



# The Midlands

POPULATION 378,000 / AREA 10,782 SQ KM

## Includes »

|                          |     |
|--------------------------|-----|
| County Laois .....       | 501 |
| Abbeyleix .....          | 501 |
| Portarlington .....      | 504 |
| County Offaly .....      | 505 |
| Birr .....               | 505 |
| Clonmacnoise .....       | 509 |
| County Roscommon .....   | 514 |
| Roscommon Town .....     | 517 |
| County Leitrim .....     | 519 |
| Carrick-On-Shannon ..... | 519 |
| North Leitrim .....      | 523 |
| County Longford .....    | 524 |
| County Westmeath .....   | 524 |
| Athlone .....            | 524 |

## Why Go?

Rarely explored by those on their first visit to Ireland and wonderfully free of tour buses and souvenir stalls, the Midlands is brimming with verdant pastoral landscapes, stately homes, archaeological remains and sleepy towns where the locals are genuinely glad to see you. Although the region may not have the scenic drama or sophisticated cities of coastal Ireland, getting lost along its twisting back roads is an unhurried pleasure and you're almost guaranteed to happen upon a local village shop/pub/undertaker's/garage/post office and find it little changed in decades. The Midlands is dominated by the River Shannon, which meanders through fields and forests, drawing boaters and fishers in hordes. Plush hotels and gourmet restaurants have sprung up along its banks, making it a wonderfully scenic and surprisingly cosmopolitan way to travel. If you're in search of a genuine slice of rural Irish life, this area makes the perfect retreat.

## Best Places to Eat

- » Wineport Lodge (p526)
- » Glasson Village Restaurant (p526)
- » Cottage (p522)
- » Left Bank Bistro (p526)
- » Oarsman (p522)

## Best Places to Stay

- » Ballyfin House (p502)
- » Castlecoote House (p518)
- » Preston House (p501)
- » Roundwood House (p502)
- » Lough Key House (p517)

## When to Go

The Midlands looks its finest in late spring when the fields, hedges and trees glow a lush, radiant green, but the place really comes to life in the summer when you'll find fairs, festivals and special events in towns across the region. It's also the season for cruising the Shannon, the weather is generally better, the days longer and the riverside pubs and restaurants really get into gear. In September, watch out for the Electric Picnic, one of Ireland's best-loved and most eclectic musical festivals.

# The Midlands Highlights

- 1 Slow down a gear and discover the rolling landscapes along the **Shannon–Erne Waterway** (p519)
- 2 Contemplate the lost land of saints and scholars at Ireland's finest monastic site, **Clonmacnoise** (p509)
- 3 Nurse a quiet pint in **Morrissey's**, one of Ireland's most atmospheric pubs (p502)
- 4 Roam the tree-lined streets and explore the castle grounds in elegant **Birr** (p505)
- 5 Learn about Ireland's greatest disaster at the harrowing Famine Museum at **Strokestown Park House** (p514)
- 6 Explore the Iron Age oak trackway unearthed at **Corlea** (p524)
- 7 Wander the corridors and gardens of magnificent **Belvedere House** (p527) and marvel at its spiteful history

