



Counties Wicklow & Kildare

Includes ➔

County Wicklow	135
Wicklow Mountains	135
Glendalough	140
Western Wicklow.....	147
The Coast	148
Southern Wicklow.....	150
County Kildare.....	153
Maynooth.....	153
Kildare Town.....	155
Donnelly's Hollow to Castledermot.....	157

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Ballyknocken House (p149)
- ➔ Strawberry Tree (p151)
- ➔ Tinakilly Country House & Restaurant (p148)
- ➔ Grangecon Café (p148)
- ➔ Byrne & Woods (p140)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Brook Lodge & Wells Spa (p151)
- ➔ Hunter's Hotel (p149)
- ➔ Powerscourt Hotel & Spa (p139)
- ➔ Martinstown House (p156)

Why Go?

Wicklow and Kildare may be neighbours and have a boundary with Dublin in common, but that's where the similarities end.

Immediately south of the capital is wild, scenic Wicklow. Its most dramatic natural feature is a gorse-and-bracken mountain spine that is the east coast's most stunning landscape, complete with deep glacial valleys, isolated mountain passes and, dotted throughout, some important historic treasures, including one of Ireland's most important early-Christian sites and a couple of 18th-century Palladian estate houses.

To the west is flat, fecund Kildare, which also has a handful of elegant Palladian piles but is best known as horse country – of the thoroughbred kind. Some of the world's most lucrative stud farms are here, many with links to the horse-breeding centre of Kentucky in the US. Kildare is also home to some of the best golf courses in Ireland and, in recent years, the country's largest outlet mall.

When to Go

- ➔ Summer – June to September – is the best time to visit Wicklow, especially if you're going to walk the Wicklow Way or do a little green-thumb exploring.
- ➔ Running from Easter to late August is the Wicklow Gardens Festival.
- ➔ The Irish Derby – the most prestigious flat race in the Irish racing calendar – is held in June at the Curragh in County Kildare; meets continue right up to October.

COUNTY WICKLOW

POP 136,000 / AREA 2027 SQ KM

Just south of Dublin, Wicklow (Cill Mhantáin) is the capital's favourite playground, a wild pleasure garden of coastline, woodland and a daunting mountain range, home to the country's most popular walking trail.

Stretching 132km from Dublin's southern suburbs to the rolling fields of County Carlow, the **Wicklow Way** leads walkers along disused military supply lines, old bog roads and nature trails. Along the way you can explore monastic ruins, handsome gardens and some magnificent 18th-century mansions.

National Parks

Wicklow Mountains National Park covers just over 200 sq km of mountainous blanket bogs and woodland. Within the boundaries of the protected area are two nature reserves, owned and managed by the Heritage Service and legally protected by the Wildlife Act 1976. The larger reserve, west of the Glendalough Visitor Centre, conserves the extensive heath and bog of the Glendalough Valley plus the Upper Lake and valley slopes on either side. The second, Glendalough Wood Nature Reserve, conserves oak woods stretching from the Upper Lake as far as the Rathdrum road to the east.

Most of Ireland's native mammal species can be found within the confines of the park. Large herds of deer roam on the open hill areas, though these were introduced in the 20th century as the native red-deer population became extinct during the first half of the 18th century. The uplands are the preserve of foxes, badgers and hares. Red squirrels are usually found in the pine woodlands – look out for them around the Upper Lake.

The bird population of the park is plentiful. Birds of prey abound, the most common being peregrine falcons, merlins, kestrels, hawks and sparrowhawks. Hen harriers are a rarer sight, though they too live in the park. Moorland birds found in the area include meadow pipits and skylarks. Less common birds such as whinchats, ring ouzels and dippers can be spotted, as can red grouse, whose numbers are quickly disappearing in other parts of Ireland.

i Information

For information about Wicklow Mountains National Park, call in at or contact the **National Park Information Office** (☎0404-45425; www.wicklowmountainsnationalpark.ie; Miners'

Rd, Bolger's Cottage, Upper Lake, Glendalough; ☎10am-5.30pm May-Sep, to dusk Sat & Sun Oct-Apr), off the Green Rd that runs by the Upper Lake, about 2km from the Glendalough Visitor Centre. There's usually someone on hand to help; if you find it closed the staff may be out running guided walks. *Exploring the Glendalough Valley* (Heritage Service; €2) is a good booklet on the trails in the area.

i Getting There & Away

Wicklow is relatively easy to get around.

CAR

The main routes are the N11 (M11), which runs north-south through the county from Dublin to Wexford, and the N81, which runs down the western spine of the Wicklow Mountains through Blessington into County Carlow.

BUS

St Kevin's Bus runs twice daily from Dublin and Bray to Roundwood and Glendalough. Dublin Bus 65 runs regularly as far as Blessington.

TRAIN

The Dublin Area Rapid Transport (DART) suburban rail line runs southward from Dublin as far as Bray, and there are regular train and bus connections from the capital to Wicklow town and Arklow.

Wicklow Mountains

As you leave Dublin and cross into Wicklow, the landscape changes dramatically. From Killakee, still in Dublin, the Military Rd begins a 30km southward journey across vast sweeps of gorse-, bracken- and heather-clad moors, bogs and mountains dotted with small corrie lakes.

The numbers and statistics aren't all that impressive. The highest peak in the range, Lugnaquilla (924m), is really more of a very large hill, but that hardly matters here. This vast granite intrusion, a welling-up of hot igneous rock that solidified some 400 million years ago, was shaped during the Ice Ages into the schist-capped mountains visible today. The peaks are marvellously desolate and as raw as only nature can be. Between the mountains are a number of deep glacial valleys, most notably Glenmacnass, Glenmahure and Glendalough – while corrie lakes such as Lough Bray Upper and Lower, gouged by ice at the head of the glaciers, complete the wild topography.

The narrow Military Rd winds its way through the most remote parts of the mountains, offering some extraordinary views of the surrounding countryside. The best place