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The Best of Ireland

At first glance, Ireland presents a familiar face to American visitors. The language is the same, only more lyrical, the faces are familiar, the food recognizable, even the stout well known. Many visitors, notably Irish Americans, experience it as a kind of homecoming. It takes a while for this superficial impression to wear off, but it will, because this is a unique country in its own right, a fact that becomes clearer the longer you stay here. The impenetrable Gaelic language is increasingly prevalent, and in some counties road signs are predominately in Gaelic. This creates a kind of distance, a feeling of foreignness, that it seems many Irish do not mind cultivating. These are a proud people and, in part because of the success of the powerful Irish tourism industry, increasingly possessive of their nation. They know how many people come here from other lands and feel a sort of ownership here—because of family backgrounds, and the familiarity of last names—and while they are sympathetic, they will quickly remind you that this is *their* country. Don't be put off by this. Most of them are genuinely glad you're here—they can just feel a bit overrun from time to time.

For visitors this is an ideal country to traverse, and with its varied and extensive offerings within a compact frame, it's visually addictive. Within a few miles you can travel from rugged coastline to smooth pastureland to towering mountains to gloomy peat bog. You may not go very fast on its winding narrow roads, but you will see a great deal in a small period of time. Within a half-day's drive of downtown Dublin lie Neolithic tombs, Bronze Age forts, early Christian monastic sites, Viking city walls, and vast Georgian estates. Centuries-old castles stand anachronistically in pastures, with ponies grazing nonchalantly around them. The past is all around you here: Pre-historic stone tables stand in backyards, and farmers drive their tractors carefully around ancient stone circles. There are thousands of unexcavated ancient sites dotted around the countryside, waiting to be explored. Others are marked, but open to the public—most of these are in perfect condition, protected by the general population who have a profound respect for these mysterious sites that were, until recently, believed by many to be protected by fairies.

So here is a quick list of some of our favorite places in Ireland. We hope that while you're here you'll find a few of your own.

1 The Best Picture-Postcard Towns

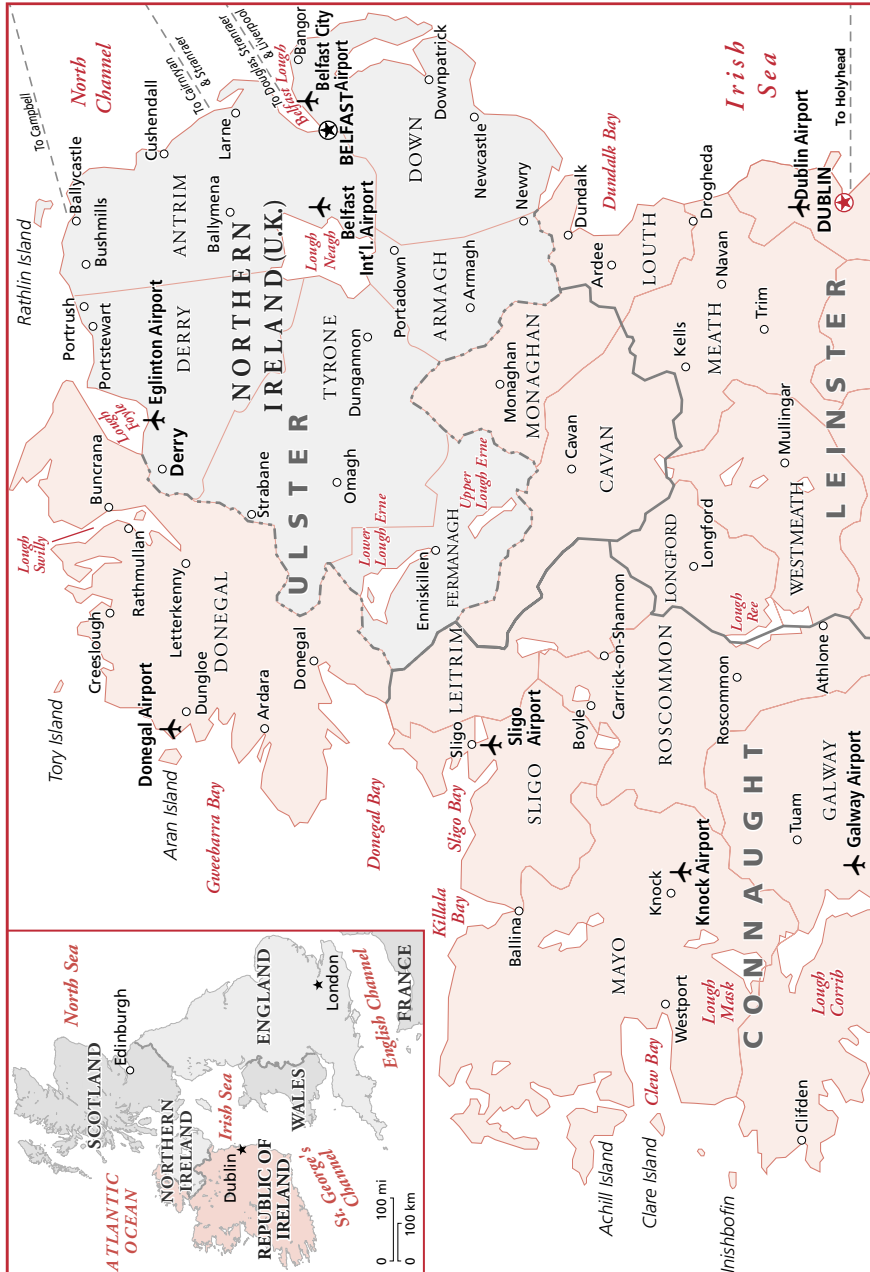
- **Dalkey** (County Dublin): This charming south-coast Dublin suburb has just enough glorious freedom from that city's traffic snarls and frenzy. With a castle, a mountaintop folly, and lovely beaches, there's a lot to enjoy. Dalkey is an upscale bedroom community for Ireland's rich, so it's unsurprising that it also has fine restaurants and welcoming pubs. This is a tempting town to settle into. See chapter 5.

