As the days get longer and brighter, we know they'll have a great welcome in store for you.

Enjoy the supplement — and be sure to take some time out this spring to explore the best of Ireland. There's so much to see and do!



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DON'T MISS THIS

Surfs up: Leitrim may only have a few short kilometres of coast but Tullaghan Strand is one of the best locations to catch a wave on the Atlantic coast!

Boat Tours: Take a boat tour of the beautiful surrounds of Lough Gill near Dromahair on the Rose of Innisfree. Or take in the sights of The Shannon on Moon River in Carrick-on-Shannon.

Drama: Ballinamore hold their drama festival from March 1-8 while in Kiltyclogher, they run their festival from March 2-9. Each night there will be a new theatre showpiece featuring talent from all over the country.

Music: If you love country music then don't miss the Kings of Country, Mick Flavin and Declan Nerney when they perform together in The Corn Mill, Carrigallen on March 8.

Comedy: The 2 Johnnies Get Loose in The Landmark Hotel, Carrick-on-Shannon on April 26.

The humble spud: Celebrate the humble spud with a free day marking all things potato at the Organic Centre, Rossinver on Sunday, March 10.

Hill walking: Take to the hills of lovely North Leitrim for the Hill Walking Festival this Easter. Running from Saturday, April 20 through Sunday, April 21, this festival is the perfect excuse to get out and enjoy the great outdoors. There are long and medium walks as well as a ramble. Contact the Holey Soles Hill Walking club on facebook for more.

spring breaks 2019



Two captains meet for a chat about the weather and the sailing conditions at Ballinamore Marina with a traditional barge from Riversdale in the background
PICTURES: FÁILTE IRELAND HIDDEN HEARTLANDS



The stunning Glencar Lake in North Leitrim.

take a break in LEITRIM

Everything from designer yurts to top-rated hotels

If you are looking to enjoy a holiday with a difference then you are spoilt for choice in Co Leitrim. Accommodation options vary from fabulous stately homes to riverside barges, welcoming B&Bs and even extend to tree houses and luxury yurts!

If glamping is more your style then take a look at the options in Co Leitrim with everything from bijou 1960s caravans and yurts through to traditional camping grounds next to fabulous amenities - Lough Rynn just outside Mohill is just one example!

Those looking for luxury accommodation won't be disappointed as there are a number of hotels on offer from castles set in wonderful sprawling estates - complete with spa and award winning dining - to Shannon side hotels with gorgeous views of the water.



Glamping at Battlebridge near Leitrim village

You won't be disappointed.

Looking for something a little more unusual? Why not try renting a barge to stay in on the Shannon-Erne waterway or try out some of the boats for rent along the Shannon and canal waterways.

Of course, if you are looking for something for the family there are plenty of self catering apartments and cottages for rent throughout the county. Choose from the stunning scenery of the Glencar valley, beach

side options in Tullaghan or go for the buzz of the vibrant town centres of Carrick-on-Shannon, Manorhamilton or Ballinamore.

Enjoy lazy afternoons near Lough Gill and Parke's Castle with accommodation in the beautiful Dromahair area or check out some of the county's more secluded houses for holiday rental.

With so many glorious walks, cycleways, lakes, rivers and places to visit, you'll be kept as busy as you want to be. Whatever your accommodation choice one thing remains the same in Co Leitrim - the warm welcome you will receive.

So pack your bags, plan that spring getaway and reward yourselves with a holiday to remember in lovely Leitrim!

Check out the best that Leitrim has to offer on leitrimtourism.com/category/stay/



Set out from Carrick-on-Shannon and decide your route along the way, remember the speed limit is 10kph fast enough to watch the Leitrim countryside slide by



Cheers - you can choose to keep your feet dry and enjoy the scenery or take a plunge and delve into some of Leitrim's adventure water sports

Go at your own pace as you cruise Leitrim waters

Relax, unwind and slip into the Leitrim way of life with a cruise of the Shannon, taking in villages and vibrant towns on your journey.

Forget traffic jams and queuing for seats and instead become the captain of your own vessel sailing through Leitrim's historic landscape which is perfect for discovering treasures and tasting local delicacies.

Carrick-on-Shannon is both Leitrim's party central and a cultural hub with history, food and music top of the list and easy to access.

Ireland's well known 40 shades of green are most vibrant in the Leitrim countryside during Spring. A journey down the Shannon Erne canal will clear your head and revitalise your soul.

Head to Leitrim Village, a snug location with a few cosy bars and some superb food options to get you started. Electric Bikes are available here to help you conquer any hills along the Blueway.

All 16 Leitrim locks are self operated but they are automatic so there is no hard work once you have your cruise card.

Keshcarrigan is worth a stop and a walk around and do not miss the floating boardwalk in the pretty traditional town of Drumshanbo. If you play an instrument then this is the spot to join a session and make new friends.

Ballinamore is a town to take stock in, get your supplies and enjoy the delights of the canal town. Almost every businesses is promoted in Irish here and the border town is the place to climb Sliabh an Iarainn, ride a horse at

Drumcoura or visit Solas Art Gallery.

This area is well known for angling so whether it is your first try or you are an experienced fisher, throw a line, sit back and relax as your catch swims towards you.

Dromod Harbour and Jamestown Lock are picture perfect, you can't return home without an instagram worthy shot from here.

Once you have de-stressed, you can look for a little more adventure. Take a kayak out, stand up paddle, cycle the Blueway, take a walk on the wild side on the Tree Canopy Trail at Lough Key Forest Park or dunk the whole family in water sport activities at Acres Lake, Drumshanbo.

You can hire a cruise boat in Carrick-on-Shannon or a traditional barge in Ballinamore, then all you need is your sea legs and a captain's hat!



McDermott's Castle on an island at Lough Key Forest Park is worth a trip to on your boat

take a break in LEITRIM

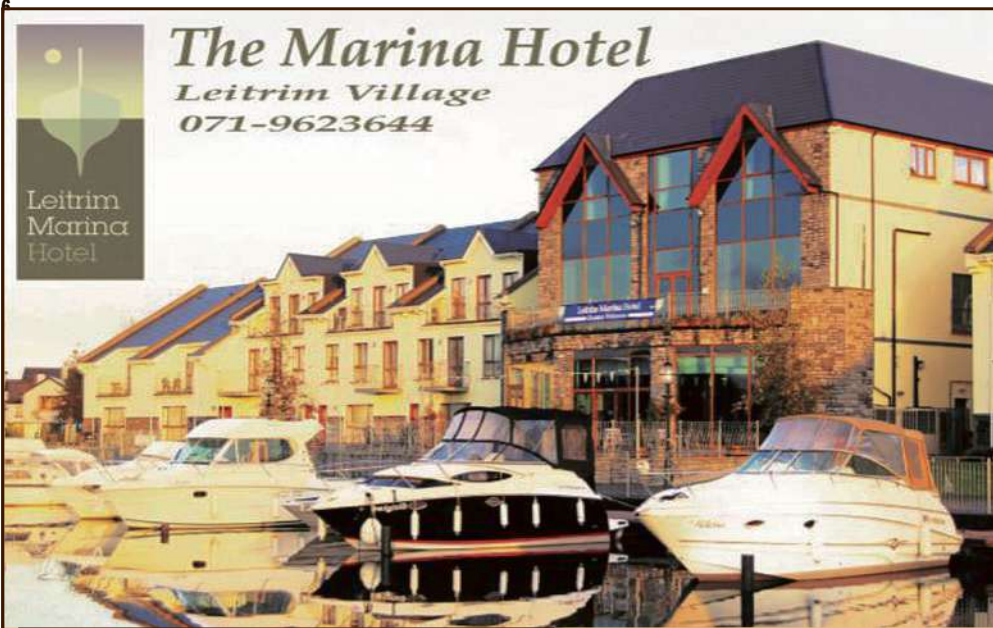


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Fancy a stay in a castle? Why not try Lough Rynn Castle and Estate?

TOP 10 SIGHTS TO SEE

- 1: Glencar Waterfall:** consistently making the top of must see items for Co Leitrim, and for good reason too!
- 2: Parkes Castle:** this stunning castle on the shores of Lough Gill has informative displays and stunning views.
- 3: Glenade Valley:** home of the mythological Dubharchú - Leitrim's own Nessie - this valley is well worth a trip.
- 4: Costello Chapel, Carrick-on-Shannon:** the smallest church in Ireland. Built in 1879 by Edward Costello as a memorial to his wife.
- 5: Cavan and Leitrim Railway, Dromod:** Experience a unique slice of transport history in this unique museum.
- 6: MacDiarmada's Cottage, Kiltyclogher:** the only surviving home of one of the signatories from the 1916 uprising.
- 7: Tullaghan strand:** Leitrim has the shortest coastline of any county just 4km long. Drop in for a visit!
- 8: Floating boardwalk, Drumshanbo:** part of the Blueway, this floating walkway is a truly unique experience.
- 9: Margaret of New Orleans' cottage, Carrigallen:** a memorial cottage to remember Margaret Haughey.
- 10: Sliabh an Iarainn:** take one of the looped walks around Sliabh an Iarainn, you won't regret it!



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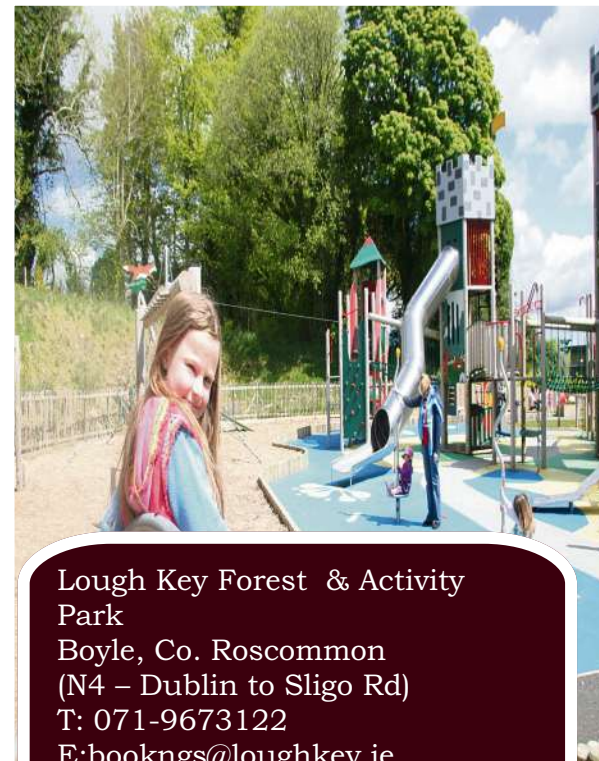
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DON'T MISS THIS

Cara 10 Mile Challenge, Bundoran: March 8-10. Push yourself to the limit competing against Ireland's top athletes.

