

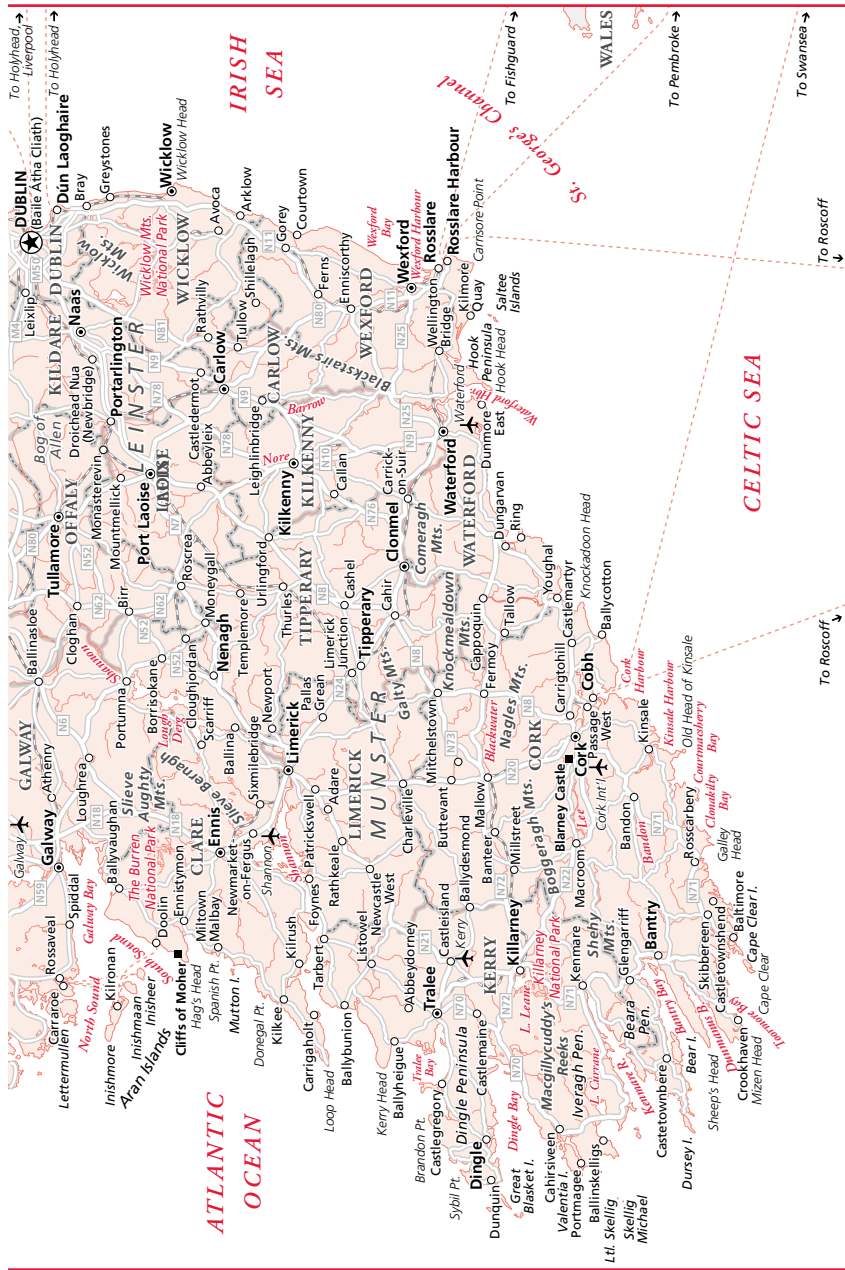
The Best of Ireland

For visitors, Ireland is an ideal country to traverse, and with its varied and extensive offerings within a compact frame, it's visually addictive. Within a few miles, you can travel from rugged coastline to smooth pastureland to towering mountains to gloomy peat bog. You can spend the night in ancient castles or modern spa hotels, dine on fine Irish cuisine or snack on fish and chips. The sheer number of sights, villages, charming pubs, and adorable restaurants and shops is overwhelming—you always feel that you might be missing something. The country's varied offerings can be a bit dazzling, so it's nice to have somebody help you focus. That's why we've put together this list of some of our favorite places and things in Ireland. We hope that while you're here, you'll find a few of your own.