- **Carlingford** (County Louth): Up in quiet, lazy Louth, little Carlingford is a draw. A tiny medieval village with castle ruins on the bay, its pedestrian-friendly lanes are filled with colorful shops, cafes, and pubs, and its other draws include a scattering of good eateries. See chapter 6.
- **Inistioge** (County Kilkenny): Nestled in the Nore River Valley, surrounded by undulating hills, this riverfront village with two spacious greens and a host of pubs cries out to be photographed. Its rivers and lakes are swimming with fish and attract hosts of anglers. See chapter 7.
- **Kilkenny** (County Kilkenny): Kilkenny is a charming medieval town. Its city walls, splendidly restored castle, and renowned arts scene draw visitors from across Ireland and abroad. The combination of the historic feel and the modern arts movement makes this an especially rewarding town to discover. See chapter 7.
- **Kinsale** (County Cork): Kinsale's narrow streets all lead to the sea, dropping steeply from the hills around the harbor, although the crowds of visitors teeming on the sidewalks every summer attest to the fact that the Kinsale secret is out. The walk from Kinsale through Scilly to Charles Fort and Frower Point is breathtaking. Kinsale has the added benefit of being a foodie town, with no shortage of good restaurants. See chapter 9.
- **Kenmare** (County Kerry): If you're driving the Ring of Kerry, this is the best base you could wish for at the mouth of the River Roughty on Kenmare Bay. The town is picture perfect with stone cottages, colorful gardens, and flowers overflowing from window boxes. See chapter 10.
- **Adare** (County Limerick): Like a town plucked from a book of fairy tales, Adare has thatched cottages, black-and-white timbered houses, lichen-covered churches, and romantic ruins, strewn along the banks of the River Maigue. It's also got two excellent hotels and one fabulous restaurant. See chapter 11.
- **Athlone** (County Westmeath): Sitting at the edge of the River Shannon, its streets curving around a sturdy, fortresslike castle, Athlone is a charmer. Houses are painted in bright hues, and with its small, funky boutiques and spirit of fun, it has the feel of a busy university town. Good restaurants and lively pubs add to its charms. See chapter 15.

2 The Best Natural Wonders

- **The Slieve Bloom Way** (County Laois): Slieve Bloom, Ireland's largest and most unspoiled blanket bog, rises gently above the peat fields. Its beauty—gentle slopes, glens, rivers, waterfalls, and bog lands—is subtle but persistent, and it is comparatively untouched. You can have it more or less to yourself, apart from its deer and foxes, and an occasional frolicking otter. See p. 465.
- **MacGillycuddy's Reeks** (County Kerry): A mountain range on the Iveragh Peninsula, MacGillycuddy's Reeks not only has the best name of any mountain range in Ireland, but also the highest mountain on the island, Carrantuohill (1,041m/3,414 ft.). The Reeks are among Ireland's greatest spectacles. See p. 322.
- **The Burren** (County Clare): We can guarantee this: the Burren is one of the strangest landscapes you're likely to see. Its vast limestone grassland is spread with a quilt of wildflowers from as far afield as the Alps, all softening the stark stones jutting out of

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the ground. Its inhabitants include nearly every species of butterfly found in Ireland. See p. 364.

- **Cliffs of Moher** (County Clare): Rising from Hag's Head to the south, these magnificent sea cliffs reach their full height of 214 (702 ft.) just north of O'Brien's Tower. The views of the open sea, of the Aran Islands, and of the Twelve Bens mountains of Connemara (see below) are spectacular. A walk south along the cliff edge at sunset makes a perfect end to any day. See p. 369.
- **Croagh Patrick** (County Mayo): Rising steeply 750m (2,460 ft.) above the coast, Croagh Patrick is seen as a holy mountain, where a saint is said to have retreated in penance. Traditionally, barefoot pilgrims climb it on the last Sunday of July, but in recent years, hundreds of Nike-shod tourists have been making the ascent daily. The view from above can be breathtaking or nonexistent—the summit is often wrapped in clouds. See p. 413.
- **The Twelve Bens** (County Galway): Amid Connemara's central mountains, bogs, and lakes the rugged Twelve Bens range crowns a spectacular landscape. Some of the peaks are bare and rocky, others clothed in peat. The loftiest, Benbaun, in Connemara National Park, reaches a height of 719m (2,395 ft.). See p. 399.
- **Slieve League** (County Donegal): The Slieve League peninsula stretches for 48km (30 miles) into the Atlantic. Its wonderfully pigmented bluffs rise to startlingly high sea cliffs, best gazed at from Carrigan Head. They can also be walked along, if you dare. See p. 444.
- **Giant's Causeway** (County Antrim): At the foot of a cliff by the sea, this mysterious mass of dark tightly packed, naturally occurring hexagonal basalt columns are nothing short of astonishing. This volcanic wonder, formed 60 million years ago, looks marvelous from above, even better when negotiated (cautiously) on foot. See p. 518.