Ballyshannon Drama Festival: Taking place in the Abbey Arts Centre from March 9-17, a must for theatre lovers.

Seachtain na Gaelige: Taking part countywide a celebration of our language, tradition and culture. March 1-17.

St Patrick's Day Parades: Celebrate our national day in many of the St. Patrick's Day parades around the county

Shore 2 Summit Adventure Race: March 16, Sliabh Sneacht, Innishowen. Test your overall fitness, switching disciplines and utilizing different muscles

Cup of Tae Festival, Ardara, w/e May 3: Often called the best "wee festival in Ireland" Ardara celebrates the great tradition of fiddle playing in Donegal, attracting Irish and international musicians.

Rory Gallagher International Festival: Ballyshannon, w/e May 30: Join more than 10,000 fans from all parts of the world in celebrating the life and times of Ballyshannon-born Rory Gallagher.

Donegal International Rally: Letterkenny, w/e June 21. Join some of the top drivers in Europe, a pulsating experience

Sea Sessions, Bundoran: w/e June 21. Superb music acts and more in the tented village.

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Climb every mountain . . . this stunning image of Errigal, Donegal's highest peak with its winter coat on. Errigal, Muckish, the Bluestacks and dozens of hill and walking trails across the county offer endless opportunities to get out and enjoy the stunning scenery in Donegal PICTURE: IAIN MILLER



Music is always on the menu, here visitors enjoy and join in the fun at the Cup of Tae Festival which returns this May in Ardara

take a break in DONEGAL

A land of stunning beauty for the visitor to soak up

In Donegal we often feel that we are four counties rolled into one with all our different land and seascapes, our different accents and traditions and just something different to see and enjoy around every corner.

The Wild Atlantic Way has put Donegal on a very firm footing and, having been judged "The Coolest Place on the Planet" by the prestigious National Geographic magazine, tourists from home and abroad have at last discovered this treasure that we have kept to ourselves for so many years.

With over 300 miles of rugged coastline the county offers so much for the water sports enthusiast.

Over the last number of years Donegal has developed a deserved reputation for its world-class surf

breaks and plays host to some of the top surfers from as far away as Hawaii. With many accredited surf schools around the county Donegal caters for the youngest beginner to the seasoned professional throughout the year.

The broad Atlantic also offers many other opportunities for adrenaline junkies — and thrill-seekers — deep sea diving in crystal waters, sailing, kayaking, water skiing, wind and kite surfing, some leisurely time on your stand up board or an angling trip just under the majestic cliffs of Sliabh Liag.

In a county that boasts the highest number of Blue Flag beaches you will never be too far away from a beach be it a small cove or an endless stretch of undisturbed sand. Beaches that offer you the chance to chill out, take a leisurely walk or run, or for the more adventurous a good gallop with your trusted steed. The opportunities are

limitless. The song the "Hills of Donegal" was no coincidence — once you wander off the coastline you will discover a wealth of mountains, hills, valleys and lakes. Whether you want to engage in some serious mountain climbing, hike along so many of the quiet trails while discovering so many towering peaks, you certainly will not be disappointed.

In recent years Donegal has embraced the fitness ethos and never a weekend goes by when you will not find a 5k or 10k or even something more challenging. Likewise with biking — our hills and valleys offer a wealth of challenges.

You cannot talk about Donegal without mentioning golf — we hosted last year's Irish Open. With numerous championship links and parkland courses the terrain and facilities make golfing in Donegal memorable.



Make a weekend of it and enjoy Donegal as the county celebrates St Patrick's Day with parades, large and small across the county PICTURE: GERARD MCHUGH



Manus Kelly and Donal Barrett, in their Subaru WRC round a sharp bend during last year's Donegal International Rally which draws thousands here in June PICTURE: THOMAS GALLAGHER

Our welcome is warm and the memories never fade

Perhaps the greatest compliment constantly paid to Donegal by countless visitors over the years is the sheer friendliness and even curiosity of our people.

Dún na nGall in the Irish language translates into the "fort of the strangers" - we like to think it more as the home of the strangers, a place where our hearts are as big as our mountains.

No matter where you go - from Malin Head to the cliffs of Sliabh Liag you will always be met with a welcome smile and a touch of curiosity. Ask a question and you will often be answered by another one - it is just our curious good nature.

The further off the beaten track you travel you will find this so much more

evident - a day spent in the Gaeltacht areas of the county opens a whole new world where people are just so keen to encourage you to visit so many iconic spots like Aranmore and Tory Islands. Sitting proudly in the the Atlantic Ocean these islands are jewels in Donegal's tourism crown where visitors can experience a vibrancy to a culture that is both inspiring and engaging. It is no surprise that these islands have captured the imagination of artists and musicians for hundreds of years.

In many of the pubs around the county you will discover the real Ireland, a place to meet up with the locals have a chat, unwind and even sing the odd song or two.

Each one of the over two hundred pubs has its own story - you could just stumble upon a great session in the

most out of the way place. One very famous publican, Leo Brennan proved that when he built his famous tavern with the attitude "build it and they will come". Now it did help that he had a great family of singers.

There is a pub to suit all tastes in the county and today you will find the best of locally sourced food. Gone are the days when the large red catering tin of coffee rested beside the kettle - today you will find the best of barista coffees, fresh seafood chowders and locally sourced seafood all served with that genuine Donegal welcome.

Today Donegal has a wide selection of accommodation to suit everybody: from "Hobbit" pods to 4/5 star hotels, homely bed and breakfasts to luxury spa resorts, self catering cottages and apartments to caravan and camping parks.



Stunning beauty abounds - this image captures Loughros head near Ardara PICTURE MATT BRITTON

take a break in DONEGAL



Irish surfer Richard Fitzgerald rides the waves at Bundoran. Surfing breaks in Donegal are hugely popular PICTURE: MATT BRITTON

TOP 10 SIGHTS TO SEE

- 1:** Sliabh Liag: Capture some of the best views in Europe from the dramatic cliffs overlooking Donegal Bay.
- 2:** Malin Head: Ireland's most northerly point where you can catch the Northern Lights or visit the set of Star Wars.
- 3:** Donegal Islands: A total get away from it all with the feeling of being somewhere very unique in the world.
- 4:** Surfing Bundoran/Rosnowlagh: Ride the waves along the breaks in the birthplace of Irish surfing.
- 5:** Fanad Lighthouse: See Donegal in a totally different light from this iconic lighthouse, one of many around the coast.
- 6:** Glenveagh National Park: A stately home surrounded by woodlands, and lakes and and home to Golden Eagles.
- 7:** Daniel O'Donnell Visitor Centre: Celebrate a glittering life in music and you might just meet the man himself.
- 8:** Donegal Bay Waterbus: Cruise along Donegal Bay viewing various historical sights and an active seal colony.
- 9:** Glencolmcille Folk Village: There are few better places to delve into the past and experience our living culture.
- 10:** Donegal Castle: The ancient home of the O'Donnells, which has been restored in Donegal's historic quarter.

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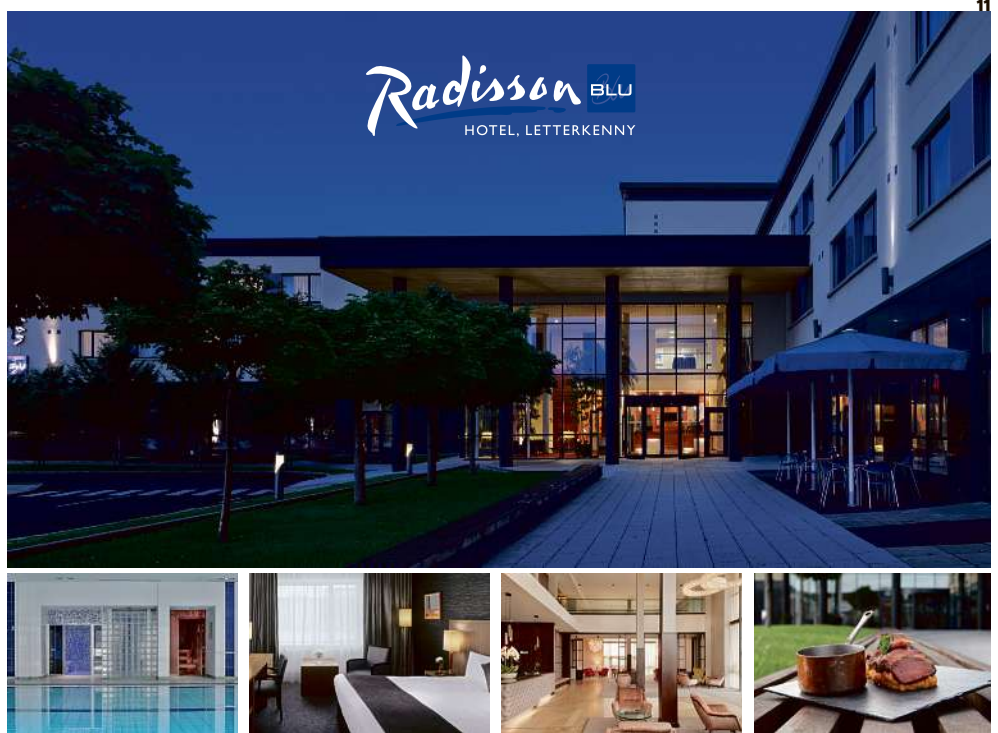
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- Tour The Wild Atlantic Way**
- Visit Magee of Donegal & Irish House to see how the legendary Donegal Tweed is made**
- The Folk Village Glencolmille Sliabh Liag - Europe's Highest Sea Cliffs - an unforgettable experience**
- Maritime & Heritage Centre - Experience traditions of the famous hand crafts & Killybegs fishing port**
- Daniel O'Donnell Visitor Centre**
- Glenveagh National Park**
- Rosstown / Murbagh beaches**
- Belleek Pottery**
- Donegal Castle, Donegal Town**
- Donegal Craft Village, Donegal Town**
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- Fishing trips can be arranged**
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DON'T MISS THIS

Ardagh Heritage & Creativity Centre: If it's folklore that interests you, this is the perfect spot to learn about Longford's most famous myth: The Wooing of Etain. There are also numerous creative activities for the whole family to enjoy.

