For a taste of iconic Ireland, County Kerry has surf-pounded sea cliffs, emerald-green farmland and wild countryside. Also try out our day-trip guide to the Gap of Dunloe, travelling by bike, boat or horse-drawn cart.

**SIGHTS**

**Dunbeg Fort**
(dunbegfort.com; Kilvickadownig)
The Iron Age promontory fortification is perched atop a sheer sea cliff about 4 miles southwest of Ventry. The fort has four outer walls; inside are the remains of a house and a clochán (beehive hut), as well as an underground passage.

**Killarney National Park**
(killarneynationalpark.ie; Killarney)
Inside Killarney’s 25,280-acre national park are beautiful Lough Leane (the Lower Lake or ‘Lake of Learning’), Muckross Lake and the Upper Lake, as well as the Mangerton, Torc, Shely and Purple Mountains. Areas of oak and yew woodland stretch for miles. This is wonderful walking and biking country.

**Ring Forts**
(Ballycarbery)
One mile northwest of Cahersheen, two extraordinary stone ring forts situated 600m apart are reached from a shared parking area. Cahergal, the larger and more impressive, dates from the 10th century and has stairways on the inside walls, a clochán, and the remains of a roundhouse. The smaller, 9th century Leacanabuile contains the outlines of four houses.

**Ross Castle**
(heritageireland.ie; Ross Rd)
Lakeside Ross Castle dates back to the 15th century, when it was a residence of the O’Donoghue family. It was the last place in Munster to succumb to Cromwell’s forces, thanks partly to its cunning spiral staircase, every step of which is a different height in order to break an attacker’s stride. The castle is a lovely walk or bike ride southwest of St Mary’s Cathedral, you may well spot deer along the way.

**Skellig Michael**
(heritageireland.ie; Skellig Ring)
The jagged, 217m-high rock of Skellig Michael is the larger of the two Skellig Islands and a Unesco World Heritage site. Early Christian monks established a community and survived here from the sixth until the 12th or 13th century. The monastic buildings perch on a saddle in the rock, some 150m above sea level.

**ACTIVITIES**

**Hidden Ireland Adventures**
(hiddenirelandadventures.com)
Guided ascents of Carrauntoohil depart on Wednesdays and Saturdays year-round (weather permitting). Book well ahead.

**Irish Adventures**
(irishadventures.net)
This outfit offers guided adventure trips including rock climbing on the local sea cliffs and kayaking in Dingle Harbour with a very famous local – Fungie the dolphin. It also runs mountain bike trips and horse riding treks.

**Offshore Surf School**
(offshoresurfschool.ie; Inch)
Offshore Surf School offers a range of surf lessons, including a two-hour group class, and also rents gear.

**Seafari**
(00 353 064 664 2059; Kenmare Pier)
Warm up with complimentary tea, coffee and rum – and the captain’s sea shanties – on an entertaining two-hour cruise to see Ireland’s biggest seal colony and other wildlife, including white-tailed eagles. Binoculars (and lollipops!) are provided.

**EATING**

**Charthouse**
MODERN IRISH £££
(thecharthousedingle.com; Dingle Town)
Window boxes frame this freestanding stone cottage, while inside dark-red walls, polished floorboards and flickering candles create an intimate atmosphere. Creative cooking uses Irish produce: Beara Peninsula scallops with Castlegregory chorizo, Dingle vodka–marinated hake, and butter bean cassoulet with hazelnut-crusted Toons Bridge halloumi.

**Gorman’s Clifftop House**
IRISH ££
(outoftheblue.ie; Dingle Town)
The best place to eat and sleep in the area is Gorman’s Clifftop House. Dine on Kerry mountain lamb stew, Dingle Bay prawns and other exquisite dishes.

**Heather**
CAFÉ £
(outoftheblue.ie; Dunloe)
In a glorious setting, this light-filled café adjoins a farm that provides produce from

**Don’t miss**

Long’s Riding Stables horse treks head along Ventry beach or among the hills above the bay, and three-day expeditions circle the whole of the Dingle Peninsula.
its fields and polytunnels, while seafood and meat are locally and sustainably sourced. Fantastic food ranges from toasted-hazelnut-sake-torching dishes like Killarney pork belly with fennel slaw, or back-heat crêpes with smoked salmon and Yalta island yoghurt.

Ildás MODERNIRISH €€€
(ida.ng.com; John St, Dingle Town)

Chef Kevin O’Kelly is dedicated to promoting produce solely from the Dingle Peninsula, taking lamb, seafood and foraged herbs to create delicately flavoured concoctions such as braised John Dory fillet with fennel and leek risotto, spiced currant and garlic, which are served as part of a sort vegetarian or meze menu (no à la carte).