3 The Best Castles

- **Trim Castle** (County Meath): Trim, also called King John's Castle, restored as a "preserved ruin," is a massive Anglo-Norman structure. It was all but impregnable for 4 centuries (late-12th to mid-17th). Until it was abandoned and collapsed in the 17th century, it never underwent any significant alteration. For anyone with imagination, Trim is a visual gateway into medieval Ireland. See p. 203.
- **Cahir Castle** (County Tipperary): One of the largest of Ireland's medieval fortresses, this castle is in an extraordinary state of preservation. Tours explain some fascinating features of the military architecture, and then you're free to roam through a maze of tiny chambers, spiral staircases, and dizzying battlements. See p. 239.
- **Kilkenny Castle** (County Kilkenny): Although parts of the castle date from the 13th century, the existing structure has the feel of an 18th-century palace. There have been many modifications since medieval times, including the addition of colorful landscaping, and the old stables now hold numerous art galleries and shops. See p. 250.
- **Blarney Castle** (County Cork): Despite the mobs of tourists who besiege it daily, this majestic tower house is worth a visit. While you're there, check out the Badger Cave and dungeons at the tower's base, as well as the serpentine paths that wind through the castle gardens. Need we mention the stone? You sidle in under the upper wall with your head hanging

over a 10-story drop. You kiss it. It's a thing people do. See p. 271.

- **Charles Fort** (County Cork): On a promontory in Kinsale Harbor, this fortress's massive walls enclose a complex of buildings in varying states of repair. At the entrance you're handed a map and left to explore, discover, and almost certainly get lost in the maze of courtyards, passages, walls, and barracks. See p. 278.
- **Bunratty Castle and Folk Park** (County Clare): This grand old castle has been well restored and filled with a curious assortment of medieval furnishings, offering a glimpse into the life of its past inhabitants. This is the first stop for many arrivals from Shannon, so expect crowds. See p. 358.
- **Doe Castle** (County Donegal): This picturesque tower house is surrounded

on three sides by the waters of Sheep Haven Bay and on the fourth by a moat carved into the bedrock that forms its foundation. It has a remote waterfront setting and sweeping views of the nearby hills. See p. 449.

- **Carrickfergus Castle** (County Antrim): This well-preserved Norman fortress standing guard on the bank of Belfast Lough is huge and impressive, with an imposing tower house and a high wall punctuated by corner towers. See p. 507.
- **Dunluce Castle** (County Antrim): These castle ruins surmount a razor-sharp promontory jutting into the sea. This was no doubt a highly defensible setting, and the castle wasn't abandoned until a large section collapsed and fell into the breakers. See p. 518.

4 The Best of Ancient Ireland

- **Newgrange** (County Meath): Poised atop a low hill north of the River Boyne, Newgrange is the centerpiece of a megalithic cemetery dating back 5,000 years. The massive mound and passage tomb were constructed, it seems, as a communal vault to house cremated remains. The tomb's passage is so perfectly aligned with the solstice sun that the central chamber, deep within the mound, is illuminated for several days at the winter solstice. See p. 201.
- **Hill of Tara** (County Meath): Of ritual significance from the Stone Age to the Christian period, Tara has seen it all and kept it all a secret. This was the traditional center and seat of Ireland's high kings. Although the hill is only 154m (512 ft.) above sea level, from here you can see each of Ireland's four Celtic provinces on a clear day. The site is mostly unexcavated and tells its story in whispers. It's a place to be walked slowly. See p. 200.
- **Loughcrew** (County Meath): At this little-known site, not far from Newgrange, a series of cruciform passage tombs crown two hills. On the east hill, a guide unlocks the door to one of the domed tombs, answering your questions with a personal touch not possible at the larger sites. More rewarding, however, is a hike up the west hill to a second, more solitary series of tombs where you can make your own imaginative reconstruction. See p. 201.
- **Lough Gur** (County Limerick): This lakefront site will convince you that the Neolithic farmers of Ireland had an estimable sense of real estate. Inhabited for more than 4,000 years, the ancient farming settlement offers a number of prehistoric remains. The most impressive of these is the largest surviving stone circle in Ireland, made up of 113 stones. See p. 352.
- **Dún Aengus** (County Galway): No one knows who built this massive

stone fort, or when. The eminent archaeologist George Petrie called Dún Aengus “the most magnificent barbaric monument in Europe.” Facing the sea, where its three stone rings meet steep 90m (295-ft.) cliffs, Dún Aengus still stands guard today over the southern coast of the island of Inishmore, the largest of the Aran Islands. See “Side Trips from Galway City” in chapter 12.

