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Ireland Highlights

This 300km-tourist trail takes you past some of Ireland’s most famous attractions and through spectacular countryside. Start with a whistle-stop tour of Dublin, including visits to Trinity College and the Book of Kells as well as a sample of Guinness in its home-town. The next day, head west to Galway, from where you should take a drive through stunning, brooding Connemara National Park (which can be driven in a nice loop) before heading south through the moonlike landscape of the Burren. Take a detour to the Cliffs of Moher, then head to Ennis, a good spot to enjoy a bit of traditional Irish music. Keep going south through the Connor Pass into County Kerry, stopping for a half-day in Dingle before setting out to visit its peninsula, taking in the views and prehistoric monuments of Slea Head. Via the ferry, continue on to Killarney, the perfect base from which to explore the famous Ring of Kerry, a much-trafficked 179km loop around the Iveragh Peninsula.
The west of Ireland is rightly at the top of most people’s must-visit lists. Start in County Sligo, where prehistory and panorama combine to wonderful effect at Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery. Wind your way south along the coast, stopping at some of Ireland’s best surf beaches like Strandhill and Enniscrone, to the pretty village of Pollatomish. Southwest of here is magnificent Croagh Patrick, which is worth a climb if only to feast your eyes on island-studded Clew Bay. Go west to Louisburgh, from where you can head offshore to craggy Clare Island (home of the pirate queen Grace O’Malley), before turning south along the beautiful Doolough Valley to Leenane, situated on Ireland’s only fjord. This is the northern gateway to Connemara National Park, which you can explore via the beautiful coastal route, passing Kylemore Abbey, venturing onto Clifden’s scenic Sky Road and then winding your way around the coast through pretty Roundstone. Alternatively, you could savour the stunning wilderness of the inland route through Maam Cross to Galway, where you should devote at least a day to exploring the colourful streets and wonderful pubs.

South of Galway, the fishing villages of Kinvara and Ballyvaughan are at the edge of the strange, karst landscape of the Burren, home to all manner of flora and fauna, as well as big-ticket attractions like the ancient Aillwee Caves and the Cliffs of Moher. Going south, be sure to sample some of Ireland’s exquisite traditional music by attending a session in one of the pubs of Miltown Malbay; beach lovers should also opt for a stop in Kilkee, a favourite with surfers.

The easiest way to cross into County Kerry is via the ferry at Killimer. Take a day to explore the Dingle Peninsula, with its rich menu of ancient sites and stunning views, before overnighting in Dingle – one of the prettiest towns along the entire west coast. Take another day to explore the world-famous Ring of Kerry, ending in Killarney National Park, right on the edge of Killarney itself. Take the scenic route across the middle of the Beara Peninsula and make your way to the Italianate Garinish Island, with its exotic flowers. Then follow the coast through Castletownshend and the fishing village of Union Hall to the city of Cork.
Top: Giant’s Causeway (p606), County Antrim
Bottom: Stone circle, Beara Peninsula (p247)
Coastal Tour

Start in Dublin, then head north to the Neolithic necropolis at Brú na Bóinne. Continue on to Mellifont Abbey before crossing the border into Northern Ireland and heading to Belfast. Go northwest along the Antrim coast to the Giant’s Causeway. Continue around the coastline of north Donegal, stopping at Glenveagh National Park. Head south into Sligo and climb the Stone Age passage grave at Carrowkeel for views of Lough Arrow. Make your way to the southwest via Connemara National Park. Wonder at the Burren and check out traditional music in Doolin before crossing into County Kerry and exploring the Dingle Peninsula. Go through Killarney on your way round the Ring of Kerry. Camp in Kenmare and explore the Beara Peninsula, then Ireland’s second city, Cork. Explore County Waterford from seaside Ardmore. Visit Dungarvan and its castle, and the museums in Waterford. Go north through Thomastown to St Canice’s Cathedral in Kilkenny before exploring the city’s medieval core. Visit Castletown House in County Kildare, then cut east to Glendalough in the Wicklow Mountains National Park. Finally, head back to Dublin.