1 THE BEST PICTURE-POSTCARD TOWNS

- **Dalkey** (County Dublin): The cutest of a string of upscale seaside towns in suburban Dublin nicknamed “Bel Eire” for their wealth, beauty, and density of celebrity residents, Dalkey is both a short drive and a million miles away from the busy city. With a castle, a mountaintop folly, lovely beaches and some fine restaurants, this is a town that tempts you to settle into its comfortable affluence. See chapter 6.
- **Carlingford** (County Louth): The ancient name for this gorgeous little town is *Cuan Aghmeach*, which means “Haven of the People with the Perfect Reputation.” With its castle ruins overlooking the glassy lough, and pedestrian-friendly lanes filled with colorful shops, cafes, and pubs, this place tends to live up to its reputation. See chapter 7.
- **Inistioge** (County Kilkenny): Nestled in the Nore River Valley, surrounded by undulating hills, this riverfront village with two spacious greens and a host of pubs cries out to be photographed. Its rivers and lakes are swimming with fish and attract hosts of anglers. See chapter 8.
- **Kinsale** (County Cork): Kinsale's narrow streets all lead to the sea, dropping steeply from the hills around the harbor, although the crowds of visitors teeming on the sidewalks every summer attest to the fact that the Kinsale secret is out. The walk from Kinsale through Scilly to Charles Fort and Frower Point is breathtaking. Kinsale has the added benefit of being a foodie town, with no shortage of good restaurants. See chapter 9.
- **Dingle/An Daingean** (County Kerry): Dingle is a charming hilltop medieval town. Its stone buildings ramble up and down hills, and its small population is relaxed about visitors. It has lots of little diners and picturesque pubs, and a lovely, historic church. See chapter 10.
- **Kenmare** (County Kerry): It's easy to fall in love with Kenmare, with its stone cottages, colorful gardens, and flowers overflowing from window boxes. It's also home to several elegant hotels, so makes an enchanting base when exploring the Ring of Kerry. See chapter 10.





- **Athlone** (County Westmeath): Sitting at the edge of the River Shannon, its streets curving around a sturdy, fortress-like castle, Athlone is a charmer. Houses are painted in bright hues, and with its small, funky boutiques and spirit of fun, it has the feel of a busy university town. Good restaurants and lively pubs add to its charms. See chapter 12.
- **Ardara** (County Donegal): On the southwest coast of County Donegal,

the tiny town of Ardara looks as if it were carved out of a solid block of granite. Its streets undulate up and down the rocky hills, and are lined with little boutiques and charming arts shops, many selling clothes made of the famed Donegal wool. You can wander its entirety in a few minutes. It's a bite-size place. See chapter 14.

2 THE BEST NATURAL WONDERS

- **MacGillycuddy's Reeks** (County Kerry): A mountain range on the Iveragh Peninsula, MacGillycuddy's Reeks not only has the best name of any mountain range in Ireland, but also the highest mountain on the island, Carrauntuohill (1,041m/3,414 ft.). The Reeks are among Ireland's greatest spectacles. See p. 326.
- **The Slieve Bloom Way** (County Laois): Slieve Bloom, Ireland's largest and most unspoiled blanket bog, rises gently above the peat fields. Its beauty—gentle slopes, glens, rivers, waterfalls, and bog lands—is subtle but persistent, and it is comparatively untouched. You can have it more or less to yourself, apart from its deer and foxes, and an occasional frolicking otter. See p. 380.
- **The Burren** (County Clare): We can guarantee this: The Burren is one of the strangest landscapes you're likely to see. Its vast limestone grassland is spread with a quilt of wildflowers from as far afield as the Alps, all softening the stark stones jutting out of the ground. Its inhabitants include nearly every species of butterfly found in Ireland. See p. 386.
- **Cliffs of Moher** (County Clare): Rising from Hag's Head to the south, these magnificent sea cliffs reach their full

height of 214m (702 ft.) just north of O'Brien's Tower. The views of the open sea, of the Aran Islands, and of the Twelve Bens mountains of Connemara (see below) are spectacular. A walk south along the cliff edge at sunset makes a perfect end to any day. See p. 390.

- **The Twelve Bens** (County Galway): Amid Connemara's central mountains, bogs, and lakes, the rugged Twelve Bens range crowns a spectacular landscape. Some of the peaks are bare and rocky, others clothed in peat. The loftiest, Benbaun, in Connemara National Park, reaches a height of 719m (2,395 ft.). See p. 419.
- **Croagh Patrick** (County Mayo): Rising steeply 750m (2,460 ft.) above the coast, Croagh Patrick is seen as a holy mountain, where the saint is said to have retreated in penance. Traditionally, barefoot pilgrims climb it the last Sunday of July, but in recent years, hundreds of Nike-shod tourists have been making the ascent daily. The view from above can be breathtaking or nonexistent—the summit is often wrapped in clouds. See p. 438.
- **Slieve League** (County Donegal): The Slieve League peninsula stretches for 48km (30 miles) into the Atlantic. Its wonderfully pigmented bluffs rise to

startlingly high sea cliffs. They can also be walked along, if you dare. See p. 475.

- **Giant's Causeway** (County Antrim): At the foot of a cliff by the sea, this mysterious mass of dark, tightly packed, naturally occurring hexagonal basalt columns

are nothing short of astonishing. This volcanic wonder, formed 60 million years ago, looks marvelous from above, even better when negotiated (cautiously) on foot. See p. 532.

