



Counties Down & Armagh

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ McKee's Country Store & Restaurant (p569)
- ➔ Parson's Nose (p582)
- ➔ Brunel's (p575)
- ➔ Poacher's Pocket (p570)
- ➔ Moody Boar (p585)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Old Inn (p565)
- ➔ Enniskeen Country House (p574)
- ➔ Narrow Water Castle Apartment (p580)
- ➔ Fortwilliam Country House (p582)
- ➔ Hutt Hostel (p574)

Why Go?

County Down's treasures fan out beyond Belfast. Strangford Lough's sparkling, island-fringed waters stretch south, with the bird-haunted mudflats of Castle Espie and Nendrum's ancient monastery on one shore, and the picturesque Ards Peninsula on the other. The Mourne Mountains' velvet curves sweep down to the sea near Downpatrick and Lecale, the old stamping grounds of Ireland's patron saint.

Down's neighbour County Armagh is largely rural, from the low, rugged hills of the south to the apple orchards and strawberry fields of the north, with Ireland's ecclesiastical capital, the appealing little city of Armagh, in the middle. South Armagh is a peaceful backwater, where you can wander back and forth across the border with the Republic without even noticing.

Both counties' lush landscapes and scalloped bays provide a bounty of seasonal ingredients, used by a wealth of exceptional eateries throughout the region.

When to Go

- ➔ May brings white clouds of apple blossom to County Armagh's orchards, celebrated with the Apple Blossom Fair in the early part of the month.
- ➔ Summertime generally has the best weather for hiking and cycling, and late June sees the International Walking Festival in the Mourne Mountains.
- ➔ Spring and autumn are both good for birdwatching, but keen birders have a big X on their calendars in October, when tens of thousands of overwintering brent geese begin to arrive at Castle Espie on Strangford Lough.



Counties Down & Armagh Highlights

- 1** Hike along ancient smuggler trails in the **Mourne Mountains** (p576).
- 2** Tour the illustrious castle and taste top menus in elegant **Hillsborough** (p581).
- 3** Explore stately halls and exquisite gardens at **Mt Stewart House** (p568).
- 4** Watch vast flocks of geese, ducks and waders at **Castle Espie** (p569).
- 5** Tee off at esteemed **Royal County Down Golf Course** (p574) in seaside Newcastle.
- 6** Follow in the steps of Ireland's patron saint in **Downpatrick** (p571).
- 7** View priceless texts including a first edition of *Gulliver's Travels* at **Armagh Public Library** (p583).
- 8** Visit *Game of Thrones*—famed **Castle Ward Estate** (p577).
- 9** Mountain-bike down the slopes of **Kilbroney Forest Park** (p577).