Longford parkrun: Get a bit of exercise and mingle with the locals at the Longford parkrun takes place at the Albert Reynolds Peace Park (The Mall) every Saturday at 9.30am.

The Royal Canal: Longford has many beautiful areas along the Royal Canal with notably scenic spots at Clondra and Abbeyshrule among others.

Viewmount House: Treat yourself to the very best of Longford's fine cuisine in Viewmount House. This stunning venue offers top nosh as well as luxury accommodation.

Granard Knights & Conquests: Whether you're a history buff or not, this is the perfect spot to learn about the local heritage. Based in Granard, the centre is great fun for all the family.

Corlea Trackway: Examine the Iron Age bog road that was discovered at Corlea. Built in the year 148 BC it's an unmissable experience.

Longford Golf Club: Located just over 1km from Longford Town Centre this 18 hole parkland course allows players to enjoy panoramic views of the Town and surrounding countryside with Cairn Hill providing a beautiful backdrop.

spring breaks 2019



The Shannonside village of Lanesboro is well worth a visit. Right beside Lough Ree, there are scenic walks, water activities and plenty of events that take place throughout the year. It's also one of the most popular spots in Longford for angling, with festivals and competitions every year PICTURE: BRIGID MULLOOLY



Corlea Trackway just outside the village of Kenagh is a great spot for some fresh air and beautiful scenery PICTURE: MICHELLE GHEE

take a break in LONGFORD

From one end to the other Longford is a tourist's paradise

Longford has plenty of things going for it, perhaps none more so than its tourism appeal. From the idyllic rebel trails of north Longford to the breathtaking Blueways along the county's Royal Canal, to describe it as a 'hidden gem' hardly does it justice.

Throw in the region's umpteen visitor focal points and it's not hard to see why Longford's tourism industry is undergoing somewhat of a renaissance at present.

One of the leading attractions that is heading up this positive upsurge is none other than Granard's Knights & Conquests Heritage & Visitor Centre.

Opened amid much fanfare last September, this custom made building eloquently tells the story of the Normans arrival into Ireland during the latter half of the 12th century.

Stylishly kitted out with all the mod

cons typically associated with similar venues of its ilk, the centre features high-end interactive features and visually informative presentations on The Normans' association with Granard.

The second phase of the project's development received a major boost when it was awarded €2.8m in State aid under the Government's Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.

That seven figure sum is expected to go a long way towards developing the second phase of an outdoor 15 acre heritage park.

The latter is a theme which is in rich evidence at the opposite end of the county and more specifically Corlea's Trackway Visitor Centre.

A visually impressive interpretation of an Iron Age bog built in 148BC, an eighteen-metre stretch of the preserved trackway is on permanent display inside for sightseers and

heritage enthusiasts.

For those looking to unwind and relax in what is arguably one of Ireland's most impressive inland parks, why not take in a visit to the Mall, otherwise known as the Albert Reynolds Peace Park?

Tranquility is also a depiction richly associated with the picturesque lakes of north Longford and Loch Gowna, a fisherman's haven for angling aficionados from both at home and abroad.

That same semblance of calmness is a virtue that can be directed at the eye-catching surrounds of Richmond Harbour in Clondra and the unspoiled banks of the River Shannon which overlook tourist hotspots Lanesboro and Tarmonbarry.

And that's before one even dares to mention the €233m impending arrival of UK leisure giants Center Parcs to Ballymahon later this summer.



The Royal Canal at Abbeyshrule is perfect for a walk in the fresh air. Why not get on your bike and see how far you can cycle? It's the perfect activity - especially on a sunny day



The award-winning Viewmount House is a boutique gem on the outskirts of Longford town. It's perfect for a luxury stay and the adjoining restaurant offers the very best in fine dining

Picturesque Ardagh village is steeped in local history

Ardagh Village is one of the most picturesque locations in the county of Longford. With its ancient buildings, its rich heritage and clean, friendly atmosphere, there's certainly plenty to attract the attention.

The village of Ardagh lies to the south east of Longford town and owes its name to the diocese in which the greater part of the county is situated.

It is said that St Patrick founded a church here in the 5th century and installed St Mel as bishop.

The ancient ruins of St Mel's Cathedral are near the present Church of Ireland and St Mel himself is said to be buried within the walls.

Ardagh is a very attractive Estate Village and its distinctive architecture

as a planned estate has led to its designation as a heritage village. It has featured regularly in the forefront of the National Tidy Towns Awards.

While visiting this postcard-pretty village, your first stop should be Ardagh Heritage and Creativity Centre, which is located in an old 1898 schoolhouse.

The story of Ardagh is one of history, literature and storytelling and the centre draws on the rich fabric of Ardagh life down through the ages, including its association with Sir Walter Scott, Oliver Goldsmith and Maria Edgeworth.

Here, you'll also learn the story of Midir, the local fairy who lives on Brí Léith (the Ardagh Mountain). Ardagh Heritage and Creativity Centre is a great place to learn the story of how Midir wooed Etain, and the many tasks

he completed to win her love.

Ardagh Heritage and Creativity Centre is also a great spot for children's activities and a number of family fun events are planned throughout the year. More information can be obtained from the centre itself.

When you've learned all there is to learn about local history and folklore, take a walk through the village and see St Mel's Old Cathedral, or the limestone Ardagh Clock Tower, which is one of Ardagh's most distinctive features standing on the village green.

Bearing the date 1863, it commemorates Sir George Ralph Fetherston (d. 1853), the landlord whose idea it was to develop a new village.

There's plenty more to see and do at Ardagh Heritage Village, so set a few hours of your day to take it all in.



Ardagh is a perfect place to spot mischievous fairies in the woods
PICTURE: SHELLEY CORCORAN

take a break in LONGFORD



spring
breaks
2019

The recently-opened Granard Knights & Conquests Heritage & Visitor Centre is a great place to learn about local history.

TOP 10 SIGHTS TO SEE

- 1:** The Greville Arms is a great spot for lunch while walking in the footsteps of Michael Collins and Kitty Kiernan.
- 2:** Ballinamuck Battlefield 1798 Visitors Centre is located in the middle of the site of a battle fought in September 1798.
- 3:** The Titanic Memorial and Garden in Ennybegs is a striking monument to Killoe's connection with the Titanic.
- 4:** St Mel's Cathedral is the main historical attraction of Longford town, overlooking all the main roads into town.
- 5:** Sean MacEoin's Forge near Ballinalee village, is the restored forge of Seán MacEoin (1893-1973), a soldier and statesman who was known as 'The Blacksmith of Ballinalee'.
- 6:** Aughnacliffe Dolmen is the only one of four portal tombs in Longford that is easily accessible by the public.
- 7:** Granard Motte & Bailey is an Anglo-Norman fortification that dominates much of the town of Granard.
- 8:** Newcastle Woods in Ballymahon is the site of the Center Parcs resort, and provides some very beautiful walkways.
- 9:** Barley Harbour is a beautiful spot to bring a picnic and enjoy the stunning views that Lough Ree has to offer.
- 10:** Ardagh heritage village is a beautifully quaint spot filled with ancient buildings and steeped in Longford history.



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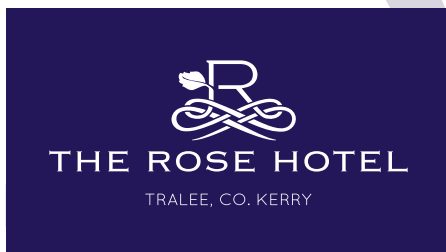
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Thomond Park: Home of top class rugby, including Pro14 and European Champions Cup

Marquee at Dolan's: Limerick's premier venue has a number of big gigs in the coming months

Gaelic Grounds: All-Ireland champions will play league and championship hurling here in the coming weeks

Mungret Park: A superb new amenity in the western suburbs with walks and playground

Foynes Flying Boat Museum: One of the county's tourism crown jewels celebrating our aviation history

Lime Tree Theatre: Fantastic cultural space that hosts big local and touring productions

Adare Manor: Afternoon tea at the mooted Ryder Cup venue is a delightful treat

City centre shopping: Limerick has an eclectic range of boutiques and department stores

Kidstown: Two expansive play centres for the young ones to run free, in Corbally and Ballysimon

The East Room: Fine dining in stunning setting of the White House on University of Limerick's deservedly renowned campus

spring breaks 2019



A fascinating visitor experience: King John's Castle in the heart of Limerick city has flourished since its overhaul in 2014 with some amazing interactive exhibitions



Seat of power: Limerick Museum in the former Franciscan Church on Henry Street is home to some 60,000 artefacts

take a break in LIMERICK

Immerse yourself in rich history of Shannonside

IF you are coming for a weekend break to Limerick, and aside from shopping, eating and relaxing, do remember there are many superb historical sites that are well worth a visit.

Nestling on the banks of the Shannon, Limerick is a perfect location if you want to explore both Kerry and Clare with the bonus of coming back to a city every night which has plenty to offer from every perspective.

Limerick has a wealth of historical buildings and artefacts and no better place to start than King John's Castle. Shannon Heritage which runs the 13th century castle has, in recent years, made stunning changes to the visitor experience. At the castle you have a state-of-the-art interpretive activities and exhibitions with 21st century touch screen technology and 3D models so that tourists and visitors can

interact as they learn about the tales of the famous siege of Limerick.

