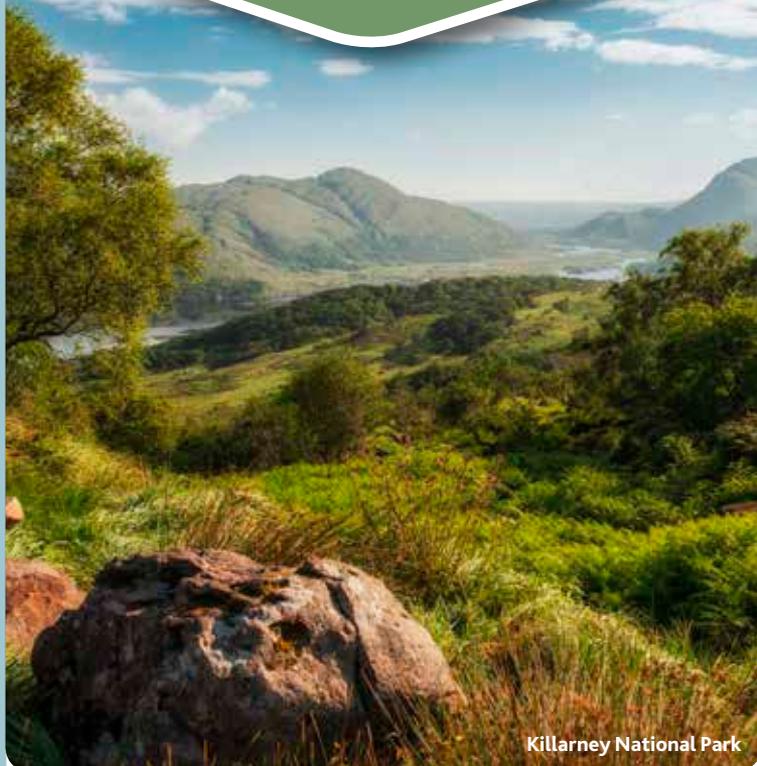


Best of County Kerry



Killarney National Park

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 Cahersiveen, 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 [0]64 664 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-crust 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 roasted-hazelnut cake to filling dishes like Killorglin pork belly with fennel slaw, or buckwheat crêpes with smoked salmon and Valentia Island yoghurt.

Idás MODERN IRISH £££
(idasdingle.com; John St, Dingle Town)

Chef Kevin Murphy 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 dashi cream, pickled cucumber and wild garlic, which are served as part of a set vegetarian or nonvegetarian menu (no à la carte).

Out of the Blue SEAFOOD £££
(outoftheblue.ie; 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 chargrilled whole sea bass flambéed in cognac.

Quinlan's Fish SEAFOOD £
(kerryfish.com; Tralee)

Quinlan's is Kerry's leading chain of fish shops, with its own fleet so you know everything here is fresh. The fish and chips are great; alternatives include Dingle Bay squid and chips with sweet chilli sauce. Lighter pan-fried options are available. The Delft-blue, scrubbed-timber and exposed-brick premises have a handful of wine-barrel tables, or head to Tralee's Town Park.

Tom Crean Fish & Wine SEAFOOD £

(tomcrean.ie; Kenmare)
Named for Kerry's pioneering Antarctic explorer, and run by his granddaughter, this venerable restaurant uses only the best of local organic produce, cheeses and fresh seafood.

Sneem lobster is available in season and the seafood gratin served in a scallop shell is divine.

DRINKING
Bridge Bar £

(moorings.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 Cashel blue-cheese burger are among the standouts of its bar menu.

John Benny's £
(johnbennyspub.com; Dingle Town)

A toasty cast iron woodstove, stone slab floor, memorabilia on the walls and great staff make this one of Dingle's most enjoyable traditional pubs. Glenbeigh oysters and Cromane mussels are highlights of its excellent pub menu.

John B Keane £
(37 William St; Listowel)

Once run by the late writer himself, this small and unassuming bar is swathed in Keane memorabilia.

O'Connor's £
(7 High Street, Killarney)

Live music plays every night at this tiny pub with leaded-glass doors, which is one of Killarney's most popular haunts. In warmer weather, the crowds spill out onto the adjacent lane.

Roundy's £
(5 Broguemakers Lane; Tralee)

Ingeniously converted from a terrace house (with a tree still growing right through the courtyard garden-turned-interior), this hip little bar has regular DJs spinning old school funk and live bands.

West Kerry Brewery & Brick Pub £
(brickspub; West Kerry)

Small-batch brews use hand-drawn well water and botanicals such as elderflower, rosehip and blackcurrants from the brewpub's gardens, which are strewn with sculptures by owner and brewer Adrienne Heslin. The 19th-century pub hosts live music and has four guest rooms.

Day trip

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 first arose: Kate, a fabled local beauty based on a popular song, supposedly lived in a cottage in the pass and dispensed poteen (illegally distilled whiskey) to weary travellers. The 19th-century pub at the northern end of the Gap is still known as Kate Kearney's Cottage; there's 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 sit back to enjoy the story.

You cruise past Inisfallen with its ruined monastery, then turn south to sail under pretty Brickeen 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 hauled up this shallow, fast-flowing section.

The Long Range is next, a winding channel that is half-lake

and half-river, uncoiling beneath the crags of Eagle's Nest mountain (golden eagles once nested here) before entering the long and narrow Upper Lake.

After disembarking at Lord Brandon's Cottage around 12.30pm (where there's a café and toilets), you begin the bike section with a 3-mile climb to the head of the Gap. It's a steady uphill, but not too steep, and there's no shame in getting off and pushing for a bit. At the summit you're rewarded with stunning views in both directions, and a four-mile downhill run to Kate Kearney's Cottage, where there's a café, pub

PHOTOGRAPH: SHUTTERSTOCK

and toilets. From here, you follow signs for Killarney along minor roads to the N71, then a cycle path that first hugs the side of the main road before veering off through the golf course and the northern part of Killarney National Park to end near the town centre opposite St Mary's Cathedral.

The total distance cycled is 14 miles; allowing time for stops and an hour for lunch, you should be back in Killarney by 3.30pm. Hikers can also do this route – allow three hours to walk from Lord Brandon's to Kate Kearney's, and take the Killarney Shuttle Bus from the latter back into town.



The River Loe winds through the steep valley of the Gap of Dunloe

Dingle Distillery

An offshoot of Dublin's Porterhouse microbrewery, this craft distillery began producing whiskey in 2012, but the necessary ageing process meant that the first fruits of its labours were not bottled until 2016. It also produces artisan gin and vodka. They use three distinctive, hand-crafted copper pots that each incorporate a boil ball to create their smooth whiskey, and a small, swan-necked pot for the gin and vodka.



BEST OF COUNTY KERRY



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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 (cahernane.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 (mountbrandonhostel.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 (ballybunionsgolf.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).