3 THE BEST CASTLES

- **Trim Castle** (County Meath): Trim, also called King John's Castle, restored as a "preserved ruin," is a massive Anglo-Norman structure. It was all but impregnable for 4 centuries (late 12th to mid-17th c.). Until it was abandoned and collapsed in the 17th century, it never underwent any significant alteration. For anyone with imagination, Trim is a visual gateway into medieval Ireland. See p. 215.
- **Cahir Castle** (County Tipperary): One of the largest of Ireland's medieval fortresses, this castle is in an extraordinary state of preservation. Tours explain some fascinating features of the military architecture, and then you're free to roam through a maze of tiny chambers, spiral staircases, and dizzying battlements. See p. 352.
- **Kilkenny Castle** (County Kilkenny): Although parts of the castle date from the 13th century, the existing structure has the feel of an 18th-century palace. There have been many modifications since medieval times, including the addition of colorful landscaping, and the old stables now hold numerous art galleries and shops. See p. 250.
- **Blarney Castle** (County Cork): Despite the mobs of tourists who besiege it daily, this majestic tower house is worth a visit. While you're there, check out the Badger Cave and dungeons at the tower's base, as well as the serpentine paths

that wind through the castle gardens. Need we mention the Blarney Stone? You sidle in under the upper wall with your head hanging over a 10-story drop. You kiss it. It's a thing people do. See p. 272.

- **Bunratty Castle and Folk Park** (County Clare): This grand old castle has been well restored and filled with a curious assortment of medieval furnishings, offering a glimpse into the life of its past inhabitants. This is the first stop for many arrivals from Shannon, so expect crowds. See p. 374.
- **Doe Castle** (County Donegal): This picturesque tower house is surrounded on three sides by the waters of Sheep Haven Bay and on the fourth by a moat carved into the bedrock that forms its foundation. It has a remote waterfront setting and sweeping views of the nearby hills. See p. 480.
- **Carrickfergus Castle** (County Antrim): This well-preserved Norman fortress on the bank of Belfast Lough is huge and impressive, with an imposing tower house and a high wall punctuated by corner towers. See p. 520.
- **Dunluce Castle** (County Antrim): These castle ruins surmount a razor-sharp promontory jutting into the sea. This was a highly defensible setting, and the castle wasn't abandoned until a large section collapsed and fell into the breakers. See p. 531.

4 THE BEST OF ANCIENT IRELAND

- **Hill of Tara** (County Meath): Of ritual significance from the Stone Age to the Christian period, Tara has seen it all and kept it all a secret. This was the traditional center and seat of Ireland's high kings. Although the hill is only 154m (512 ft.) above sea level, from here you can see each of Ireland's four Celtic provinces on a clear day. The site is mostly unexcavated and tells its story in whispers. It's a place to be walked slowly. See p. 212.
- **Newgrange** (County Meath): One of the archaeological wonders of western Europe, Newgrange is the centerpiece of a megalithic cemetery dating back 5,000 years. Its massive mound and passage tomb are amazing feats of engineering. But the question remains: what was it all for? See p. 214.
- **Loughcrew** (County Meath): At this little-known site, not far from Newgrange, a series of cruciform passage tombs crown two hills. Guided tours of the cairns are offered during the summer, but we prefer to come in the off season, when you can borrow a key and make your own imaginative reconstruction. See p. 214.
- **Lough Gur** (County Limerick): This lakefront site will convince you that the Neolithic farmers of Ireland had an estimable sense of real estate. Inhabited for more than 4,000 years, the ancient farming settlement offers a number of prehistoric remains. The most impressive of these is the largest surviving stone circle in Ireland, made up of 113 stones. See p. 367.
- **Dún Aengus** (County Galway): No one knows who built this massive stone fort, or when. The eminent archaeologist George Petrie called Dún Aengus "the most magnificent barbaric monument in Europe." Facing the sea, where its three stone rings meet steep 90m (295-ft.) cliffs, Dún Aengus still stands guard today over the southern coast of the island of Inishmore, the largest of the Aran Islands. See p. 415.

Value Save Money: Buy a Heritage Card

The Heritage Card is a pass that allows you free entry to almost all historic sites owned or managed by the Irish government. Given that these include some of the country's most popular attractions, it can be a real saving. The card costs €21 for adults, €16 for seniors, €8 for children and €55 for families. You can buy them at any of the site ticket offices, or at www.heritageireland.ie.