Tip to Toe

Begin in Northern Ireland’s second city, Derry, walking the city walls and exploring the Bogside district. Then cross into County Donegal and explore the Inishowen Peninsula before overnighting in Dunfanaghy. As you move down Donegal’s coastline, check out the monastic ruins of Glencolumbäille and the sea cliffs at Slieve League. Cross into County Sligo and visit the Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery before checking in to your Sligo Town hotel. The next day, treat yourself to a round of golf at the County Sligo Golf Course at Rosses Point or a seaweed bath in Enniscrone. You’ll skirt the eastern edge of Connemara National Park as you travel south to Galway, from where you should strike out for Clonmacnoise. From here, move through the heart of the Midlands to another monastic gem, the Rock of Cashel. Medieval Kilkenny is only an hour away – visit its stunning castle before exploring nearby Thomastown and Jerpoint Abbey. Using Wexford as a base, explore Curraclaoe Beach and visit Enniscorthy and the excellent National 1798 Rebellion Centre. Or you could chill out and watch the fishermen draw in their lines in Kilmore Quay.
Northern Delights

Start in Belfast, where you should visit the Titanic Experience and take a black-taxi tour, before heading north toward the Antrim coast and the Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge. Head west toward the Unesco World Heritage-listed Giant’s Causeway, a highlight of any trip to Northern Ireland; along the way, Game of Thrones fans can check out Ballintoy Harbour, which stood in for the Iron Islands’ Lordsport Harbour in the TV series. The causeway coast finishes in the fascinating village of Bushmills, home to the famous distillery. Derry is worth a day – walk the city’s walls and explore its more recent past in the Bogside district, and then cross the invisible border into the Republic by visiting the Inishowen Peninsula in County Donegal. Back in the North, finish your visit in Lough Erne, taking in both White Island and the carved stones of Devenish Island.

Ireland of the Ancients

Begin at the stunning Neolithic tombs of Newgrange and Knowth in County Meath, in the heart of Brú na Bóinne. Nearby, stand at the top of the celebrated Hill of Tara, a site of immense folkloric significance and seat of the high kings of Ireland until the 11th century. Across the plain is the Hill of Slane, where St Patrick lit a fire in 433 to proclaim Christianity throughout the land. To the west is the Neolithic monument of Loughcrew – a quieter alternative to Brú na Bóinne. Keep going west to County Roscommon. Just outside Tulsk village is Cruachan Ái, the most important Celtic site in Europe. Head south to Clonmacnoise, the 6th-century monastic site in County Offaly, then continue through the heart of the country to the impressive Rock of Cashel in County Tipperary. Turn east and head through County Kilkenny, stopping at the Cistercian Jerpoint Abbey, at the pretty village of Thomastown. From here, travel north-east to Wicklow and magnificent Glendalough, where the substantial remains of a monastic settlement linger by two beautiful lakes.
Map Legend

Sights
- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

Activities, Courses & Tours
- Bodysurfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

Sleeping
- Sleeping
- Camping

Eating
- Eating

Drinking & Nightlife
- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

Entertainment
- Entertainment

Shopping
- Shopping

Information
- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

Geographic
- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

Population
- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

Transport
- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- S-Bahn/Subway station
- Taxi
- T-bane/Tunnelbana station
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Tube station
- U-Bahn/Underground station
- Other Transport

Routes
- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

Boundaries
- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

Hydrography
- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

Areas
- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Sight
- Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book.
Neil Wilson

Counties Wexford, Waterford, Carlow & Kilkenny; County Cork; County Kerry

Neil’s first visit to Ireland was on a sailing trip to Kinsale in 1990. Since then he has travelled most of the Republic and all of Northern Ireland, often while researching for Lonely Planet guidebooks. Working on this edition allowed him to hike the main ridge of MacGillicuddy’s Reeks, cycle to the top of Priest’s Leap, and eat far too much farmhouse cheese in West Cork (mmm, Gubbeen…). Neil is a full-time travel writer based in Scotland, and has written more than 70 guidebooks for half a dozen publishers. Neil also wrote the Great Outdoors chapter.
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