Nearby there is a number of fascinating historical treasures. A very short walk away is St Mary's Cathedral, now an Anglican (Church of Ireland) place of worship, which is a fascinating building, over 850 years old, which welcomes visitors.

The Cathedral is one of the oldest buildings in Limerick and is part of the medieval quarter. It was originally the Royal Palace for the Kings of Thomond. You won't be disappointed as the minute you enter, you will be brought back in time.

Housing much of our historical treasures - up to 60,000 of them in fact - is the Limerick Museum on Henry Street, the oldest local authority museum in the state.

Also nearby, actually sitting right on the banks of the Shannon and next to Thomond Bridge on Clancy Strand is

one of Limerick's most famous landmarks. The Treaty Stone commemorates the Treaty of Limerick signed in 1691.

The stone is situated on Clancy Strand, beside the river Shannon and opposite King John's Castle.

Opposite is another famous religious landmark, St Munchin's Church. While there, ask the locals to explain the curse of St Munchin to you. If you want you can then just walk the beautiful boardwalk along Clancy strand admiring the river as you make your way back into the city centre.

Bunratty Castle and Folk Park is just a 10 minute drive from the city and well worth a visit. And, if you have time and have a car, there are other magnificent historical sites in Adare, one of Ireland's most beautiful villages; nearby Askeaton, the county capital Newcastle West and on the east side of the county, Kilmallock and Lough Gur.



Other pubs spend big to achieve the old world charm that O'Shaughnessy's in Glin naturally exudes



A warm welcome awaits in Flannery's bar on Shannon Street

Raise your glass to the rich variety of pubs in Limerick

While Limerick's reputation as a sporting mad city and county precedes it, one light we are guilty of sometimes hiding under a bushel is our great nightlife - particularly our fabulous range of pubs.

The city, of course, offers a wealth of choice for any visitor and great options for any night out of the week - be it a cheeky Tuesday or a full-on Friday.

If you're more drawn to the glamorous joints, then a trip to Limerick's newest venue, Maggie Choo's on O'Connell Street, is a must.

Opened as recently as last November it has been beautifully designed and lovingly appointed. A great place to glam up and get a cocktail. Its equally stylish sister bar, 101, sits next door offering another sumptuous space.

House Limerick on the quays also draws a stylish crowd, while further

down the docks sits Dolan's, one of Ireland's premier music venues.

One of the city's best spots for a trad session, it also dominates the pop and rock scene in Limerick bringing in countless top acts.

Pharmacia on Sarsfield Street is another venue alive with brilliant music nights.

For those more into their traditional bars, Limerick City Centre boasts a number of great pubs.

Tom Collins on Cecil Street is a big favourite as is The White House on O'Connell Street. You won't go far without hitting a Flannery's either - there are four - while Mother Macs and The Wickham Tap are great spots for those that love their ales.

For those venturing out into the county there are some great pubs to check out as well.

Follow the names of Collins and Chawke, (including Aunty Lena's) in Adare and you won't go far wrong.

You certainly won't miss Clancy's bar and restaurant during a drive or

amble through Bruff. A giant mural of John Hayes adorns the outside and a warm welcome is guaranteed within. Known for its steak, you won't be hungry or thirsty leaving Clancy's.

Pa McGrath's in Boher does a roaring lunch trade for locals and travellers on the N24. It even found favour with former US Secretary of State John Kerry who popped in for a bite to eat in 2016. John and all its customers enjoy the traditional old-time feel of the thatched pub.

At Limerick's western tip of the Wild Atlantic Way sits the lovely village of Glin, which periodically finds itself in the news over the celebrity visitors to its castle, which is owned by the family of film star Dominic West.

None other than Taylor Swift was a recent visitor, but whoever goes there always pays a visit to O'Shaughnessy's at the top of the main street. Known locally as The Captain's, its interior is a glorious throwback to the past, in the best, most unaffected way. The welcome and the stout are just as good.



Mother Macs is a welcoming ale house in the city centre

take a break in LIMERICK

TOP 10 SIGHTS TO SEE

- 1: As you'll see from the facing page, Limerick is replete with historical attractions, not least King John's Castle.
- 2: The Hunt Museum on Patrick Street in the city is home to one of the quirkiest collections in the country.
- 3: Curraghchase Forest Park is a wonderful place to wander through nature for a few hours.
- 4: Askeaton in the west and Kilmallock in the east are two examples of Limerick's superb medieval heritage.
- 5: The gorgeous Clare Glens riverside walk near Murroe forms part of the boundary with Tipperary.
- 6: Adare is a premier tourism attraction, a beautiful village, re-energised by the refurbished Adare Manor golf resort.
- 7: The Ballyhoura bike trails offer some of the best off-road trail action in the country for the adventurous minded.
- 8: Lough Gur, near Bruff, is not only lovely but a site of historical importance, as is the Grange Stone Circle.
- 9: The Knights Walk in Glin winds uphill around the village's castle offering wonderful estuary vistas.
- 10: Newcastle West, the county town, boasts the superbly refurbished Desmond Castle, among other attractions.



Maggie Choo's and 101 are two of Limerick's most stylish spots to while away the evening - and the night!

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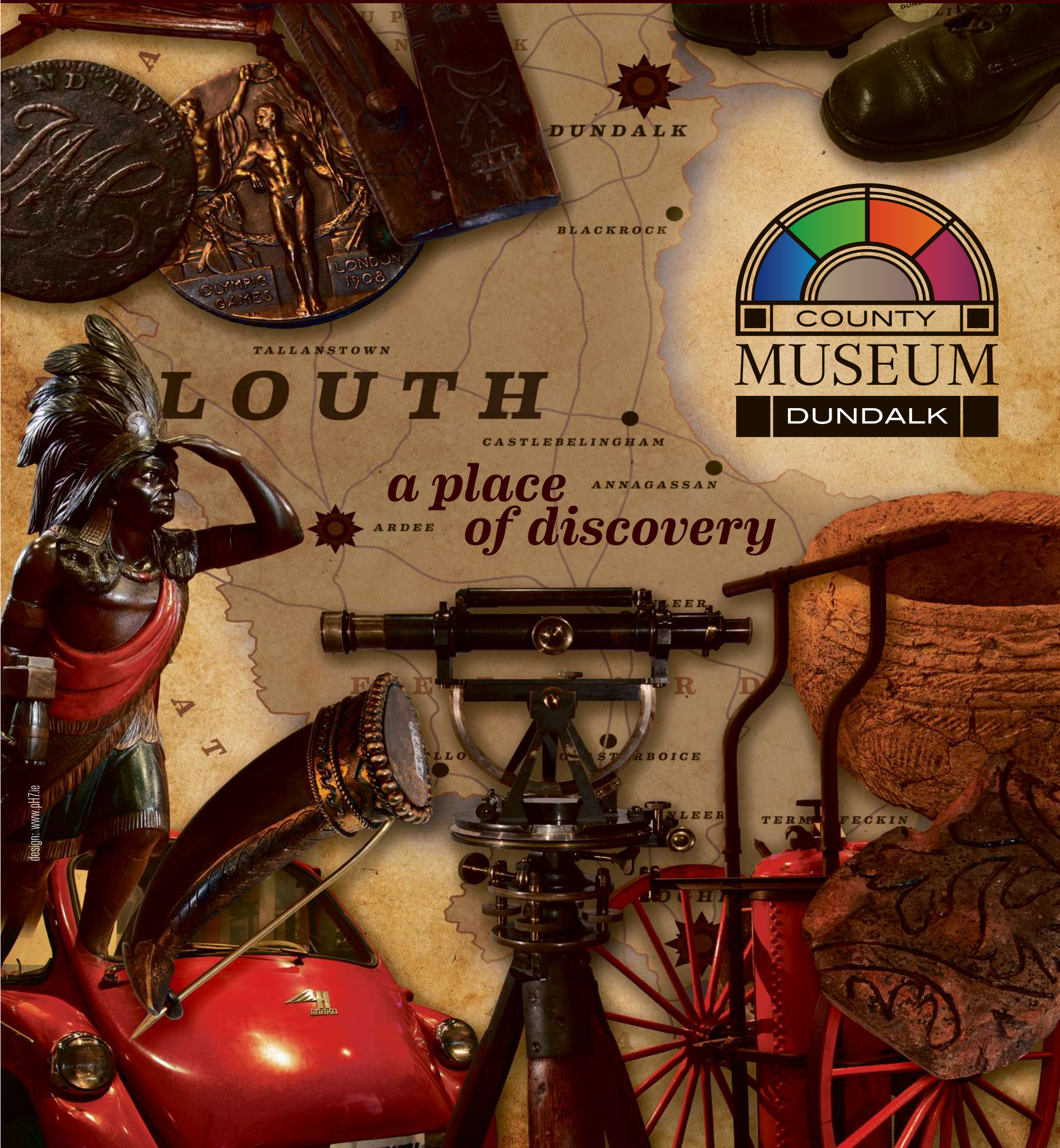
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DON'T MISS THIS

The Spirit Store: The George's Quay in Dundalk has much to offer, from live music to comedy and even a few drinks in between.

Airbound Trampoline: This indoor trampoline park is situated in the Northlink Business Park in Dundalk

Funtasia Water Park: Home to massive water slides, this leisure complex in Drogheda is suitable for all ages.

Carlingford Oyster Festival: An annual family fun event, this year's festival takes place from August 8-12.

Skypark: With a huge zip-line park in Carlingford that caters for all ages, Skypark is the largest aerial adventure course in Ireland.

Aura Leisure Centre: Home to one of Ireland's best swimming academies, Aura Leisure has centres in Dundalk and Drogheda.

The Dundalk Stadium: An all-weather racing stadium for horse and greyhound racing

Whiteriver Park: Home to a modern kart racing track - Whiteriver Park in Collon is one for the speed demons!

Port Beach: This Blue Flag beach just north of Clogherhead village offers stunning views on a clear day.

Listoke Distillery and Gin School: This unique distillery in Drogheda is Ireland's only gin school.