Dozens of sights listed in this book take Heritage Cards, including: Aughnanure Castle (p. 418); the Blasket Centre (p. 335); Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery (p. 453); Céide Fields (p. 439); Charles Fort (p. 279); Clonmacnoise (p. 430); Dublin Castle (p. 144); Fota House (p. 288); Glendalough (p. 191); Glenveagh National Park (p. 481); the Hill of Tara (p. 212); The Iveagh Gardens; Jerpoint Abbey (p. 253); the John F Kennedy Arboretum (p. 229); Kilmainham Gaol (p. 146); Kilkenny Castle (p. 250); Muckross House (p. 319); the National Botanic Gardens (p. 184); the Rock of Cashel (p. 352); and Trim Castle (p. 215).

- **Carrowmore and Carrowkeel** (County Sligo): These two megalithic cities of the dead (Europe's largest) may have once contained more than 200 passage tombs. The two together—one in the valley and the other atop a nearby mountain—convey an unequaled sense of the scale and wonder of the ancient peoples' reverence for the dead. Carrowmore is well presented and interpreted, while Carrowkeel is left to itself and to those who seek it out. See p. 453.
- **Navan Fort** (County Antrim): There is no longer much remaining here to reflect the great past of this fort, though it was once the ritual and royal seat of Ulster. Thankfully, the interpretive center here is nothing short of remarkable, and it offers a great introduction to the myth and archaeology of the fort, known in Irish as *Emain Macha*. See p. 529.

5 THE BEST EARLY CHRISTIAN RUINS

- **Glendalough** (County Wicklow): Nestled in "the glen of the two lakes," this atmospheric monastic settlement was founded in the 6th century by St. Kevin, who was looking for seclusion and certainly found it here. The setting is endlessly scenic, with lakes and forests surrounding it. Although quite remote, Glendalough suffered assaults from the Vikings and English forces, and eventually faded away. Today its stone ruins collude with the countryside to create one of the loveliest spots in Ireland. See p. 191.
- **The Rock of Cashel** (County Tipperary): In name and appearance, "the Rock" suggests a citadel, a place designed more for power than prayer. In fact, Cashel (or *Caiseal*) means "fortress." The rock is a huge outcropping—or an *upcropping*—of limestone topped with spectacularly beautiful ruins, including what was formerly the country's finest Romanesque chapel. This was the seat of clerics and kings, a power center to rival Tara. Now, however, the two sites vie only for the attention of tourists. See p. 352.
- **Jerpoint Abbey** (County Kilkenny): Jerpoint is the finest representative of the many Cistercian abbeys whose ruins dot the Irish landscape. Somehow, hundreds of years of rain and wind have failed to completely wipe away medieval carvings, leaving us a rare chance for a glimpse of how magnificent these abbeys once were. The splendid, richly carved cloister is the best place to spot the carvings, particularly at the top of the many columns. See p. 253.
- **Skellig Michael** (County Kerry): Thirteen kilometers (8 miles) offshore of the Iveragh Peninsula, rising sharply 214m (702 ft.) out of the Atlantic, this is a remote rocky crag dedicated to the archangel Michael. In flight from the world, early Irish monks in pursuit of "white martyrdom" chose this spot to build their austere hermitage. Today the journey to Skellig, across choppy seas, and the arduous climb to its summit are challenging and unforgettable. See "The Skellig Islands" under "The Iveragh Peninsula" in chapter 10.
- **Clonmacnoise** (County Offaly): This was once one of Ireland's most important religious, artistic, and literary centers, a place of pilgrimage and culture. Founded in the mid-5th century at the axis of the River Shannon and the medieval east-west thoroughfare known as the *Eiscir Riada*, Clonmacnoise

thrived for centuries until its prime riverfront location brought repeated violent raids that proved its undoing. Even in ruins, Clonmacnoise remains a place of peculiar serenity. See p. 430.

- **Inishmurray** (County Sligo): This uninhabited island off the Sligo coast holds another striking monastic ruin, this one surrounded by what appears to be the walls of an even more ancient

stone fort. Despite its remoteness, the Vikings sought out this outpost of peace-seeking monks for destruction in A.D. 807. Today its circular walls and the surrounding sea create a stunning view, well worth the effort required to reach it. See “Exploring the Surrounding Countryside” under “Sligo & Yeats Country” in chapter 13.