Out of the Blue SEAFOOD €€€
(cut8ofafile in, Dingle Town)

Occupying a bright blue-and-yellow waterfront fishing shack, this rustic spot is in fact one of Dingle’s top restaurants, with an intense devotion to fresh local seafood (and only seafood). If staff don’t like the catch, they don’t open, and they resolutely don’t serve chips. Highlights might include Dingle Bay prawn bisque with lobster or charred while seafood finished in espelette.

Quinlans’s Fish WEST KERRY €€€
(kerryfish.com; Tralee)

Quinlans is Kerry’s leading chain of fish shops, with 15 to its door so if you know everything here is fresh. The fish and chips are great, alternatives include Dingle Bay squid and chips with sweet chilli sauce. Lighter pub-style options are available. The Delft-blue, scrubbed-timber and chilli sauce. Lighter pan-fried you know every thing here is

Tom Crean Fish & Wine Dingle €€€
(tomcrean.ie; Kenmare)

Tom Crean Fish & Wine

Dingle’s top restaurants, with an Occupying a bright blue-and- coverings. Served in a scallop shell is divine. Sneem lobster is available in season and the seafood gratin served in a scallop shell is divine.

DATE BRIDGE BAR E
(mooreeng.ie, Portmagee)
The focus of Portmagee’s village life is the raspberry-coloured Bridge Bar, a local gathering point that hosts traditional Irish music and set dancing sessions every Friday and Sunday year-round. Fish and chips and a Cauld blue-cheese burger are among the standouts of its bar menu.

John Benny’s E
(johnbennyspub.com; Dingle Town)

Located in the heart of town, John Benny’s is a venerable restaurant uses only its fields and polytunnels, while seafood and meat are locally and sustainably sourced. Fantastic food ranges from toasted-hazelnut-sake-torching dishes like Killarney pork belly with fennel slaw, or back-heat crêpes with smoked salmon and Yalta island yoghurt.

The River Lee winds through the legendary town of Killarney.

Exploring the Gap of Dunloe

Studded with crags and jewel-like lakes, the Gap of Dunloe is a wild and scenic mountain pass. It lies to the west of Killarney National Park, squeezed between Purple Mountain and the lofty summits of Macgillycuddy’s Reeks (Ireland’s highest mountain range).

Although it’s outside the national park boundary, it’s been a vital part of the Killarney tourist trail since the late 18th century when, inspired by the Romantic poets, wealthy tourists came in search of ‘sublime’ and ‘savage’ landscapes. During this period, the legend of Kate Kearney of the Gap is still known as Kate Kearney’s Cottage, a busy car park here where you can hire jaunting cars and drivers (a horse and cart; cash only). A boat trip through the lakes followed by a bike ride through the Gap of Dunloe is the classic Killarney region experience. Your hostel, hotel or campsite can arrange it for you.

Boats depart near Ross Castle at 11am, with bikes in the bow. The 1½-hour cruise is brilliant; ask your boatman about the highest/lowest level he has ever seen in the lakes, and at back to enjoy the story. You cruise past Healy’s Cottage with its ruined monastery, then turn south to sail under pretty Bombr韓n’s Bridge and reach the Meeting of the Waters. The boat then surges up a rocky channel beneath the Old Weir Bridge – after prolonged dry weather, when lake levels are low, passengers may have to get out and walk a short distance while the boat gets ashore. A toasty cast iron woodstove, and set dancing sessions every Friday and Sunday year-round. Fish and chips and a Cauld blue-cheese burger are among the standouts of its bar menu.

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Sleeping

**Brook Lane Hotel** £££
Best for boutique luxury
(brooklanehotel.com; Kenmare)
Rooms warmed by under-floor heating are individually decorated with bespoke furniture and luxurious fabrics.

**Cahernane House Hotel** £££
Best for blowing the budget
(caherane.com; Killarney)
This magnificent manor is up a tree-lined driveway. There are 38 antique-furnished rooms, some with clawfoot baths or Jacuzzis.

**Inch Beach House** £
Best for welcoming staff
(inchbeachguesthouse.com)
Breezy Inch Beach House is all skylights, sea views, light colours and modern fittings. Some rooms directly face the beach.

**Mount Brandon Hostel** £
Best for a hostel option
(mountbrandonthostel.com)
A patio overlooks the bay from this small and simple hostel with scrubbed wooden floors and furniture.

**Pax House** ££
Best for a scenic location
(pax-house.com)
This inn has contemporary décor and outstanding views over the estuary from the glass-framed terrace.

**Teach de Broc** ££
Best for lovely grounds
(ballybuniongolf.com)
Framed by flowers, this low-rise boutique inn has spacious rooms that are thoughtfully appointed and stylishly decorated.

**FURTHER READING**
Our Ireland guide (£16.99) has a chapter on County Kerry which is also available to download from app stores (£1.64).