Carlingford is the jewel in the crown of the North East and a regular mecca for tourists to the area. Check out the wonderful array of pubs and beautiful historic sites



Dundalk town centre has a host of sights and pubs to visit

take a break in LOUTH & the northeast

Wee County has lots to offer everyone - big and small!

It may be known as the Wee County, but there is nothing small about the beautiful and interesting tourist attractions in county Louth. There are some great places to visit.

Starting in the north of the county with the Cooley mountains: two great ridges which orient northwest to southeast, with Slieve Foy being the highest peak at 588m and also the highest peak in County Louth.

This mountain range is steeped in legend and is also well known as a great hiking area, giving hikers fun and challenging opportunities.

The mountains will lead you down to Carlingford. This quaint village is a beautiful area listed as a medieval town. The town has 13th century castles, be sure to check out both Taaffe's and King John's castles.

Carlingford is also host to many pubs and eateries for the hungry tourists, including PJ's Oyster Bar & Restaurant where you can enjoy Carlingford oyster and Taaffe's red ale.

Carlingford Abbey is a medieval Dominican abbey and national monument located in the village and is a beautiful spot to wander and take in some history of Carlingford.

Check out the ferry from Carlingford to the Greencastle Royal Castle, Kilkeel, located in a tranquil setting overlooking Carlingford Lough, well worth the short ferry crossing.

For the adventure seeker, there is a great adventure centre in Carlingford, there are many activities to partake in, such as Laser Combat, Skypark and Archery to name but a few.

In terms of accommodation, there are hotels and a host of self-catering

holiday homes to rent for any occasion.

Dundalk town is host to the County Louth Museum, which is centrally located close to the town centre, near lots of amenities and transport links. There are many collections and exhibitions housed in the museum.

The collections date as far back as the Stone Age up to present day. A current exhibition shows the history of the Irish during World War 1.

Monasterboice, just north of Drogheda is a great place to visit and is the site of an ancient monastery. The historic ruins in Monasterboice are of an early Christian settlement in County Louth, north of Drogheda.

On the site, visitors can discover an old graveyard, two churches and a sundial but Monasterboice is most famous for its spectacular high crosses and round towers, another must see during any trip to the North East.



Castle Roche is a wonderful example of a Norman castle and offers spellbinding views of the local landscape



St Patrick's Cathedral in Dundalk town centre is a must for any visitors to the region

Have a flutter at the races or spend a day by the beach

If you fancy a flutter at the races, then a visit to Dundalk Stadium, Ireland's first all-weather racecourse, is a must. The stadium is also the country's first floodlit racecourse as well as being the world's first dual-purpose horse and greyhound stadium.

Dundalk Stadium is operational 52 weeks of the year with greyhound racing every week and 36 all-weather fixtures confirmed for 2019.

This €35m state of the art racing stadium offers top class facilities, including a 400 seat restaurant, carvery, fast food outlet and several full-service licensed bars.

Dundalk itself has excellent road and rail infrastructure – and is perfectly located on the east coast. Within a 30 mile radius there is a

population of 428,000. A 50 mile radius brings in Ireland's two main cities, Dublin and Belfast, increasing the catchment to in excess of three million people.

Dundalk Stadium is one of the most modern racecourses in Ireland, offering customers unforgettable night time entertainment with superb corporate hospitality and post-racing entertainment until after midnight.

The Champions Restaurant is fully glass fronted, overlooking both horse and greyhound race tracks and has a panoramic view of the Cooley Mountains.

A four-course meal is served at a leisurely pace throughout racing every Friday and Saturday night followed by music in Gallops Bar. It is a night not to be missed!

Other facilities at Dundalk Stadium

include a fast-food outlet in Sprinters Bar, Silks Carvery on the ground floor, Intermediate Bar and Gallops Bar, ATM and free car parking.

After a busy day at the races, why not head down the coast to Blackrock?

Here you'll find lots of gorgeous coastline to feast your eyes on. Blackrock is a small coastal village which lies on the shores of Dundalk Bay, and is a short 10-minute drive from Dundalk.

It has a beautiful promenade, with a variety of beaches, seafront cafés and traditional tea-rooms.

The local community organize lots of events throughout the year and the sea is a haven for beach-worshippers and sports enthusiasts alike.

Fun at the horses, or relaxing along the coastline of the northeast – lovely Louth has it all.



No trip to Louth would be complete without a day out at the races at Dundalk Stadium

take a break in LOUTH & the northeast

TOP 10 SIGHTS TO SEE

- 1:** The Cooley Peninsula is a fantastic place to visit, it has the highest peak in county Louth.
- 2:** Proleek Dolmen is situated just outside Dundalk at Ballymascanlon and dates back to the Neolithic Period.
- 3:** The Boyne Valley is the historic centre of the northeast.
- 4:** Castle Roche is a must for any tourist - it is a 13th century Norman castle on the outskirts of Dundalk.
- 5:** Ardee Castle is significant for being the largest fortified medieval tower house in Ireland.
- 6:** Known locally as Cúchulainn's Castle, the ruins of a late 18th century castle stands on top of the mound of Castletown Motte in Dundalk - well worth a visit!
- 7:** King John's Castle in Carlingford towers over the village.
- 8:** St. Laurence's Gate in Drogheda is widely regarded as one of the finest of its kind in Europe.
- 9:** Beaulieu House outside Drogheda is believed to be the finest example of Irish domestic architecture to survive from the Restoration.
- 10:** An Grianán is a 'Big House' run by the Irish Countrywomen's Association as a centre for learning, personal development and recreation.



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The Proleek Dolmen at Ballymascanlon is a fine example of the remarkable depth of history in the region



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DON'T MISS THIS

Kildare Town: Is full of heritage that's not to be missed, from sites associated with St Brigid to the nearby National Stud

Canals: Whether by barge trip or by bike, these 1790s engineering marvels, the Grand and Royal, are experiencing a renaissance

Golf: If it's your thing, Kildare has numerous great courses at the K Club and Carton House, to name but two

The bog: Whether it's Lullymore or the Bog of Allen Nature Centre, there are many ways to experience something that has defined much of the county.

Museum of Style Icons: It's upstairs in Newbridge Silverware and has a huge range of silver screen memorabilia

Shackleton Trail: Explorer Ernest caught the imagination of the world — you can see where he was born and spent his youth

Made of Athy: A trail with an eye-opening homegrown exploration of the famous names from music whose heritage hails from Athy, from Johnny Marr of The Smiths to Neil Hannon of The Divine Comedy

Burtown House & Gardens: A 300-year-old Quaker house with amazing gardens and a fabulous restaurant

Kildare Village: This huge retail outlet at Junction 13 on the M7 houses glamour and bargains galore from brands including Calvin Klein, Karen Millen, Under Armour and many more

spring breaks 2019



These statues of legendary Fiannian warrior Fionn MacCumhail, who is closely associated with the Hill of Allen and the Curragh, with his hounds Bran and Sceolan, guards the entrance to the plains, and can be seen by motorists driving to Newbridge or the Curragh using the M7 Junction 12 exit



Some of Ireland's finest golf courses are located in Kildare — Carton House, just outside Maynooth is one of the best examples

take a break in KILDARE

County Kildare has relaxed blend of rural and urban

Kildare is such a busy county that it is impossible to easily summarise and harder again to pick out its highlights.

Yet for all that busyness, it remains a relaxed place, somewhere a visitor can experience the best that a county with a nicely-blended hybrid of rural and cosmopolitan urban life can offer.

A day could begin, for argument's sake, with a walk in the idyllic tranquility of Donadea Forest Park, or on the famed Curragh Plains, and end in one of the county's many fine restaurants followed by a night of theatre — with some loud and hairy laps of Mondello Park in the middle!

With attractions ranging from the rurally-oriented, like Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park, to the glamorous such as Kildare Village, and

refined, like eating a meal at Sallins restaurant Two Cooks, which has a Michelin Bib Gourmand, the sheer number of activities available to the visitor is complimented by their enormous variety.

With two railway lines, three motorways and several bus companies running numerous trips on a daily basis, it is easy to get to Kildare, and, just as importantly, also to get around the county.

The county's proximity to Dublin is part of what makes it easy to access, with its good transport links to the city.

This proximity has also fundamentally informed the character of the county down through history, with much of what Kildare has to offer a direct result of its closeness to Dublin, such as the great houses of the gentry including Castletown House and Carton House in the county's north.

Indirectly, the development of the world-famous equine industry in the county is very closely linked to an expertise developed over the centuries by the presence of the military in the Curragh and Naas.

If history is your thing, then Kildare is a conucopia of surprises and hidden gems.

In recent years, archaeologists have uncovered several important medieval sites throughout the county, including what is believed to be the county's first stud farm, south of Kilcullen.

But if you prefer your history to be a little more current, you could try the excellent Quaker museum in Ballitore, or the college's museum at Maynooth University where Nicholas Callan invented the induction coil.

Whatever interests you, you'll always find something in Kildare to engage you.



Both the beauty of Castletown House, in Celbridge, and its history are impressive to say the least, with visitors getting a chance to imagine the life of an Irish duchess more than 200 years ago

The canals are enjoying a renaissance as after more than half a century of neglect and under-use, they are now being opened up for tourists on boats or on bicycles

If it's food and drink you're after, Kildare has plenty

Any good visit to Kildare should always include one of its famous restaurants, the continued success of which are an unavoidable sign that the Lilywhites are enthusiastic foodies.

Finding restaurants that regularly feature in the top 10 of best Irish eateries, and in one case has a Michelin Bib Gourmand, is perhaps the essence of any trip to Kildare — that it is full of surprises, of nooks and crannies that delight and amaze in equal measure.

The Ballymore Inn, in Ballymore Eustace, is consistently ranked as one of the best in the country, along with Two Cooks in Sallins (recipients of that Bib) and Canteen in Celbridge.

Newcomer Novak's in Athy is making a name for itself, and that's not forgetting all that Maynooth's Main

Street has to offer with the Avenue, Bistro 53, Picaderos and Donatellos to pick and choose from.

Hartes and the Silken Thomas in Kildare town and the Dew Drop Inn in the heart of Kill village are always consistently good, while Vie de Chateau in Naas is a favourite with locals and visitors alike.