6 THE BEST LITERARY SPOTS

- **Dublin Writers Museum:** With Joyce’s typewriter, handwritten letters from Brendan Behan to friends back home, and early flyers from the Abbey Theatre when it was run by Lady Gregory and Yeats, this museum is heaven for bookish types. You can spend hours reading the memorabilia and marveling at the trivia. See p. 145.
- **Glasnevin Cemetery** (County Dublin): Besides being the setting for part of *Ulysses*, this is the resting place of James Joyce’s parents and other members of his family. The English-born poet Gerard Manley Hopkins is buried here, in the Jesuit plot. Maud Gonne, the Irish nationalist and longtime Dublin resident who is said to have inspired Yeats’s play *Cathleen ní Houlihan*, is buried in the Republican plot. The writer, drinker, and Irish Republican Brendan Behan is also buried here. See p. 152.
- **Davy Byrnes Pub:** In *Ulysses* Joyce describes the main character, Leopold Bloom, stopping in at this Dublin pub for a Gorgonzola sandwich and a glass of burgundy. “He raised his eyes and met the stare of a bilious clock. Two. Pub clock five minutes fast. Time going on. Hands moving. Two. Not yet.” Today the clock is said to be kept 5 minutes fast, in honor of Bloom and Joyce. See p. 171.
- **James Joyce Museum:** At the edge of the sea in the Dublin suburb of Sandycove, this Martel tower was home to Joyce for a short time, but he based a character on his host, Oliver St. John Gogarty, described in *Ulysses* perfectly as “stately, plump Buck Mulligan.” The museum was opened in 1962, and its interior has been restored to look as it did when Joyce was here, along with plenty of memorabilia, including Joyce’s walking stick and guitar. See p. 180.
- **St. Patrick’s Cathedral** (County Dublin): Jonathan Swift tickled and horrified the world with his vicious wit. He shook up political establishments with his sarcasm, and nauseated the English-speaking world with his suggestion that people should dine on Irish babies. While kicking up such a stir, he was dean of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, which sponsored and supported him through it all. He is buried here alongside his longtime companion, Stella. See p. 147.
- **County Sligo:** With its many connections to the beloved poet W. B. Yeats, this county is a pilgrimage destination for Yeats fans. The poet’s writing was shaped by the landscape and people in this farming region, and many of its monuments—including Lough Gill, Glencar Lake, Ben Bulbin Mountain, and Maeve’s tomb—appear in his

poetry. There are also several museums housing first editions, photographs, and other memorabilia, and Yeats's dark and

somber grave is in Drumcliff. See chapter 13.

7 THE BEST GARDENS

- **Powerscourt Gardens** (County Wicklow): This grandiose Irish garden is set amid the natural splendor of the Wicklow Hills just outside of Dublin. The sprawling, manicured gardens and the wild beauty of the Powerscourt waterfall make this a great day's outing, and a respite from the noise and congestion of the city. See p. 193.
- **Japanese Gardens** (County Kildare): On the grounds of the National Stud, this peaceful enclave is based on the traditional designs of Japanese gardens. A Japanese specialist planned the structure and its symbolism, and most of the plants and stones were imported from Japan. See p. 206.
- **Ilnacullin** (County Cork): A ferry conveys visitors from a rhododendron-framed bay in the town of Glengarriff to Garinish Island, the unlikely site of a fine Italianate garden. The formal garden, with the Casita at its center, is linked to a "wild garden" that showcases a collection of rhododendrons, azaleas, and rare trees. See p. 292.
- **Glenveagh National Park** (County Donegal): A castle and its gardens stretch across a strangely barren valley high in the hills of Donegal, along the banks of Lough Veagh. The sprawling park contains a grand statuary garden, a walled garden, and a rhododendron-lined path that leads to a stunning view of the castle and lake. See p. 481.
- **Mount Stewart House Gardens** (County Down): Built upon an elaborate plan, the Mount Stewart house has several gardens of distinctive character. The Ards Peninsula provides a climate conducive to cultivating many subtropical species. The statuary, topiary, and planting designs reflect a touch of whimsy. See p. 523.

8 THE BEST FAMILY ACTIVITIES

- **Dublin Zoo in the Phoenix Park** (Dublin): Kids love this sympathetically designed zoo, with its wild creatures, animal-petting corners, and train ride. The surrounding park has room to run, picnic, and explore. See p. 158.
- **Irish National Heritage Park** (County Wexford): Nearly 9,000 years of Irish history come alive here in ways that will fascinate visitors of all ages. The whole family will be captivated by the story of ancient Ireland, from its first inhabitants to its Norman conquerors. See p. 224.
- **Fota Island Wildlife Park** (County Cork): In this wildlife park, rare and endangered animals roam freely. You'll see everything from giraffes and zebras to kangaroos, flamingos, penguins, and monkeys wandering the grassland. Add in a small amusement park for toddlers, a tour train, picnic tables, and a gift shop and you have the makings of a wonderful family outing. See p. 288.
- **Muckross House and Gardens** (Killarney, County Kerry): This huge Victorian mansion with its exquisite gardens is also home to skilled artisans at work.

Nearby are a series of reconstructed traditional farms, with animals and docents, providing a gateway to rural Ireland as it was for centuries. See p. 319.

- **Fungie the Dolphin Tours** (Dingle, County Kerry): Every day, fishing boats ferry visitors out into the nearby waters to see Fungie, the friendliest dolphin you're ever likely to meet. Fungie swims right up to the boat, and the boatmen stay out long enough for ample sightings. You can also arrange an early morning dolphin swim. See p. 335.