- **Carrowmore and Carrowkeel** (County Sligo): These two megalithic cities of the dead (Europe’s largest) may have once contained more than 200 passage tombs. The two together—one in the valley and the other atop

a nearby mountain—convey an unequaled sense of the scale and wonder of the ancient peoples’ reverence for the dead. Carrowmore is well presented and interpreted, while Carrowkeel is left to itself and to those who seek it out. See p. 427.

- **Navan Fort** (County Antrim): There is now little to see of this place’s past greatness, though it was once the ritual and royal seat of Ulster. Thankfully, the interpretive center here is nothing short of remarkable, and it offers a great introduction to the myth and archaeology of the fort, known in Irish as *Emain Macha*. See p. 516.

5 Remnants of the Golden Age: The Best Early Christian Ruins

- **Glendalough** (County Wicklow): Nestled in “the glen of the two lakes,” this atmospheric monastic settlement was founded in the 6th century by St. Kevin, who was looking for seclusion, and certainly found it here. The setting is endlessly scenic, with lakes and thick forests surrounding it. Although quite remote, Glendalough suffered numerous assaults from the Vikings and English forces, and eventually faded away. Today its stone ruins collude with the countryside to create one of the loveliest spots in Ireland. See p. 180.
- **Jerpoint Abbey** (County Kilkenny): Jerpoint is the finest representative of the many Cistercian abbeys whose ruins dot the Irish landscape. Somehow hundreds of years of rain and wind have failed to completely wipe away clever medieval carvings, leaving us a rare chance to see a glimpse of how magnificent these abbeys must once have been. The splendid, richly carved cloister is the best place to spot elaborate carvings, particularly at the top of the many columns. See p. 252.
- **The Rock of Cashel** (County Tipperary): In name and appearance, “the Rock” suggests a citadel, a place designed more for power than prayer. In fact, Cashel (or *Caiseal*) means “fortress.” The rock is a huge outcropping—or an *upcropping*—of limestone topped with spectacularly beautiful ruins, including what was formerly the country’s finest Romanesque chapel. This was the seat of clerics and kings, a power center to rival Tara. Now, however, the two sites vie only for tourists. See p. 240.
- **Skellig Michael** (County Kerry): Thirteen kilometers (8 miles) offshore of the Iveragh Peninsula, rising sharply 214m (702 ft.) out of the Atlantic, this is a remote rocky crag dedicated to the Archangel Michael. In flight from the world, early Irish monks in pursuit of “white martyrdom” chose this spot to build their austere hermitage. Today the journey to Skellig, across choppy seas, and the arduous climb to its summit are challenging and unforgettable. See “The

Skellig Islands” under “The Iveragh Peninsula” in chapter 10.

- **Inishmurray** (County Sligo): This uninhabited island off the Sligo coast holds another striking monastic ruin, this one surrounded by what appear to be the walls of an even more ancient stone fort. Despite its remoteness, the Vikings sought out this outpost of peace-seeking monks for destruction in 807. Today its circular walls and the surrounding sea create a stunning view, well worth the effort required to reach it. See “Exploring the Surrounding Countryside” under “Sligo & Yeats Country” in chapter 14.

- **Clonmacnois** (County Offaly): This was once one of Ireland’s most important religious, artistic, and literary centers, a place of pilgrimage and culture. Founded in the mid-5th century at the axis of the River Shannon and the medieval east-west thoroughfare known as the Eiscir Riada, Clonmacnois thrived for centuries until its prime riverfront location brought repeated violent raids that proved its undoing. Even in ruins, Clonmacnois remains a place of peculiar serenity. See p. 470.

6 The Best Literary Spots

- **Glasnevin Cemetery** (County Dublin): Besides being the setting for part of *Ulysses*, this is the resting place of James Joyce’s parents and other members of his family. The English-born poet Gerard Manley Hopkins is buried here, in the Jesuit plot. Maud Gonne, the Irish nationalist and longtime Dublin resident who is said to have inspired Yeats’s play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, is buried in the Republican plot. The writer, drinker, and Irish republican Brendan Behan is also buried here. See p. 142.
- **Davy Byrne’s Pub**: In *Ulysses* Joyce describes the main character, Leopold Bloom, stopping in at this Dublin pub for a Gorgonzola sandwich and a glass of burgundy. “He raised his eyes and met the stare of a bilious clock. Two. Pub clock five minutes fast. Time going on. Hands moving. Two. Not yet.” Today the clock is said to be kept five minutes fast, in honor of Bloom and Joyce. See chapter 5.
- **Dublin Writers Museum**: With Joyce’s typewriter, handwritten letters from Brendan Behan to friends back home, and early flyers from the Abbey Theatre when it was run by

Lady Gregory and Yeats, this museum is heaven for bookish types. You can spend hours reading the memorabilia, and marveling at the trivia. The only thing it lacks is a good shop. See chapter 5.

