

EXCURSIONS

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Without even the smallest hint of irony Dubliners will happily tell you that one of the city's best features is how easy it is to get out of it. Whenever they get the chance – come sun, a bank holiday or a sneaky 'sick' day off work – Dubliners will stuff their families, picnic hampers, golf clubs or whatever else they need into their cars and head for the hills, the beach, the countryside or anywhere else not hemmed in by grey concrete. Ireland is pretty small, so you can get pretty much anywhere within four or five hours' drive, but you don't have to go to Kerry or Donegal to really get into the heart of the country. A short, non-rush-hour drive will literally transport you into the countryside.

Beachcombers can jump the bus or DART and within half an hour grey concrete gives way to seaside villages with cosy harbours and sandy beaches. If you want to dig a little into the country's remote and recent past, Dublin's neighbouring counties – Wicklow to the south, Kildare to the west and Meath to the north – have ruins, prehistoric sites and stately country piles that rank among the country's most important historical attractions. Or, if you just fancy a rugged walk or gentle gambol in the Irish countryside, then there are plenty of spots to indulge, from the taxing hikes around the mountains surrounding Glendalough in County Wicklow to the gorse-bracketed paths of Howth Head immediately north of Dublin Bay.

If you're on a short visit to Dublin, then obviously timing is all-important. Sure, there's plenty to keep you amused, entertained and interested within the confines of the city centre, but Dublin's environs are as much a part of the Dublin experience as a weekend in Temple Bar; to most Dubliners, in fact, even more so. All of the sights listed in this chapter are worthwhile destinations in their own right and deserving of any effort you make to get to them. But what makes them doubly attractive for the short-term visitor is that they're all a short distance from the city, and travel to and from them is generally hassle-free.

COASTAL BREAKS

You'd never think it while walking around the city centre, but Dublin is a mere stone's throw from a number of lovely seaside towns, most of which have been incorporated into the greater city but have managed to retain that quiet village feel. The traditional fishing village of [Howth \(p227\)](#) – that bulbous headland on the northern edge of Dublin Bay – is now one of Dublin's most prestigious addresses, primarily because the residents are fiercely protective of their unspoilt headland, dotted with fancy houses and rising above the beautiful harbour where many of them keep their pleasure boats. Further north along the coast is the ever-elegant village of [Malahide \(p228\)](#), fronted by a long, sandy coastal basin and an impressive marina full of shops, restaurants and – naturally – expensive boats.

To the south of Dublin Bay lies [Dalkey \(p229\)](#), a compact village that is virtually attached to the southern suburbs. You can rent boats at the small harbour and explore the southern reaches of the bay and, after you're back on dry land, there are a couple of great restaurants that alone make the journey worthwhile.

Visiting all three is pretty easy. All are connected to the city centre via the DART, which cuts travel time to under 45 minutes in any direction. The obvious itinerary is to visit Howth and Malahide in one day, but each is worth devoting a little more time to if you can. If golf is your thing, Howth's wonderful courses will take up the better part of half a day, leaving you the other half to explore the port and have a seafood dinner in one of the harbour's restaurants. If you feel like a good walk, then an amble across the top of Howth Head to the lighthouse is a thoroughly enjoyable experience, especially in good weather.

As Dalkey lies on the opposite end of Dublin Bay, it is really a trip in itself, but there's plenty to keep you amused for at least half a day. Besides renting a boat and exploring the nearby waters and offshore island, there are some lovely walks in the hills above the town and further south in [Killiney \(p230\)](#), which is also home to a fabulous beach.

THE DISTANT PAST

Dublin is old, but it ain't that old. If you really want to get stuck into Ireland's past, you need to get out of the city, but you don't have to