- **Bunratty Castle and Folk Park** (County Clare): Kids are enthralled by this well-restored medieval castle and re-created 19th-century village. It's complete with a school and loaded with active craftspeople. See p. 374.
- **Marble Arch Caves** (Marlbank, County Fermanagh): Adventurous families are guided by boat through well-lit underground waterways to explore caves and view amazing stone formations. See p. 567.

9 THE BEST ACTIVE VACATIONS

- **Sailing Ireland's West Coast:** Spectacular coastal scenery, interesting harbor towns, and an abundance of islands make the west coast a delight for cruising sailors. See "Sailing," in chapter 5.
- **Horseback Riding in Donegal:** The wild and woolly coast of Donegal offers the perfect scenic backdrop for trail riding, and as varied a terrain—beaches, countryside, mountains—as you'll find anywhere. See chapter 14.
- **Sea Kayaking in West Cork:** In Castletownbere on the dramatic, rugged Beara Peninsula, Sea Kayaking West Cork specializes in accompanied trips out and around Bere Island and as far as Glengarriff. You can play it as safe or as rough as you want. See p. 296.
- **Bicycling in the Southwest:** The peninsulas and islands of Cork and Kerry are perfect for cycling, with an abundance of beautiful places to visit. Roycroft's Stores in Skibbereen, County Cork, rent bikes that are a notch above the usual rental equipment. See the "Sports & Outdoor Pursuits" sections in chapters 9 and 10.
- **Walking the Donegal Coast:** The rugged headlands of Donegal are the most spectacular in Ireland, and the best way to explore them is on foot. Among the finest walks are Slieve League, Malin Head, and Horn Head. See "The Donegal Bay Coast," in chapter 14.

10 THE BEST LUXURY ACCOMMODATIONS

- **The Clarence** (Dublin; ☎ 01/407-0800; www.theclarence.ie): Owned by members of the band U2, the Clarence is a perfect mixture of sleek sophistication and coolness. Everything here is designed for subtle elegance, from the soft, neutral color schemes, to the luxurious bed linens and huge beds, to the helpful staff. The Octagon Bar is a relaxing hangout, while the Tea Room restaurant is one of the best eateries in town. The new spa will pummel and facial you into relaxation, while the staff members hurry off to find your favorite red wine. Staying here is a real treat. See p. 118.

- **Park Hotel Kenmare** (County Kerry; ☎ 800/323-5463 in the U.S., or 6644-1200; www.parkkenmare.com): In a palm-tree-lined garden beside Kenmare Bay, this imposing 19th-century hotel is grand and luxurious. In the high-ceilinged sitting rooms, fires crackle in the open fireplaces, oil paintings decorate the walls, and there's a full set of armor at the top of the grand staircase surrounded by tapestries and rare antiques. Guest rooms have Georgian and Victorian furnishings and peaceful waterfront or mountain views. The guest-only, in-house spa is extraordinary. See p. 312.
- **Gregans Castle Hotel** (County Clare; ☎ 800/323-5463 in the U.S., or 065/707-7005; www.gregans.ie): Not a castle at all, but an ivy-covered, stone manor house, this small, family run hotel is filled with light, and it has lovely views of the Burren and Galway Bay. The drawing room and expansive

hallways are filled with heirlooms, and the walls are decorated with Raymond Piper's mural paintings of the Burren. Guest rooms are spacious and elegantly decorated in muted colors with antique pieces, and all have expansive views of the spectacular countryside. Dinners here are outstanding, and eating in is worth every penny. See p. 388.

- **Delphi Lodge** (County Galway; ☎ 095/42222; www.delphilodge.ie): This was once the country hideaway for the marquis of Sligo, and now it can be yours. Inside, the emphasis is on clean, bright simplicity and perfect taste; the grounds and environs are spectacular. "Tranquility," "comfort," and, well, "fishing" are the operative words here. You will want to stay longer than you'd planned—and by renting one of the cottages for a week or more, you can make the indulgence more affordable. See p. 426.

11 THE BEST MODERATELY PRICED ACCOMMODATIONS

- **Moy House** (County Clare; ☎ 065/708-2800; www.moyhouse.com): This unusual 19th-century tower house atop a hill overlooking the sea is beautiful inside and out. Rooms have comfortable, modern beds covered in crisp Irish linens, and are decorated with original paintings and period antiques. Bathrooms are beautifully designed to combine modern conveniences with the building's old architecture (a glass panel in one room provides a look down into an old well). Downstairs, the small, attractive dining room serves up excellent food and has a sea view. It's a snug, warm, friendly place to visit. See p. 393.
- **The Bervie** (County Mayo; ☎ 098/43114; www.bervieachill.com): Views really don't get any better than this—right

at the edge of the sea, overlooking the cliffs across the bay. This cozy retreat is an ideal place to stay for those exploring Ireland's wild west coast. Owners Elizabeth and John Barrett are charming hosts who greet you with fresh scones and will cook you a delightful dinner if you wish. The house is a former coast guard station—as solid as a rock, and as comforting as a security blanket. This is one of our favorite places in Ireland. See p. 445.

