



County Donegal

POP 161,400 / AREA 3001 SQ KM

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Beach House (p461)
- ➔ Olde Castle Bar (p435)
- ➔ Nancy's Bar (p443)
- ➔ Danny Minnie's Restaurant (p446)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Corcreggan Mill (p450)
- ➔ Glen House (p462)
- ➔ Castle Murray (p438)
- ➔ Woodhill House (p443)

Why Go?

'Up here it's different', the saying goes, and it's true. County Donegal is the wild child of Ireland. Even before the twins of history and politics conspired to isolate it, Donegal was a place like no other on the island. It's a county of extremes: at times desolate and battered by brutal weather, yet in turn a land of unspoilt splendour where stark peaks and sweeping beaches bask in glorious sunshine, and little restaurants serve amazing food.

Uncrowded Donegal's rugged interior with its remote mountain passes and shimmering lakes is only marginally outdone by the long and labyrinthine coastline with its windswept peninsulas and isolated, characterful pubs. Proudly independent, one-third of the county is official Gaeltacht territory, where Irish is the lingua franca.

After its northern start in Derry, the Wild Atlantic Way really begins to strut its stuff in Donegal as the county's untamed craggy coastline truly puts the wild into the way.

When to Go


- ➔ Donegal's character is forged by its impetuous weather. In winter the howling winds and sheeting rain can feel Arctic, and storms arrive unannounced.
- ➔ In summer the weather isn't much more reliable but the clouds regularly break into brilliant sunshine that transforms brooding pewter skies into brilliant blue. Because everything is open, you'll also get the pick of traditional music, storytelling and dance festivals that spring up across the county and even in pubs.


Getting There & Away

Major towns in Donegal are served by buses that link to both Dublin and Northern Ireland. There is no train service.

Donegal Airport (www.donegalairport.ie) has very limited service on Aer Lingus to Dublin, that's primarily for connecting to other flights. It's about 3km northwest of Annagry on the northwestern coast.

Getting Around

Buses link major towns. **Bus Éireann** ( in Letterkenny 074-912 1309; www.buseireann.ie) serves mostly the southwestern part of the county. Main routes include Sligo–Bundoran–Donegal town–Letterkenny–Derry, Donegal Town–Killybegs–Ardara–Glenties–Dungloe and Killybegs–Kilcar–Glencolumbkille.

Bus Feda ( 074-954 8114; www.feda.ie) serves the northwestern part of the county, with a looping route from Galway and Sligo to Bundoran, Donegal town, Letterkenny, Dunfanaghy and Gweedore, terminating in Crolly.

DONEGAL TOWN

POP 2600

Pretty Donegal town occupies a photogenic spot at the mouth of Donegal Bay. With a backdrop of the Blue Stack Mountains, a handsome and well-preserved castle and a good choice of places to eat and sleep, it makes an excellent base for exploring the popular coastline nearby.

On the banks of the River Eske, Donegal town was a stamping ground of the O'Donnells, the chieftains who ruled the northwest from the 15th to 17th centuries. Today, despite being the county's namesake, it's neither its largest town (Letterkenny), nor the county town (the even smaller town of Lifford).

Sights & Activities

★ Donegal Castle HISTORIC BUILDING
( 074-972 2405; www.heritageireland.ie; Castle St; adult/child €4/2; ☉ 10am–6pm daily Easter–mid-Sep, 9.30am–4.30pm Thu–Mon mid-Sep–Easter) Guarding a picturesque bend of the River Eske, Donegal Castle remains an imperious monument to both Irish and English might. Dating to the 15th century, the castle was rebuilt in 1623 by Sir Basil Brooke, along with the adjacent three-storey Jacobean house. Further restoration in the 1990s has made it an atmospheric place to visit; rooms are furnished with French tapestries and Persian rugs. There are guided tours every hour.

Built by the O'Donnells in 1474, it served as the seat of their formidable power until 1607, when the English decided to rid themselves of pesky Irish chieftains once and for all. Rory O'Donnell was no pushover, torching his own castle before fleeing to France in the infamous Flight of the Earls. Their defeat paved the way for the Plantation of Ulster by thousands of newly arrived Scots and English Protestants, sowing the seeds of the divisions that still afflict Ireland to this day.

Diamond Obelisk

MONUMENT

(The Diamond) In the early 17th century, four Franciscan friars, fearing that the arrival of the English meant the end of Celtic culture, chronicled the whole of known Celtic history and mythology. Starting 40 years before the biblical flood through AD 1618, *The Annals of the Four Masters* is one of the most important sources of early Irish history. The obelisk (1937), in the Diamond, commemorates the work; copies are displayed in the National Library in Dublin.

★ Bank Walk

WALKING

Follow this lovely flat trail along the west bank of the River Eske and Donegal Bay. The myriad shade trees have labels as to their type and frequent benches allow you to pause and soak up the views. It's 1.5km each way and begins on the west side of the Killybeg Rd/N56 bridge.


Donegal Bay Waterbus

BOAT TOUR

( 074-972 3666; www.donegalbaywaterbus.com; Donegal Pier; adult/child €20/7; ☉ Easter–Oct) The most enjoyable way to explore the highlights of Donegal Bay is on a 1¼-hour boat tour taking in everything from historic sites to seal-inhabited coves, admiring an island manor and a ruined castle along the way. The tour runs up to three times daily; departure times change daily to match the tides.

Ted's Bike Shop

BICYCLE RENTAL


( 074-974 0774; www.tedsbikeshop.ie; off N56; rentals per day from €15; ☉ 10am–6pm Mon–Sat) You can rent all types of bikes and get plenty of excellent advice at this bustling bike shop.

Sleeping

Good B&Bs and stolid hotels are plentiful around Donegal town; for high-end luxury head to nearby Lough Eske.

Donegal Town Independent Hostel

HOSTEL €

( 074-972 2805; www.donegaltownhostel.com; off Killybegs Rd/N56, Doonan; dm €17, d €38–42; @☉)