

Counties Wexford, Waterford, Carlow & Kilkenny



Counties Wexford, Waterford, Carlow and Kilkenny are (along with the southern chunk of Tipperary) collectively referred to as the 'sunny southeast'. This being Ireland the term is, of course, relative. But due to the moderating effect of the Gulf Stream, it *is* the country's warmest, driest region.

Although sun-lounger time might be limited, the coastal counties of Wexford and Waterford are wreathed with wide, sandy beaches, along with thatched fishing villages, genteel seaside towns and remote, windswept peninsulas littered by wrecks – as well as a swash-buckling history of marauding Vikings, lighthouse-keeping monks and shadowy knights' sects. You can stick to the coast (hop on a car ferry for a quick shortcut), or head into the hinterland to the beautiful Nire Valley and Comeragh Mountains, where prehistoric remains hide among the heather.

Deeper inland, the gently meandering River Barrow separates the verdant counties of Carlow and Kilkenny. But while County Carlow is a country gal at heart – with romantic country lodgings hidden away in her rolling hills, and flowering estates connected by a garden trail – Kilkenny is her city-slicker cousin. A mighty castle, a magnificent cathedral, narrow, winding medieval lanes and cracking pubs make County Kilkenny's namesake city one of the most visited in the country, while hip eateries, happening clubs and a host of festivals give this spirited little city a worldly sophistication.

Best of all, thanks to that 'sunny southeastern' climate, these four counties have some of Ireland's best outdoors pursuits, including glorious walking and cycling opportunities.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Storybook Sleeps** Stay in a castle whatever your budget – from a haunted hostel near Ballyragget (p239) to a private island in Waterford city (p208)
- **River Rambles** Amble the towpath linking the charming villages of Graiguenamanagh (p238) and St Mullins (p226)
- **Horror Stories** Learn about Ireland's poignant history at the National 1798 Rebellion Centre in Enniscorthy (p202) and aboard a Famine ship in New Ross (p200)
- **Culinary Creations** Sharpen your cookery skills with top chefs Paul Flynn in Dungarvan (p215) or Kevin Dundon in Arthurstown (p200)
- **Adrenaline Rushes** Surf, sea-kayaking, or spin until you're dizzy on fairground rides at Tramore (p211)



■ POPULATION: 377,617

■ AREA: 7147.19 SQ KM

COUNTY WEXFORD

pop 131,749

County Wexford's navigable rivers and fertile land have long lured invaders and privateers. The Vikings founded Ireland's first major towns on the wide, easy-flowing River Slaney, which cuts through the middle of the county. The most enjoyable way for visitors to unwrap Wexford's swashbuckling maritime history is pausing in pretty waterfront villages and sampling catches from the surrounding waves.

WEXFORD TOWN

pop 8931

At first glance, Wexford (Loch Garman) appears a sleepy port town where the silted estuary now sees less traffic than Waterford and Rosslare Harbour. However, there are reminders of its glorious Viking and Norman past in the meandering lanes off Main St – as well as some medieval monuments and a world-class opera festival in autumn, held in the city's state-of-the-art new opera house.

History

The Vikings named it Waesford (meaning 'harbour of mud flats') and its handy location near the mouth of the Slaney encouraged landings as early as AD 850. It was captured by the Normans in 1169; traces of their fort can still be seen in the grounds of the Irish National Heritage Park.

Cromwell included Wexford in his destructive Irish tour from 1649 to 1650. Around 1500 of the town's 2000 inhabitants were put to the sword, including all the Franciscan friars. During the 1798 Rising, rebels made a determined, bloody stand in Wexford town before they were defeated.

Orientation

From Wexford Bridge at the north end of the town, the quays lead southeast along the water, via the small kink called the Crescent, home to a statue of Commodore John Barry (1745–1803), who emigrated from Wexford to America and founded the US navy. Most shops are a block inland on North and South Main St.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Readers' Paradise (☎ 053-912 4400; 2 Slaney St; ☎ 9.30am–6pm Mon–Sat) Good stock of Irish-interest second-hand fiction and nonfiction.

Wexford Book Centre (☎ 053-912 3543; 5 South Main St; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Thu & Sat, 9am–7pm Fri, 1–5pm Sun) Lots of new Irish titles plus a limited selection of foreign newspapers and magazines.

INTERNET ACCESS

Tangiers (☎ 053-914 6404; 19 Trimmers La; per hr €3.50; ☎ 9am–10pm Mon–Sat, 10.30am–8pm Sun)

Wexford Library (☎ 053-912 1637; McCauley Car Park, off Redmond Sq; www.wexford.ie/library; ☎ 10.30am–5.30pm Mon–Tue & Thu–Sat, 10.30am–8.30pm Wed) Free internet access (one hour time limit).

LAUNDRY

My Beautiful Laundrette (☎ 053-912 4317; St Peters Sq; ☎ 9.30am–1pm Mon–Sat) Opening hours can vary.

LEFT LUGGAGE

O'Hanrahan Station (☎ 053-912 2522; Redmond Pl; ☎ 6am–9pm Mon–Sat, 8am–9pm Sun) Has left-luggage facilities for €2.50 per item per day at the southern end of the platform.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Wexford General Hospital (☎ 053-915 3000) On the N25, 2.5km west of the centre.

MONEY

There's an AIB bank and a National Irish Bank on North Main St near Common Quay St.

POST

Main post office (☎ 053-914 5314; Anne St)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 053-912 3111; Quayfront; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Sat Apr–Oct plus 11am–1pm & 2–5pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9.15am–1pm & 2–5pm Mon–Sat Nov–Mar)

Sights

Originally a beach where provisions were boated into the city, the **Bull Ring** became a centre for bull baiting in medieval times: the town's butchers gained their guild charter by providing a bull each year for the sport. The **Lone Pikeman statue** commemorates the participants in the 1798 Rising, who used the place as an open-air armaments factory.

The only survivor of the six original town gates is the 14th-century **Westgate**. It was originally a tollgate, and the recesses used by the toll collectors are still intact, as is the lockup used to incarcerate 'runagates' – those who tried to avoid paying. Some stretches of the town wall are also in good nick, including