- **Temple House** (County Sligo; ☎ 071/918-3329; www.templehouse.ie): Not a hotel, yet not quite like any other B&B we've stayed in, Roderick and Helena Perceval's grand Victorian manor house is an extraordinary place where ceilings soar to the stratosphere, marble stays solidly underfoot, and the

family's working farm stretches out for miles around you. A Templar castle lies in ruins on the banks of their lake. To spend a few days here is to experience a different world. See p. 456.

- **Rathmullan House** (County Donegal; ☎ 800/223-6510 in the U.S., or 074/915-8188 in Ireland; www.rathmullanhouse.com): This getaway lies at the end of a long private drive on the banks of

the mirrorlike waters of Lough Swilly. Rooms are big and beautifully detailed, with a soft color scheme, claw-foot tubs, and private patios. There are half a dozen drawing rooms in which you can relax on big leather sofas by open fires. The staff is friendly and open, and the atmosphere is one of pure rural rest and relaxation. See p. 483.

12 THE BEST BUDGET ACCOMMODATIONS

- **Abbott Lodge** (Dublin; ☎ 01/836-5548; www.abbott-lodge.com). This is one of Dublin's most popular guesthouses, with simple, well-kept rooms, many of which have high ceilings or architectural details like original cornices. A genuinely friendly staff will fill you in on the neighborhood's offerings, including the best pubs and restaurants nearby. A full Irish breakfast is included in the rates. See p. 126.
- **The Bastion** (County Westmeath; ☎ 090/649-4954; www.thebastion.net): This simple and peaceful guesthouse in the heart of colorful Athlone is a find. Run by brothers Vinny and Anthony McCay, it has a minimalist approach, with clean white walls and crisp white linens contrasted with dark polished wood. The big, rambling house is comfortable, friendly, and perfectly located for touring Athlone, or as a base for exploring the surrounding countryside. See p. 433.
- **Devondell** (County Galway; ☎ 091/528306): Definitely one of the best value places to stay in Galway Town, this elegant little B&B sits in an upscale residential district a short walk from the sea. Breakfasts here are something else. See p. 405.
- **The Shores** (County Kerry; ☎ 066/713-9196): It's not often you find a

place with a private beach for under €100 per night. Views of Tralee Bay from this guesthouse are stunning, especially on a sunny day. Bedrooms are comfortable and well designed, and the breakfast menu will give you a good start to your day. See p. 346.

- **An Bohreen** (County Waterford; ☎ 051/291010): This cozy B&B in Dungarven has attractive bedrooms and a roaring fire to welcome guests on cold days. Best of all, however, is the superb food; there's really no need to search around for a restaurant while you're staying here. See p. 245.
- **Wicklow Way Lodge** (County Wicklow; ☎ 01/281-8489): Set on a peaceful farm with sweeping views of the surrounding countryside, this is one of those places that you can't quite believe you've found for the money. Hosts Seamus and Marilyn Kinlan could hardly make their guests feel more welcome. See p. 202.
- **Tara Lodge** (Belfast; ☎ 028/9059-0900): This stylish, comfortable little boutique hotel is an excellent find in Belfast, a city not known for the quality of its budget accommodations. Rooms are comfortable and well-designed. Try the homemade porridge at breakfast—it's practically legendary. See p. 514.

