



# Counties Londonderry & Antrim

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## Why Go?

Northern Ireland's spectacular north coast is a giant geology classroom. The patient workmanship of the ocean has laid bare the black basalt and white chalk that underlie much of County Antrim, and dissected the rocks into a scenic extravaganza of sea stacks, pinnacles, cliffs and caves. This mystical landscape's extraordinary rock formations, ruined castles and wooded glens have made the region an atmospheric backdrop for the TV series *Game of Thrones*, with numerous filming locations here.

To the west, County Londonderry's chief attraction is the spirited city of Derry. Ireland's only walled city sits alongside a broad sweep of the River Foyle and echoes with centuries of often-turbulent history. The current decade has seen it undergo a renaissance as a cultural powerhouse, with a profusion of creative enterprises, public artworks and vibrant drinking and dining scenes. Derry also makes an ideal jumping-off point for the Wild Atlantic Way.

## When to Go

- ➔ May is the best month for walking along the Causeway Coast, as you'll avoid the summer crowds at the Giant's Causeway and enjoy a colourful sprinkling of spring flowers to boot.
- ➔ June and July see the peak of the seabird nesting season – an ideal time to visit the Kesh National Nature Reserve on gloriously remote Rathlin Island – and also bring the best beach weather.
- ➔ The traditional festivities of Ballycastle's Ould Lammas Fair, dating from the 17th century, take place on the last Monday and Tuesday of August, marking the end of summer and beginning of the harvest.

## COUNTY LONDONDERRY

POP 247,130 / AREA 2074 SQ KM

### Derry

POP 107,900

Northern Ireland's second-largest city continues to flourish as an artistic and cultural hub. Derry's city centre was given a striking makeover for its year as the UK City of Culture 2013, with the new Peace Bridge, Ebrington Square, and the redevelopment of the waterfront and Guildhall area making the most of the city's splendid riverside setting.

There's lots of history to absorb here, from the Siege of Derry to the Battle of the Bogside and Bloody Sunday – a stroll around the 17th-century city walls that encircle the city is a must, as is a tour of the Bogside murals – along with the burgeoning live-music scene in the city's lively pubs.

### History

The defining moment of Derry's history was the Siege of Derry in 1688–89, an event that reverberates to this day. King James I granted the city a royal charter in 1613, and gave the London livery companies (trade guilds) the task of fortifying Derry and planting the county of Coleraine (soon to be renamed County Londonderry) with Protestant settlers.

In Britain, the Glorious Revolution of 1688 saw the Catholic King James II ousted in fa-

vour of the Protestant Dutch prince, William of Orange. Derry was the only garrison in Ireland that was not held by forces loyal to King James, and so, in December 1688, Catholic forces led by the Earl of Antrim arrived on the east bank of the River Foyle, ready to seize the city. They sent emissaries to discuss terms of surrender, but in the meantime troops were being ferried across the river in preparation for an assault. On seeing this, 13 apprentice boys barred the city gates with a cry of 'There'll be no surrender!'

And so, on 7 December 1688, the Siege of Derry began. For 105 days the Protestant citizens of Derry withstood bombardment, disease and starvation (the condition of the besieging forces was not much better). By the time a relief ship burst through and broke the siege, an estimated half of the city's inhabitants had died. In the 20th century the Siege of Derry became a symbol of Ulster Protestants' resistance to rule by a Catholic Irish Republic, and 'No surrender!' remains a Loyalist battle cry to this day.

In the 19th century Derry was one of the main ports of emigration to the US, a fact commemorated by *Emigrants*, the Eamonn O'Doherty-designed sculptures depicting an emigrant family standing on Derry Quay.

Derry was a flashpoint during the Troubles, particularly during the Battle of the Bogside and Bloody Sunday. More recently, its role as the UK City of Culture 2013 has helped revitalise the city.

### DERRY/LONDONDERRY

Derry/Londonderry is a town with two names. Nationalists always use Derry, and vandals often deface the 'London' part of the name on road signs. Staunch Unionists insist on Londonderry, which is still the city's (and county's) official name. All the same, many people, regardless of political persuasion, call it Derry in everyday speech.

The settlement was originally named Doíre Calgaigh (Oak Grove of Calgach), after a pagan warrior-hero; in the 10th century it was renamed Doíre Colmcille (Oak Grove of Columba), in honour of the 6th-century saint who established the first monastic settlement here.

In the following centuries the name was shortened and anglicised to Derrrie or Derry. Then in 1613, in recognition of the Corporation of London's role in the 'plantation' of northwest Ulster with Protestant settlers, Derry was granted a royal charter and the city was renamed Londonderry.

A new County Londonderry was created from what was originally County Coleraine, along with parts of Tyrone and Antrim; unlike the city, there has never been an officially sanctioned county called Derry. Nevertheless, those with nationalist leanings, including the county's Gaelic football team, prefer to use County Derry.

Traditionally, road signs in Northern Ireland point to Londonderry, those in the Republic point to Derry (or Doíre in Irish), and some tourism-industry promotional material covers all bases, using Derry-Londonderry-Doíre. In July 2015, the Derry City and Strabane District Council voted to change the city's official name to Derry, a decision that has been challenged by Unionists. Watch this space.