- **James Joyce Museum**: At the edge of the sea in the Dublin suburb of Sandycove, this Martel tower was home to Joyce for a short time, but he based a character on his host, Oliver St. John Gogarty, whom Joyce described in *Ulysses* perfectly as “stately, plump Buck Mulligan.” The museum was opened in 1962, and includes an interior restored to look as it would have when Joyce was here, along with plenty of memorabilia, including Joyce’s walking stick and guitar. See chapter 5.
- **St. Patrick’s Cathedral** (County Dublin): Jonathan Swift tickled and horrified the world with his vicious wit. He shook up political establishments with his sarcasm, and nauseated the English-speaking world with his suggestion that people should dine on Irish babies. While kicking up such a stir, he was dean of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, which sponsored

and supported him through it all. He is buried here alongside his longtime companion Stella. See p. 138.

- **County Sligo:** With its many connections to the beloved poet W. B. Yeats, this county is a pilgrimage destination for Yeats fans. The poet's writing was shaped by the landscape and people in this farming region,

and many of its monuments—including Lough Gill, Glencar Lake, Ben Bulbin Mountain, and Maeve's tomb—appear in his poetry. There are also several museums housing first editions, photographs, and other memorabilia, and Yeats's dark and somber grave is in Drumcliffe. See chapter 14.

7 The Best Gardens

- **Powerscourt Gardens** (County Wicklow): This grandiose Irish garden is set amid the natural splendor of the Wicklow Hills just outside of Dublin. The sprawling, manicured gardens and the wild beauty of the Powerscourt waterfall make this a great day's outing, and a respite from the noise and congestion of the city. See p. 181.
- **Japanese Gardens** (County Kildare): On the grounds of the National Stud, this peaceful enclave is based on the traditional designs of Japanese gardens. A Japanese specialist planned the structure and its symbolism, and most of the plants and stones were imported from Japan. See p. 194.
- **Ilnacullin** (County Cork): A ferry conveys visitors from a rhododendron-framed bay in the town of Glengarriff to Garinish Island, the unlikely site of a fine Italianate garden. The formal garden, with the

Casita at its center, is linked to a “wild garden” that showcases a collection of rhododendrons, azaleas, and rare trees. See p. 291.

- **Glencaveagh National Park** (County Donegal): A castle and its gardens stretch across a strangely barren valley high in the hills of Donegal, along the banks of Lough Veagh. The sprawling park contains a grand stuary garden, a walled garden, and a rhododendron-lined path that leads to a stunning view of the castle and lake. See p. 450.
- **Mount Stewart Gardens** (County Down): Built upon an elaborate plan, the Mount Stewart house has several small gardens of distinctive character. The Ards Peninsula provides a climate conducive to cultivating many subtropical species. The stuary, topiary, and planting designs reflect a touch of whimsy. See p. 510.

8 The Best Family Activities

- **Dublin Zoo in the Phoenix Park** (Dublin): Kids love this sympathetically designed zoo, with its wild creatures, animal-petting corners, and train ride. The surrounding park has room to run, picnic, and explore for hours. See p. 147.
- **Irish National Heritage Park** (County Wexford): Nearly 9,000 years of Irish history come alive here in ways that will fascinate visitors of

all ages. The whole family will be captivated by the story of ancient Ireland, from its first inhabitants to its Norman conquerors. See p. 214.

- **Fota Island Wildlife Park** (County Cork): In this wildlife park, rare and endangered animals roam freely. You'll see everything from giraffes and zebras to kangaroos, flamingos, penguins, and monkeys wandering the grassland. Add in a small amusement

park for toddlers, a tour train, picnic tables, and a gift shop and you've the makings of a fabulous family day out. See p. 286.

- **Muckross House & Gardens** (Killarney, County Kerry): This huge Victorian mansion with its exquisite gardens is also home to skilled artisans at work. Nearby are a series of reconstructed traditional farms, with animals and docents, providing a gateway to rural Ireland as it was for centuries. See p. 317.
- **Fungie the Dolphin Tours** (Dingle, County Kerry): Every day, fishing boats ferry visitors out into the nearby waters to see Fungie, the friendliest dolphin you're ever likely
- to meet. Fungie swims right up to the boat, and the boatmen stay out long enough for ample sightings. You can also arrange an early-morning dolphin swim. See p. 329.
- **Bunratty Castle and Folk Park** (County Clare): Kids are enthralled by this well restored medieval castle and re-created 19th-century village. It's complete with a school and loaded with active craftspeople. See p. 358.
- **Marble Arch Caves** (Marlbank, County Fermanagh): Adventurous families are guided by boat through well-lit underground waterways to explore caves and view amazing stone formations. See p. 552.