In their own quiet way, Les Olives Farm and Food in Naas serves up excellence in an intimate setting. Unsurprisingly, and just like the Ballymore Inn, they grow a considerable amount of the food that is served in their restaurant.

It's not just about fine dining. The casual visitor would be hard pressed to believe that clattering over bog roads out in West Kildare will bring them anywhere of a gourmet note, but then a pint and a steak at The Grill Shack in Roches Pub near Donadea is the best

answer to that. Nearby Connolly's is also a great bet for the quintessential quiet pint.

Charlie Weld's in Roberstown has a wonderful old-world charm to match its location in the historic village.

And who could forget or ignore O'Brien's on Emily Square in Athy? It is the quintessential Irish pub with groceries in the front and a pub in the back.

Elsewhere, Fletcher's pub in Naas is a haven of consistency, where good pints and even better chat reigns supreme.

Naas is also home to the lively Kavanagh's and McCormack's, while Newbridge has plenty to offer between Harrigans, O'Rourke's and Judge Roy Beans'.

Maynooth pubs are definitely worth a look, with local favourites including Brady's, the Roost and O'Neill's.



A visit to Kildare would be incomplete without checking out Naas Farmer's Market on a Saturday morning on Friary Road

take a break in KILDARE

TOP 10 SIGHTS TO SEE

- 1:** The Curragh at dawn. You haven't lived until you have seen the early-morning fog roll off the plains to reveal racehorses being exercised
- 2:** The Parade Ring at either the Curragh, Naas or Punchestown for thrilling moments from the sport of kings
- 3:** The college chapel at Maynooth University. Two centuries old it remains one of the world's most spectacular
- 4:** Roches Pub, Donadea. The 'sinking pub', with its wonky, lopsided porch, is a sight to behold, with great Guinness!
- 5:** Donadea Forest Park is one of several lovely woodlands, as well as Killinthomas and Monasterevin woods
- 6:** The Leinster Aqueduct near Naas, is an amazing feat of engineering, bringing the Grand Canal over the Liffey
- 7:** Ballinafagh Lake near Prosperous proves that you don't need to go far to find pure stillness and peace of mind
- 8:** St Patrick's Day Parade in Newbridge is a great spectacle
- 9:** The Wonderful Barn, near Leixlip was possibly a folly and possibly a barn, but is very impressive
- 10:** The view of Kildare from the top of the Hill of Allen is stunning, and, on a clear day you can see Dublin, Wicklow, Carlow, Laois, Offaly, Westmeath and Meath



spring
breaks
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DON'T MISS THIS

Tradfest: On St Patrick's Weekend, this festival of music is a real show stopper for the city.

Hurling: Winners of more All-Ireland titles than any other county, Kilkenny's hurling heritage is world renowned - we have the All Blacks of hurling. The county side will welcome some big names this year in the championship — notably Galway and Dublin.

National Reptile Zoo: Better believe it! Gowran is home to all sorts of creepy crawlies and carnivores where you can get right up close and personal with snakes and spiders ...

Kilkenny Whiskey Guild: The first recorded mention of whiskey, or uisce beatha was in the Red Book of Ossory and refers to it being made in Kilkenny. Now the Kilkenny Whiskey guild maintains the knowledgeable tradition of the nation's favourite tippie, with monthly gahterings open to the public in any of the 10 guild houses.

MacDonagh Junctions Famine Workhouse: A free tour detailing the history of the workhouse, on the site of the very impressive MacDonagh Junction shopping centre.

War Memorials: Kilkenny has two World War One memorials - one at the Peace Park by the Nore in the city and the other in Callan.

St Canice's Tower: Climb the steps and see the city as the monks once did.

spring breaks 2019



You can walk the line through the tree tops at Castlecomer Discovery Park - and also fly down the longest zip line in the country at the venue



The Smithwicks Experience, take a taste and step back in time

take a break in KILKENNY

From strolls to hikes, to bike rides - even ziplines!

Kilkenny is certainly not short of leisurely things to do. The walks around the city, the marked cycle routes and hill climbs around the county make Kilkenny a very attractive destination for the entire family.

Take Callan, and the home of Edmund Ignatious Rice, founder of the Christian Brothers. Around this quaint farmhouse is a nice stroll, with a pond, chickens and goats. It's a real pleasure to see. Another nice stroll for the younger members of the family is the Nore Valley Park, a wonderful petting farm.

Stepping up the pace, the Castle Park, Canal Walks and Linear Walks would warm you up for the more brisk walks around woods like Jenkinstown, Millennium wood and then on to the

climb up Brandon Hill outside Graignamagh. Other wonderful walks feature in Windgap and Tullahought area in south Kilkenny — notably the Kilmacoliver walk and the spectacular views of Sliabh na mBan.

Castle Morris woods in Piltown is also something special.

Then it's on your bike, there are many wonderful cycle routes - indeed there is a cycle lane the entire way from Kilkenny City to Carlow, obviously avoiding all motorway traffic.

In the city, Kilkenny Cycle Tours will hire bikes, and you can cycle out to Bennettsbridge on country roads, and return to Kilkenny by walking along the river Nore, it's a must-do.

Also, if you're worn out walking and still have some sights to see, then take one of the two tour trains available outside the gates of Kilkenny Castle.

For the more adventurous take a

trip out to Castlecomer. Apart from viewing the fine museum detailing the history of coalmining in the area, the Discovery Park offers tree top climbs and a wonderful zip line right through the woods. There is also a playground, fishing and wonderful woodland strolls with fairy villages throughout - Castlecomer Discovery is a must for all.

So for active family fun, Kilkenny has a lot to offer - other facilities include the Watershed leisure complex which has a 25m pool, toddlers pool, gym, soccer pitches and running track.

Apart from the Nore, Kilkenny is also blessed with the stunning Barrow - an anglers paradise and suitable for boating from St Mullins right the way up to Dublin.

Many locks and quaysides are dotted along the way, making your boating trip all the more memorable, with plenty of places to rest awhile.



Music festivals and outdoor concerts are a big attraction during the Spring and Summer in Kilkenny, attracting large crowds from near and far

Picking a winner - check out Gowran Park, one of the top courses in the country with a reputation for hospitality second to none - the National Hunt season at Gowran concludes on March 9

Culinary capital where fun and food is definitely king

Kilkenny is the weekend destination of choice for couples and groups looking to sample the nightlife of the City - in particular its fine dining options, traditional bars and many festivals.

Langton House Hotel is one of the most famous venues in the country, offering food, drink and a top-class nightclub. It is one of the leading venues on John Street, which starts next to John's Bridge with spots like Matt the Millers on one side and the River Court Hotel on the other.

John Street extends almost to the MacDonagh Junction shopping centre, and other leading venues include the Kilford Arms Hotel and Biddy Earley's.

Other popular spots are the Parade, with hotels like the Ormonde Hotel,

Club House Hotel, Hibernian Hotel and Pembroke Hotel all situated just off it. In the middle of Patrick Street is Butler House, offering a very special stay in Kilkenny with fine food. The restaurant at Anocht, above Kilkenny Design Centre, is also very special.

On High Street, Paris Texas is a must-see, American style cuisine with fine beers and top cocktails. A visit to Kyteler's Inn should also be on your list - famous for its 13th century owner and witch, Dame Alice. Then there's that big hit with locals and visitors alike, the Marble City Bar. Off the High Street there are some gems - Rafter Dempsey's and Aroi on Friary Street and Petronella's on the Butter Slip.

Kilkenny has two Michelin star restaurants - Campagne in Gas House Lane and the Lady Helen restaurant the beautiful Mount Juliet Estate.

Around the town are four star hotels - like Newpark Hotel, Spring Hill Court Hotel and of course the exclusive Lyrath Estate, with its award-winning conference centre and splendid setting just two miles out the road from the city centre.

The festivals really kick off with Tradfest, then the Roots Festival and spring concludes with the Cat Laughs festival - just for kicks. But every weekend there is something happening on the ancient streets of Kilkenny. There are a couple of tours for tippers in Kilkenny - the Smithwick's Experience is very popular on Parliament Street. Sullivan's Brewery on John Street, and Ballykeefe distillery near Ballycallan are also worth calling too. Highbank Orchard near Cuffesgrange is also worth visting to sample some local drinks.



Tradfest, one of the top music festivals in the country

take a break in KILKENNY



spring breaks 2019

Let your imagination run wild at Woodstock Gardens

TOP 10 SIGHTS TO SEE

- 1: Visit the Castle - Kilkenny's medieval castle sits on acres of lush parkland to rest or play in.
- 2: Walk the Nore - a river bank linear walk, which takes in both banks and goes all the way to Bennettsbridge.
- 3: See Kells - Ancient battlements can make your imagination run wild in this spot by the Kings River.
- 4: Jerpoint Park - Kilkenny's forgotten village just outside Thomastown, it's story is continuously unfolding.
- 5: Gathabawn Loop - a stunning walk in North Kilkenny, and stop off for refreshments in Mackey's.
- 6: Medieval Mile Museum, right on the Medieval Mile, the history of Kilkenny through families and titles is told.
- 7: Butler House gardens - a hidden gem in the city off Patrick Street, relax and unwind in this splendid setting.
- 8: Discovery Park - for walks and fun it, Castlecomer Discovery Park is simply the best.
- 9: Rothe House - this Tudor home is brought back to its former glory and is truly splendid - and the latest addition of a medieval garden is wonderful.
- 10: Woodstock Gardens - Specimen trees and acres to roam.

DON'T MISS THIS

Dunamaise Arts Centre:

The home of the arts in Laois plays host to a wide variety of theatre, music, dance, cinema and exhibitions as well as workshops.

Donaghmore Famine Museum:

This former workhouse details the lives and era of the people who lived within its walls.

Fly Fishing and Game Museum:

This museum in Attanagh explores the history of hunting and fishing in Ireland.

Local Breweries:

Check out the local breweries - Ballykilcavan Brewing and 12 Acres Brewing.

Laois Food:

Feast your taste buds in the local scene of organic and artesian food produce - a real treat, not to be missed.