13 THE BEST RESTAURANTS

- **L'Gueuleton** (Dublin; ☎ 01/675-3708): This place is worth the effort you'll have to put in to book a table well in advance. The cozy dining room is all candlelight, exposed brick walls, flagstone floors, polished wood beams, and Prada-clad clientele. It's an elegant Irish-French bistro. The menu changes constantly, but includes warming options such as whole roast sea bass with new potatoes and chive beurre blanc, or venison casserole with juniper and organic root vegetables. See p. 134.
- **Chapter One** (Dublin; ☎ 01/873-2266): Arguably the city's most atmospheric restaurant, this remarkable eatery fills the vaulted basement space of the Dublin Writers Museum. Artfully lighted and tastefully decorated, it offers a menu with local, organic ingredients, all cleverly used in dishes like the ravioli with Irish goat cheese and warm asparagus. Fabulous! See p. 139.
- **The Chart House** (County Kerry; ☎ 066/915-2255): In this inviting bistro, everyone comes for Laura Boyce's confident, simple cooking. Think wonderful comfort food with a flair—the kind of food you never tire of. And the service is, as the Irish would say, “spot on.” See p. 340.
- **Fishy Fishy Café** (County Cork ☎ 021/470-0415): This superfriendly little restaurant is *the* place to go for lunch in Kinsale. No reservations, no fuss, just perfectly prepared seafood, sourced locally. Really locally. As in, the waiter can tell you exactly who caught your dinner. See p. 285.
- **The Wild Geese** (County Limerick; ☎ 061/396451): After spending years making other people's restaurants fabulous, owner-chef David Foley created a gem of his own in Limerick. The cooking is complex, exquisitely flavorful, and refined. See p. 369.
- **Cromleach Lodge** (County Sligo; ☎ 071/916-5155): In this lovely country house with panoramic views of Lough Arrow and environs, Christy and Moira Tighe have created a culinary destination with few peers. The menu, Irish in focus, changes daily. The eight-course gourmet menu is the ultimate indulgence. See p. 455.
- **James Street South** (Belfast; ☎ 028/9043-4310; www.jamesstreetsouth.co.uk): This fashionable place in Belfast is a hit because of the terrific cooking, which delivers modern classics with an Irish twist. The lamb is always excellent, and shouldn't be missed. Portions are generous, the wine list very good, the crowd rapturous. See p. 516.
- **The Narrows** (County Down; ☎ 028/4272-8148): Who'd have thought that the sleepy little waterside hamlet of Portaferry would have a restaurant like this? Danny Millar is one of the hottest young chefs on this island—just ask *Food & Wine* magazine—and his complex, yet earthy, cooking is worth going out of your way for. See p. 525.

14 THE BEST PUBS

- **Brazen Head** (Dublin): Nearly qualifying as one of Ireland's ancient sites, the Brazen Head, commissioned by Charles II, is more than 300 years old, but its stout is as fresh as it comes. Among its illustrious alumni are Wolfe Tone, Daniel O'Connell, and Robert Emmet, who planned the Dublin rising of 1803

under the Head's low timbers. See p. 173.

- **Abbey Tavern** (Dublin): A short distance from Dublin center, the Abbey Tavern is the perfect place to recover and refuel after spending a day exploring Dublin. The Abbey is known far and wide for its ballads as well as its brew. See p. 176.
- **The Long Valley** (County Cork): For anyone who knows and loves Cork, this is a place of pilgrimage. There's one endless, low-slung room with a bar running its full length, doors taken from an ocean liner, barmen in white butchers' coats, and a selection of delectable sandwiches. It's a slice of heaven. See p. 277.
- **McGann's** (County Clare): Doolin, a dot of a town on the Clare Coast, is a magnet for traditional Irish musicians—and a wonderful spot to hear

impromptu sessions of Irish music. Gus O'Connor's, down the road, is more famous (but also thicker with tourists); McGann's remains the genuine article without the hype. See p. 395.

- **Moran's Oyster Cottage** (County Galway): Famed for its seafood, this centuries-old thatched-cottage pub on the weir also draws a perfect pint. This may well be the oyster capital of Ireland. It's 19km (12 miles) out of Galway and well worth the drive—or the walk, for that matter. See p. 414.
- **Crown Liquor Saloon** (Belfast): This National Trust pub, across from the Grand Opera House in Belfast, is a Victorian gem. Your mouth will drop open at its antique publican splendor even before you lift your first pint. See p. 517.

15 THE BEST WEBSITES

- **Dublin Tourist Office** (www.visitdublin.com): This site is the most comprehensive resource for visiting the capital. We especially like the last-minute booking service, which lets you find out which hotels and guesthouses have immediate availability, as well as which are offering the best discounts.
- **Irelandhotels.com** (www.irelandhotels.com): What catapults this accommodations database ahead of all the others is its "search by facility" function. Gotta have a gym? Need to find a babysitter? Want an in-room dataport for your laptop? No problem. Plug in your requirements and you'll get a list of hotels and guesthouses that fit the bill.
- **Irish Tourist Board** (www.discoverireland.ie): Bord Fáilte's site is easy to navigate and extremely informative. It's an excellent place to gather ideas for your trip.
- **AA Roadwatch** (www.aaroadwatch.ie): Planning on driving? The route-planning feature of the Irish Automobile Association's site is brilliantly simple. Plug in a starting point and destination and you'll get a detailed, no-brainer set of directions from A to B.
- **Entertainment Ireland** (www.entertainment.ie): This handy, exhaustive, searchable database includes just about every event in Ireland, from museum exhibitions and rock concerts to new plays and nightclub theme nights—and there are well-written reviews of them all.
- **Irish Family History Foundation** (www.irishroots.net): This new, comprehensive genealogy resource contains documentation from all 32 counties. Much of the archived information is free for your perusal, or you can avail yourself of researchers.

- **Newshound** (www.nuzhound.com): Hands down, this is the best single resource for keeping up-to-date on Northern Ireland. It's a searchable library of news articles about developments in

the North, including a terrific timeline of key events in the troubles. In addition, there are articles on the Republic, as well as travel and dining reviews.