9 The Best Active Vacations

- **Sailing Ireland's West Coast:** Spectacular coastal scenery, interesting harbor towns, and an abundance of islands make the West Coast a delight for cruising sailors. See "Sailing" in chapter 4.
- **Horseback Riding in Donegal:** The wild and woolly coast of Donegal offers the perfect scenic backdrop for trail riding, and as varied a terrain—beaches, countryside, mountains—as you'll find anywhere. See p. 442.
- **Sea Kayaking in West Cork:** In Castletownbere on the dramatic, rugged Beara Peninsula, Beara Outdoor Pursuits specializes in accompanied trips out and around Bere Island and as far as Glengariff. You can play it as safe or as rough as you want. See p. 296.
- **Bicycling in the Southwest:** The peninsulas and islands of Cork and Kerry are perfect for cycling, with an abundance of beautiful places to visit. Roycroft's Stores in Skibbereen, County Cork, rent bikes that are a notch above the usual rental equipment. See the "Sports & Outdoor Pursuits" sections in chapters 9 and 10.
- **Walking the Donegal Coast:** The rugged headlands of Donegal are the most spectacular in Ireland, and the best way to explore them is on foot. Among the finest walks are Slieve League, Malin Head, and Horn Head. See "The Donegal Bay Coast" in chapter 14.
- **The Great Outdoors:** This is a soupto-nuts hiking outfitter that does day trips from Dublin. Dirty Boots Treks (☎ 01/623-6785; www.dirtyboots-treks.com), offers full-day excursions into the mountains south of Dublin. Treks include roundtrip transportation in a 4x4 Land Rover from Dublin into Wicklow Mountains National Park, for an easy-to-moderate hike. You also get a homemade picnic lunch and the day is capped off with a drink in a local country pub before returning to Dublin.

10 The Best Luxury Accommodations

- **The Clarence** (Dublin; ☎ 01/670-9000; www.theclarence.ie): Owned by members of the band U2, the Clarence is a perfect mixture of sleek sophistication and coolness. Everything here is designed for subtle elegance, from the soft, neutral color schemes, to the luxurious bed linens, to the huge beds, and the helpful staff. The Octagon Bar is a relaxing hangout, while the Tea Rooms restaurant is one of the best eateries in town. The new spa will pummel and facial you into relaxation, while the staff hurry off to find your favorite red wine. Staying here is a real treat. See p. 109.
- **Brook Lodge Hotel** (County Wicklow; ☎ 0402/36444; www.brooklodge.com): This place keeps getting better and better. Rooms have firm king-size four-poster beds, wood-paneled window seats, deep tubs, quality linens, and contemporary furnishings. The latest addition to this holistic oasis is The Wells, a gorgeous spa with Finnish baths, mud baths, hot tubs, Jacuzzis, indoor and outdoor pools, a *Hamam* (Turkish bath), and a flotation room in which you are sure to relax. See p. 188.
- **Sheen Falls Lodge** (County Kerry; ☎ 800/537-8483 in the U.S. or 064/41600): This salubrious resort sits beside a natural waterfall amid smooth lawns and semitropical gardens where the River Sheen meets the Kenmare Bay estuary. There's a 1,000-volume library, where green leather sofas and floor-to-ceiling tomes evoke a gentlemen's club. Each guest room overlooks the falls (which are breathtaking when floodlit at night) or the bay. See p. 310.
- **Ashford Castle** (County Mayo; ☎ 800/346-7007 in the U.S. or 092/954-6003): "Accommodation" is an understatement for the degree of luxury and elegance you'll find at this castle on the north shore of Lough Corrib—just ask Pierce Brosnan, who held his wedding reception here a few years back. Its magnificent grounds hold vast parks, woods, and a championship golf course. Its two restaurants, the Connaught Room and the George V Room, will likely convince you to spend your evenings on the grounds. See p. 418.
- **Delphi Lodge** (County Galway; ☎ 095/42222): This was once the country hideaway for the marquis of Sligo, and now it can be yours, too. Inside, the emphasis is on clean, bright simplicity in perfect taste; the grounds and environs are among the most beautiful in Ireland. "Tranquility," "comfort," and "fishing" are the operative words here. You will want to stay longer than you'd planned—and by renting one of the cottages for a week or more, you can make the indulgence more affordable. See p. 407.
- **TENsq** (County Antrim; ☎ 028/9024-1001): This funky boutique hotel overflows with Asian luxury. Low-level beds with white comforters and dark headboards lie on cream coir (coconut fiber) carpet. Armoires, shutters, and double doors are all inlaid with white opal glass. The overall feel is one of luxurious, elegant minimalism. Don't miss a meal at Porcelain, the hotel's excellent, cutting-edge Asian fusion restaurant. See p. 498.