The Arthouse and Library:

Located in Stradbally the facilities include studios, a gallery, garden space - an oasis for the arts.

Ballyfin Demesne:

A visit to this luxury five-star hotel will provide you with a thoroughly unique experience.

Ballintubbert Gardens & House:

The birthplace of Cecil Day Lewis is an experience which combines theater, literature and horticulture.

Heritage House Abbeyleix:

Dedicated to the history of one of Ireland's oldest planned towns, one of the highlights of this museum is the Carpet Factory exhibition room.

spring breaks 2019



On the trek to the Rock of Dunamaise, Laois' most famous landmark, and a must-see when visiting the county at any time of the year



Castletown village on the river Nore

take a break in LAOIS

Laois has options aplenty for outdoor enthusiasts

Laois boasts some of the most unspoilt countryside in the country. While the term hidden gem may seem cliched, this is truly the case, which a visit to the county will all too readily reveal.

For outdoor enthusiasts, Laois offers a wide variety of activities, whether its walking, hiking, cycling and mountain biking.

For walkers and hikers, the range of terrains to choose from is virtually unlimited. The Slieve Blooms mountains form the centerpiece of much of this, but they are supplanted by a wide array of choice throughout the county.

If it's the Slieve Blooms you are heading for, then its rich vein of landscapes, comprising blanket bogs, forestry paths, wooded valleys, mountains streams and waterfalls, are

all there to be plundered. There are 16 looped walks to choose from, with six different trail heads.

The walks are all mapped out with easy to follow directions. Why not try out the Capard or Brittas loops. Perhaps the Eco Walk at Glenbarrow which consists of ten stops, which are number sequenced and offer people information about the environment they are treading in.

The Slieve Bloom mountains are also home to one of the most exciting and unique tourism projects currently underway in the country, with the construction of the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bikes Trail by Coillte, in association with Laois and Offaly County Councils.

The project ultimately will feature over 100 kms of trails. Already a small section has been opened on the Offaly side and a further section is due to be

opened later this spring. However, the Slieve Blooms don't hold the franchise when it comes to outdoor activities.

Try out the raised boardwalk walk in Abbeyleix bog or take a trip down the road to the Durrow loops or the Oakvale walks in Stradbally.

Those who like history can avail of the free Laois Heritage Trails smartphone app which features photos, maps and multilingual audioguides to the Laois Heritage Trail and the Laois Monastic Trail. The app was introduced by Laois County Council as part of Ireland's Ancient East programme.

The spring is a time for getting out and rediscovering the joys of nature and Laois is the perfect location for doing this. The county also has a huge range of accommodation to suit all tastes and budgets, from world-class hotels to numerous B &Bs.



Regina McGinley, research assistant and Paula Maher, manager, at Heritage House Abbeyleix



Actress Mandy Moore visits Donaghmore Museum with Ellen Kilmartin, Trevor Stanley, Donaghmore Museum; Catherine Casey, Laois heritage officer, and Muireann Ni Chonail, Laois arts officer

The budding beauty of some wonderful locations

Experience the real essence of Spring this year with a break to Laois. The county has a multitude of wonderful locations to visit, many of which have remained largely undiscovered up to now.

Witness Spring take root in all its glory in locales like Heywood gardens, Ballintubbert gardens, Castle Durrow, Emo Court, to name just a few.

The splendour of Emo Court, for example, has to be seen to be fully appreciated.

Designed by architect James Gandon the house is a magnificent example of the neo-Classical style, reflecting the architecture of ancient Greece and Rome.

It is surrounded by beautiful gardens and sylvan parkland which

were first laid out in the 18th century and feature formal lawns, a lake, and woodland walks with many very fine trees and shrubs.

It's the perfect getaway for an afternoon, and can be rounded off with a visit to the Emo Tea Rooms at the house.

If you want to add a touch of heritage to your visit, then why not check out the Rock of Dunamase, a hugely important fortification in the Anglo-Norman period, which offers splendid panoramas of the rolling Laois countryside.

Timahoe, as well as being a charming village, is also home to one of the most splendid round towers in the country with its ornate carved doorway which sets it apart.

The county's museums offer a unique glimpse of the past. Visit

Donaghmore Workhouse and Agricultural museum, the Irish Fly Fishing and Game museum in Attanagh, the Steam museum in Stradbally and the Mountmellick museum to experience different facets of Irish history.

Laois' towns and villages, such as the heritage town of Abbeyleix, and places like Durrow, Stradbally and Castletown, each offer their own distinctive charms and a warm welcome for all visitors.

The county has an eclectic arts scene, centred in the Dunamase Arts Centre in Portlaoise and the Arthouse in Stradbally. To round off a visit, it's worth sampling some of the county's nightlife, from old world pubs to buzzing vibrant cocktail bars.

A visit to Laois will put a spring in your step, the perfect start to the year.



The boarded walkway at Abbeyleix bog

take a break in LAOIS

spring breaks 2019



The backdrop of Timahoe was the setting for the launch of the Timahoe Conservation Plan PICTURE: ALF HARVEY.

TOP 10 SIGHTS TO SEE

- 1:** The Rock of Dunamase. Laois' most famous landmark, this Anglo-Norman fortification boasts stunning views.
- 2:** The Slieve Bloom mountains are a pure gem, offering great vistas, and are ideal for walkers and hikers.
- 3:** Emo Court. The James Gandon mansion is open to the public and is set amidst beautiful parkland, ideal for walkers
- 4:** Abbeyleix Heritage town. The streetscape of this planned estate town is a must, as are its many historic buildings.
- 5:** Heywood Gardens - the Lutyens designed gardens feature a sunken walled garden, replete with a pond.
- 6:** Timahoe Round Tower is arguably the most singular of its kind in the country, owing to its ornate carved doorway.
- 7:** Mountmellick Museum details the history of Mountmellick embroidery and the town's Quaker industrial history.
- 8:** Aghaboe Abbey. The ruins of the Abbey are an oasis of peace today, but its history is colourful to say the least.
- 9:** Abbeyleix bog walk. The raised boardwalk offers a unique perspective on this walk across a unique ecosystem.
- 10:** Poet's Cottage Camross - a preserved thatched cottage offering a glimpse of rural life in the Ireland of the 1800s.



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DON'T MISS THIS

Nenagh Castle: A Butler castle from the 13th century. Climb to the top for views over the town.

St Flannan's Cathedral: In the twin towns of Ballina / Killaloe. Dating from the sixth century with its own ogham stone and medieval high cross.

Damer House: Built by Joseph Damer in the early 18th century in the courtyard of 14th century Roscrea Castle. One of the rooms is furnished in period style. It also has a restored mill displaying original St Cronan's high cross and pillar stone.

Walking trails: North Tipperary is replete with them - from lakeside walks to forest trails

Cloughjordan ecovillage: Ireland's first sustainable village with tours of the facilities, including its eco farm.

Bike Park Ireland: Take a lift in an old army truck to the top of the slopes before a breathtaking adventure ride back to base.

Water skiing: Learn how to wakeboard, water ski, wake skate, wake surf, barefoot, trick ski, bodyboard and zapcat on Lough Derg at Watermark Ski Club near Terryglass.

Semple Stadium: The spiritual home of the GAA and the iconic Trip to Tipp. Then visit Lar na Pairce GAA museum and Hayes Hotel, where it all began.

Ballinderry Model Railway: Not just for kids, a must-see for anybody fascinated by model trains and railways.

spring breaks 2019



Climb every mountain: exploring the trails above Lough Derg which take in Tonntinna and the Millennium Cross near Portroe, gives fantastic views across the lake to counties Clare, Galway, Limerick and as far down as the Shannon Estuary



Nenagh Castle: climb to the top for views over the town

take a break in TIPPERARY north

Plenty of options for walks or cycles on the wild side

Hillwalking and cycling have become two of the country's fastest growing tourism attractions, with numerous walking festivals starting up as more and more people begin to enjoy the outdoor life and pursue a more healthy lifestyle.

And it has now become ever more popular for groups to cycle the Wild Atlantic Way or bike it from Malin and Mizen.

Tipperary is no exception when it comes to offering plenty of outdoor activities, holding its own against the best of them. Tipperary writer and walker John G O'Dwyer has been to the forefront in promoting the walks in his native county.

North Tipperary offers countless woodland, forest and lakeshore walks,

with the most popular being the climb up Keeper Hill. Accessible from many points, the Ballyhourigan Loop (marked with purple arrows) explores the lower shoulders of Keeper Hill, and the hardy walker will enjoy incorporating the Keeper Hill trek to the summit (red arrows). From the village of Toor, follow the road (unclassified) in the direction of Newport. After 2km turn right onto a minor roadway and follow the Trailhead signs to reach the trailhead at Doonane.

Upperchurch runs one of the country's best walking festivals around what is locally referred to as "God's own country", while Silvermines has been running a festival for the past two years. Both offer mountain terrain and forest trails. The Coum trail travels along the ridge above Silvermines with views of Lough Derg and the old mining

sites. At the upper end of Lough Derg is Comincha Woods, a forest walk suitable for beginners.

For a pleasant trek along Lough Derg's shore, try Castlough Woods below Portroe. Above Portroe there is a trek from Killoran to Tonntinna and back, with a spur on the way down to the Millennium Cross.

Nenagh is a designated cycling hub, with cycle routes suitable for families as well as the more experienced cyclist, with signposted routes mostly along country roads.

The longest one, just under 70km, takes in the lake road from Terryglass and back through Cloughjordan. The routes, which start at Banba Square, are designed so that you can take short cuts back to base if the legs get too tired. Along the way there are plenty of great pubs and restaurants to replace lost energy.



Cabragh Wetlands is one of Tipperary's unspoilt natural beauty spots where nature and preservation of the countryside prevail. Don't miss this unique adventure



Visit the award winning Irish cultural experience of fleadh agus failte at Jim O The Mills on Thursday nights and enjoy some Irish music, conversation, ceol agus craic

History, culture, heritage and people make Tipp top

When all is said and done, there is much more to do in Tipperary than you might imagine. What with miles of scenic beauty spots, a great tradition of Irish music, song and dance, a rich theatrical heritage, and history galore, Tipperary really is a hidden gem in the heart of the country.