11 The Best Moderately Priced Accommodations

- **Lorum Old Rectory** (County Carlow; ☎ 059/977-5282): Hospitality is one of those intangibles that no one is able to define in advance but which everyone knows when they've found it. A venerably warm and gracious home, exquisite meals, a lovely setting, and a style that puts its guests in rare form and humor make this place one of Ireland's best. See p. 189.
- **Temple House** (County Sligo; ☎ 071/918-3329; www.templehouse.ie): Roderick and Helena Perceval's grand Victorian manor house is an extraordinary place where ceilings soar to the stratosphere, marble stays solidly underfoot, and the family's working farm stretches out for miles around you. A Templar castle lies in ruins on the banks of their lake, well stocked with fish. To spend a few days here is to experience a different world. See p. 431.
- **The Bastion** (County Westmeath; ☎ 090/649-4954; www.thebastion.net): This simple and peaceful guesthouse in the heart of colorful Athlone is a find. Run by brothers Vinny and Anthony McCay, it has a minimalist approach, with clean white walls and crisp white linens contrasted with dark polished wood. The big, rambling house is right in the center of Athlone's foodie East Bank, and the McCay brothers make any stay here a pleasure. See p. 472.
- **Glenally House** (County Cork; ☎ 024/91623; www.glenally.com): At this wonderful Georgian country house near Youghal, they've gotten the details right: crisp, white cotton linens, fresh flowers in every room, fabulous cooking, roaring log fires. Everywhere is a brilliant juxtaposition of antique with up-to-the-minute style, and it works wonderfully. You'll be sorry to leave this place. See p. 288.
- **Killarney Great Southern** (County Kerry; ☎ 064/31262; www.gsh.ie): It's rare that we recommend a chain hotel as one of "the best," but this four-star grande dame of Killarney impresses us by even being in this price category. The hotel managed to keep prices down after a top-to-toe refurbishment in 2002, cementing it as one of the best values around. See p. 322.
- **Bruckless House** (County Donegal; ☎ 074/973-7071): This mid-18th-century farmhouse, restored with impeccable taste, has many charms, including award-winning gardens and a stable of Connemara ponies. Spacious, welcoming, and comfortable, Bruckless House feels like home (or better) after only a very short time. See p. 446.
- **Rathmullan House** (County Donegal; ☎ 0800/223-6510 in the U.S.; 074/915-8188 in Ireland; www.rathmullanhouse.com): This getaway lies at the end of a long private drive on the banks of the mirrorlike waters of Lough Swilly. Rooms are big and beautifully detailed, with a soft color scheme, claw-foot tubs, and private patios. There are half a dozen drawing rooms in which you can relax on big leather sofas by open fires. The staff is friendly and open, and the atmosphere is one of pure rural rest and relaxation. See p. 452.
- **The Bervie** (County Mayo; ☎ 098/43114; www.bervieachill.com): Views really don't get any better than this—sitting right at the edge of the sea, overlooking the cliffs across the pristine bay, this cozy retreat is an ideal place to stay for those exploring Ireland's wild west coast. Owners Elizabeth and John Barrett are charming hosts, who greet you with fresh scones, and will cook you a

delightful dinner, if you wish. The house is a former Coast Guard house, as solid as a rock, and as comforting as a security blanket. This is one of our favorite places in Ireland. See p. 418.

- **Ross Castle and House** (County Cavan; ☎ 043/81286 [castle]; ☎ 049/854-0218 [house]): A tower room in a centrally heated haunted castle, awaits you at Ross Castle. It won't take too big a bite out of your wallet, either. It might not be elegance, but it is unquestionably

memorable. Warm, comfortable Ross Castle and nearby Ross House are great places to relax beside Lough Sheelin, a noteworthy source of trout and pike. See p. 479.

- **Slieve Croob Inn** (County Down; ☎ 028/4377-1412): Whether you want to drop anchor and set up a home away from home in a self-catering cottage or just spend a night in a stunning landscape, you'll adore this tasteful hideaway in the magical Mourne. See p. 529.

12 The Best Restaurants

- **Jacob's Ladder** (County Dublin; ☎ 01/670-3865): Inspired cooking and a stylish room with views over Trinity College make this one of the hippest places in Dublin. Roche's forte is updating Irish standards into sublime signature dishes. His colcannon—an old favorite of potatoes and cabbage mashed with plenty of butter—is better than anywhere else on the island. Service is terrific and you get great value for your money. See p. 124.
- **Coast** (County Waterford; ☎ 051/393646): For food lovers, this is *the* great address to know about in Waterford. The dining room is as chic and understated as you'd hope to find in New York or London, with modern, smart food that really makes you take notice. From start to finish, the meal delivers just the right balance of zing and restraint. See p. 235.
- **Grapefruit Moon** (County Cork; ☎ 021/464-6646): Here's an elegant, pared down place in the middle of Ballycotton, an appealing village in East Cork. Run by members of the Allen family, of Ballymaloe fame, the key to everything is using the freshest ingredients obtainable. See p. 288.
- **The Chart House** (County Kerry; ☎ 066/915-2255): In this inviting bistro, everyone comes for Laura Boyce's confident, simple cooking. Think wonderful comfort food with a flair—the kind of food you never tire of. And the service is, as the Irish would say, “spot on.” See p. 335.
- **The Wild Geese** (County Limerick; ☎ 061/396451): After spending years making other people's restaurants absolutely fabulous, owner-chef David Foley created a gem in Limerick. The cooking is complex, exquisitely flavorful, and refined, yet always restrained. See p. 354.
- **Cromleach Lodge** (County Sligo; ☎ 071/916-5155): In this lovely country house with panoramic views of Lough Arrow and environs, Christy and Moira Tighe have created a culinary destination with few peers. The menu, Irish in focus, changes daily and never fails to delight. The eight-course gourmet menu is the ultimate indulgence. See p. 429.
- **The Corncrake** (County Donegal; ☎ 077/74534): Such a judicious blend of fresh ingredients and culinary imagination is a rare treat. The nettle soup, roast lamb, and desserts

of Noreen Lynch and Brid McCartney warrant a detour to the town of Carndonagh, where the living room of a small row house has been transformed into an extraordinary restaurant. See p. 459.

- **James Street South** (County Antrim: © 028/9043-4310; www.jamesstreet.south.co.uk): This is the table of the moment in Belfast. This place is a hit because of the terrific cooking, which delivers modern classics with an Irish twist. The lamb is always excellent,

and shouldn't be missed. Portions are generous, the wine list very good, the crowd rapturous. See p. 502.

- **The Narrows** (County Down; © 028/4272-8148): Who'd have thought that the sleepy little waterside hamlet of Portaferry would have a restaurant like this? Danny Millar is one of the hottest young chefs on this island—just ask *Food & Wine* magazine—and his complex-yet-earthly cooking is worth going out of your way for. See p. 512.

13 The Best Pubs

- **Abbey Tavern** (County Dublin): A short distance from Dublin center, the Abbey Tavern is the perfect place to recover and refuel after spending a day exploring Dublin. The Abbey is known far and wide for its ballads as well as its brew. See p. 166.
- **Brazen Head** (County Dublin): Nearly qualifying as one of Ireland's ancient sites, the Brazen Head, commissioned by Charles II, is more than 300 years old, but its stout is as fresh as it comes. Among its illustrious alumni are Wolfe Tone, Daniel O'Connell, and Robert Emmet, who planned the Dublin rising of 1803 under the Head's low timbers. See p. 163.
- **The Long Valley** (County Cork): For anyone who knows and loves Cork, this is a place of pilgrimage. There's one endless, low-slung room with a bar running its full length, doors taken from an ocean liner, barmen in white butchers' coats, and a selection of delectable sandwiches. It's a little slice of heaven. See p. 274.
- **McGann's** (County Clare): Doolin, a dot of a town on the Clare Coast, is a magnet for traditional Irish musicians—and a wonderful spot to hear

impromptu sessions of Irish music. Gus O'Connor's, down the road, is more famous (but also thicker with tourists); McGann's remains the genuine article without the hype. See p. 374.

- **Moran's Oyster Cottage** (County Galway): Famed for its seafood, this centuries-old thatched-cottage pub on the weir also draws a perfect pint. This may well be the oyster capital of Ireland. It's 19km (12 miles) out of Galway and well worth the drive—or the walk, for that matter. See p. 393.
- **Smuggler's Creek** (County Donegal): This place is worth a stop if only for its spectacular cliff-top views of Donegal Bay. Stone walls, beamed ceilings, open fires, excellent fare, and the brew that's true are among the charms proprietor Conor Britton has on tap. See p. 443.
- **Crown Liquor Saloon** (County Antrim): This National Trust pub, across from the Grand Opera House in Belfast, is a Victorian gem. Your mouth will drop open at its antique publican splendor even before you lift your first pint. See p. 505.

14 The Best Websites

- **Dublin Tourist Office** (www.visitdublin.com): This site is the most comprehensive resource for visiting the capital. We especially like the new last-minute booking service, which lets you find out which hotels and guesthouses have immediate availability, as well as which hotels are offering the best discounts.
- **Irelandhotels.com** (www.irelandhotels.com): What catapults this accommodations database ahead of the raft of hotel-finding sites is its “search by facility” function. Gotta have a gym? Need to find a babysitter? Want an in-room dataport for checking your e-mail? No problem. Just plug in your requirements and it will spit out a list of hotels and guesthouses that fit the bill.
- **Ireland Consolidated** (www.irelandconsolidated.com): One of the best bucket shops specializing in Ireland, it offers unsold tickets on major airlines at well below published rates.
- **Irish Tourist Board** (www.ireland.ie): Bord Failte’s site is both easy to navigate and extremely informative. An excellent place to start gathering ideas for your trip.
- **AA Roadwatch** (www.aaroadwatch.ie): Planning on driving? The route-planning feature of the Irish Automobile Association’s site is brilliantly simple. Plug in a starting point and destination and you’ll get a detailed, no-brainer set of directions from A to B.
- **Entertainment Ireland** (www.entertainment.ie): This handy, exhaustive, searchable database includes just about every event going on in Ireland, from museum exhibitions to rock concerts to new plays to nightclub theme nights. And there are well-written reviews of them all.
- **Irish Family History Foundation** (www.irishroots.net): This brand-new, comprehensive genealogy resource contains documentation from all 32 counties on the island. Much of the archived information is free for your perusal, or you can avail of researchers.
- **Newshound** (www.nuzhound.com): Hands down, the best single resource for keeping up-to-date on Northern Ireland. It’s a searchable library of news articles about developments in the North, including a terrific timeline of key events in “the Troubles.” In addition, there are articles on the Republic, as well as travel and dining reviews.