The recent centenary commemorations of the commencement of the War of Independence at Sologheadbeg in west Tipperary, adequately demonstrated Tipperary's unique place in Ireland since the foundation of the State. But, of course, history, culture, heritage and tradition go back much further than that and in the likes of the Devil's Bit,

where the devil allegedly took a bite out of the mountain and spat it out at Cashel for the famous rock, or perhaps in the ancient, historic and magnificently restored Holycross Abbey, a slice of the history of this part of Tipperary is beautifully illustrated.

Just a few miles away from the Abbey, see nature in its unspoilt form at the unique Cabragh Wetlands. View the thousands of species of flora, fauna, wildlife and nature at its most beautiful with the interpretive centre on hand to provide all the information you need. Take a walk along the trail, which is now wheelchair accessible, and marvel at the many hidden gems lurking in the high grass, the lakes and the hedgerows.

Perhaps a stroll in Templemore Town Park could be on the agenda as well. This magnificent park — the envy

of many towns — features a raised garden, lake, children's playground, GAA facilities, pitch and putt course, adult exercise area and of course a walking trail which is used extensively by locals and visitors alike. In truth, this is one of the finest parks of its kind in the country.

Perhaps when evening comes a trip to the famous Monks bar on Wednesday evening in Thurles for traditional Irish music, or maybe the award winning Jim O The Mills olde worlde public house nestling amongst the hills of Upperchurch, could be on the cards. If it's fine conversation, a few stories, music, song and dance, you are after, look no further than either of these two fine establishments.

North Tipp really has so much to offer the visitor - but it's the people of the county who make it so special.



Fancy a climb? Then why not check out the Devil's Bit, which is located only a few miles from Templemore

take a break in **TIPPERARY** north



The magnificently restored Holycross Abbey which stands on the banks of the River Suir

spring breaks 2019

TOP 10 SIGHTS TO SEE

- 1:** The Millennium Cross above Portroe, where, following a short walk, you will find magnificent vistas over Lough Derg.
- 2:** Nenagh Gaol and Genealogy Centre, walk in the footsteps of the jailed Cormack brothers, or trace your Tipp roots.
- 3:** MacDonagh Museum in Cloughjordan offers a fantastic insight into the executed Easter Rising leader and poet.
- 4:** Holycross Abbey, a 12th century abbey, for a walk in the footsteps of monks and see two relics of the True Cross.
- 5:** Redwood Castle, ancestral home of the O'Kennedys, later granted to the bardic family of MacEgan, is open for tours
- 6:** Roscrea Castle and Damer House built for protection purpose in Motte and Bailey style.
- 7:** Loughmore Castle. Located in the centre of Tipperary it is a castle in ruins that was first built in the 15th century.
- 8:** Historic Farney Castle, now the home and studio of Irish International Knitwear and Porcelain Designer Cyril Cullen.
- 9:** Famine Warehouse 1848 located in Ballingarry, which tells the story of the Young Irelanders.
- 10:** Keeper Hill, reached from a number of points around Newport, and, at 694m, a challenging walk for all levels.

DON'T MISS THIS

St Patrick's Day: All the big towns and some smaller villages hold colourful parades to mark the national holiday.

Horsing: Enjoy the Sport of Kings at picturesque tracks in Clonmel and Tipperary.

Marfield Lake: A beautiful location in Clonmel and a short walk to St. Patrick's Well.

Brú Ború: The home of the very best in traditional music in the shadow of the imposing Rock of Cashel.

County Museum: Located in Clonmel, this is a treasure trove of Tipperary's past.

Canoeing: The River Suir at Old Bridge in Clonmel is home to the only slalom course in Ireland outside Dublin.

Mountain walks: Take your pick from the Comeraghs, Knockmealdowns, Galtees and Slievenamon.

Golf: Welcome to a golfer's paradise with courses in Clonmel, Cahir, Carrick-on-Suir, Tipperary, Ballykisteen and Dundrum.

Restaurants: Tipperary is a foodie favourite with no shortage of locations for fine dining

Butler Trail: A fantastic trail around Cahir, Carrick-on-Suir and Clonmel revealing the influence and impact the Butler family dynasty.

Shopping: Top national brands in Clonmel and other major towns for retail therapy.

spring breaks 2019



The most iconic of Tipperary sites, the majestic and imposing Rock of Cashel, stands guard over the plains of Tipperary. If you haven't been there, what are you waiting for?



The splendid and historic Ormonde Castle, Carrick-on-Suir

Combining outdoor beauty and historical magnificence

Tipperary has everything except a coastline, but its inland setting boasts enough attractions to compensate for anything it might miss from the sea.

Few regions can offer anything to match it, from its southern boundary with three majestic mountain ranges, to the glorious river Suir as it winds its way through the county to the sea.

South Tipperary is an outdoor paradise that looks its resplendent best in spring.

Its attractions act as a magnet to those looking for activity or leisure.

Mountain ranges are proving hugely popular as short-break destinations, ideal for short hikes or more testing mountain walks.

And to have three so close together as the Comeraghs, Knockmealdowns and the Galtees means that visitors can

choose between them or else try all three to experience different challenges and experiences.

In addition, there are looped walks at Kilnamack Wood and Carey's Castle, just outside Clonmel off the Dungarvan Road; the Holy Year Cross and Glenary on the foothills of the Comeraghs; on the Blueway along the River Suir, east and west of Clonmel; and around Marlfield Lake.

Slievenamon, a smaller mountain than its southerly neighbours but famed in song and story, is also well worth a visit.

The wonderful Blueway between Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir, along the northern bank of the Suir, is one of the area's highlights, opening beautiful vistas of the river for both walkers and cyclists.

Greenways are proving to be major attractions across the country and the

Tipperary one can rival any for its glorious route between two of the area's major towns.

A visit to south Tipperary can also centre on history and architectural wonders such as the Rock of Cashel, Hore abbey and the Dominican abbey in Cashel; Cahir Castle and the Swiss Cottage in Cahir; the Main Guard in Clonmel and Ormonde Castle in Carrick-on-Suir.

They are all sited within easy reach of each other and open a window on Tipperary's fabled past.

The Rock of Cashel is one of the most visited public monuments in the country and not without reason.

Perched on a hillside overlooking the plains of Tipperary, it boasts more than one thousand years of local history.

If its walls could speak, they would beckon visitors to come and listen.

take a
break in
TIPPERARY
south



Located near the town of Cahir the Swiss Cottage was built around 1810 it is a fine example of an ornamental cottage and is special experience for its many visitors each year



The Glen of Aherlow and the Galtee Mountains of West Tipperary. Its fabulous scenery and mountain walks are a magnet for tourists throughout the year.

A superb food destination that's well worth a visit

Nestling in the Golden Vale, it's no surprise that Tipperary is the bread basket of Ireland and a top foodie location.

Its lush pastures have helped to transform the region into one of the top food destinations in the country.

Apart from a great selection of superb restaurants serving the very best of Irish and international cuisine, Tipperary has now become synonymous with a variety of home produced food and drink that give it a unique identity.

Most come under the umbrella of the Tipperary Food Producers Network whose talents have shot Tipp to become the number one foodie county in Ireland.

Why else would the Guild of Fine

Foods have chosen Tipperary to host its recent and prestigious Great Taste Awards, on a rare move out of its UK base?

It also recognised the achievement of Clonmel butcher Pat Whelan in winning its supreme accolade a year earlier, with his beef dripping.

Whelan's own cattle are reared on the fertile plains of Tipperary and it's that rich land that has developed and nurtured so much more outstanding produce.

It includes cheese that rivals the best that France can produce, succulent preserves, a remarkable array of fruit, tasty crisps, barm bracks, home baked bread and so much more from a range of artisan producers who always strive for perfection.

And Tipperary is not only the shrine of hurling but also the home of cider, a

drink that has become synonymous with Clonmel through the locally grown apples that go into the magic woven at the Bulmers plant in the town.

Producers have showcased their produce at a series of long-table dinners at iconic settings around the county and have even produced the Tipperary Breakfast to get the day off to the best possible start with all locally produced ingredients.

The Tipperary produce is on the menu at restaurants and gastro-pubs across the region as well as in most of the local markets.

It's at its very best now as spring arrives.

Even the thought of a trip to Tipp should be enough to get the taste buds going. So make Tipperary your go-to destination for superb food!



The peaceful and tranquil St Patrick's Well just outside of Clonmel. Reputedly once a meeting place of St. Declan and St. Patrick

take a break in TIPPERARY south

TOP 10 SIGHTS TO SEE

- 1: Rock of Cashel: 'The Rock' is one of Ireland's most visited tourist sites every year. An iconic national treasure.
- 2: Cahir Castle: Located in the town of Cahir on the River Suir it was built in 11th century, one of largest in Ireland.
- 3: Ormonde Castle: Built in 1560 but recently renovated, this Carrick-on-Suir Castle is the one-time home of the Butlers.
- 4: Glen of Aherlow: This famed and majestic area of west Tipperary has amazing landscapes and scenery.
- 5: Main Guard: Located in the heart of Clonmel, the Main Guard is a National Monument and former courthouse.
- 6: Fethard Horse Country Experience: An amazing interactive exhibition linking people, the land and horse.
- 7: Clonmel to Carrick-on-Suir blueway: 13 miles of walks and cycles along banks of the River Suir. Peace!
- 8: Swiss Cottage: Located near Cahir town, it was built around 1810. A fine example of an ornamental cottage.
- 9: St Patrick's Well: A picturesque and peaceful holy well located outside Clonmel, once visited by St Patrick
- 10: Slievenamon: Synonymous with Tipperary, and famed in song, the mountain gracefully overlooks the Suir Valley.



spring breaks 2019

A stretch of the Clonmel to Carrick-on-Suir Blueway on the banks of the Suir at Poulakerry Castle south of Kilsheelan Village. In the background is Slievenamon famed in song, which gracefully overlooks the Suir Valley

ANNER HOTEL



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