

Counties Fermanagh & Tyrone



The ancient landscape of Fermanagh is shaped by ice and water, with rugged hills rising above quilted plains of half-drowned drumlins and shimmering, reed-fringed lakes. A glance at the map shows the county is around one-third water – as the locals will tell you, the lakes are in Fermanagh for six months of the year; for the other six, Fermanagh is in the lakes.

This watery maze is a natural playground for anglers – the loughs and rivers are stuffed with trout and pike – and for boaters. You can hire a motor cruiser and spend a week or two navigating the scenic waterways of Lough Erne and the River Shannon, which together form a 750km network of rivers, lakes and canals. If you prefer your boats without engines, the 50km Lough Erne Canoe Trail is a paddler's paradise.

The limestone ridges to the south of Lough Erne are riddled with caves – at Marble Arch you can explore an underground river; the higher hills are swathed with blanket bog, a rare and endangered habitat. This is all grand walking country, but there are also rainy-day attractions, such as the contrasting stately homes of Florence Court and Castle Coole, and the world-famous pottery at Belleek.

County Tyrone – from Tír Eoghain (Land of Owen, a legendary chieftain) – is the homeland of the O'Neill clan, and is dominated by the tweed-tinted moorlands of the Sperrin Mountains, whose southern flanks are dotted with prehistoric sites. Apart from the hiking opportunities offered by these heather-clad hills, the county's main attraction is the Ulster American Folk Park, a fascinating outdoor museum celebrating Ulster's historic links with the USA.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Climb to the Lost World** Hike over rare blanket bog to the remote summit of Cuilcagh Mountain (p688)
- **Faces from the Past** Ponder the meaning of the strange stone figures on White Island (p684) and Boa Island (p685)
- **River of Adventure** Follow the course of an underground river as it flows through the Marble Arch Caves (p688)
- **Blazing Paddles** Hire a canoe and explore the reed-fringed backwaters of Lough Erne (p687)
- **The American Connection** Learn about the historical links between Ireland and the USA at the Ulster American Folk Park (p690)



■ POPULATION: 227,000

■ AREA: 5274 SQ KM

COUNTY FERMANAGH

ENNISKILLEN

pop 11,500

Perched amid the web of waterways that link Upper and Lower Lough Erne, Enniskillen (Inis Ceithleann, meaning Caitlin's Island) is an appealing town with a mile-long main street that rides the roller-coaster spine of the island's drumlin. (The locals say you're only a true Enniskilliner if you were born 'between the bridges'; that is, on the town's central island.) Its attractive waterside setting, bustling with boats in summer, plus a range of lively pubs and restaurants, make Enniskillen a good base for exploring Upper and Lower Lough Erne, Florencecourt and the Marble Arch Caves.

Though neither was born here, both Oscar Wilde and Samuel Beckett were pupils at Enniskillen's Portora Royal School (Wilde from 1864 to 1871, Beckett from 1919 to 1923); it was here that Beckett first studied French, a language he would later write in. The town's name is also prominent in the history of the Troubles – on Poppy Day (11 November) in 1987 an IRA bomb killed 11 innocent people during a service at Enniskillen's war memorial.

Orientation

The main street changes name half a dozen times between the bridges at either end; the prominent clock tower marks the town centre. The other principal street is Wellington Rd, south of and parallel to the main street, where you'll find the bus station, tourist office and car parking. If you're driving, try to avoid rush hour – the bridge at the west end is a traffic bottleneck.

Information

Bank of Ireland (☎ 6632 2136; 7 Townhall St)

Eason (☎ 6632 4341; 10 High St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Local-interest books and maps.

Enniskillen Library (☎ 6632 2886; Hall's Lane;

☎ 9.15am-5.15pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 9.15am-7.30pm Tue & Thu, 9.15am-1pm & 2-5pm Sat) Internet access £1.50 per 30min.

Post office (3 High St) In Dolan's Centra grocery store.

Tourist Information Centre (☎ 6632 3110; www.fermanagh.gov.uk; Wellington Rd; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, 11am-5pm Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-5.30pm

Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, 11am-5pm Sun Easter-Jun & Sep, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri & 10am-2pm Sat & Sun Oct, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri Nov-Easter) Books accommodation, changes money, sells fishing licences and provides a postal and fax service.

Ulster Bank (☎ 6632 4034; 16 Darling St)

Sights

Enniskillen Castle (☎ 6632 5000; www.enniskillencastle.co.uk; Castle Barracks; adult/child £2.95/1.95; ☎ 2-5pm Mon & 10am-5pm Tue-Fri year-round, also 2-5pm Sat May-Sep & 2-5pm Sun Jul & Aug; ☎), a former stronghold of the 16th-century Maguire chieftains, guards the western end of the town's central island, its twin-turreted **Watergate** looming over passing fleets of cabin cruisers. Within the walls you'll find the **Fermanagh County Museum**, which has displays on the county's history, archaeology, landscape and wildlife. The 15th-century Keep contains the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers Regimental Museum, full of guns, uniforms and medals – including eight Victoria Crosses awarded in WWI – and is dedicated to the regiment which was raised at the castle in 1689 to support the army of William I.

In Forthill Park, at the eastern end of town, stands **Cole's Monument** (adult/child £1/50p; ☎ 1.30-3pm mid-Apr-Sep). It commemorates Sir Galbraith Lowry-Cole (1772-1842), who was one of Wellington's generals and the son of the first earl of Enniskillen. Climb the 108 steps inside the column for a good view of the surrounding area (tickets on sale at the Enniskillen Tourist Information Centre).

Activities

The **Kingfisher Trail** is a waymarked, long-distance cycling trail that starts in Enniskillen and wends its way through the back roads of counties Fermanagh, Leitrim, Cavan and Monaghan. The full route is around 370km long, but a shorter loop, starting and finishing in Enniskillen, and travelling via Kesh, Belleek, Garrison, Belcoo and the village of Florencecourt, is only 115km – easily done in two days with an overnight stay at Belleek. You can get a trail map from the Enniskillen Tourist Information Centre.

You can hire bikes from the **Lakeland Canoe Centre** (☎ 6632 4250; www.arkoutdooradventure.com; Castle Island; half-/full-day £10/15). They also rent out two-person canoes (£20 for two hours).

You can buy **fishing** permits and licences from the tourist information office, or Home, Field and Stream (p681).

See p683 and p686 for boat-hire options, and boxed text, p687 for information on **cruising** the lakes.

Tours

Blue Badge Tours (☎ 6962 1430; bregemccusker@btpenworld.com) offers guided tours of Enniskillen and the Lough Erne area with local historian Breege McCusker, who is a registered tourist guide. Special interest tours include prehistoric sites, monastic sites, carved stones and plantation castles.

Erne Tours (☎ 6632 2882; Round 'O' Quay, The Brook; adult/child £9/6; ☎ 10.30am, 12.15pm, 2.15pm & 4.15pm daily Jul & Aug, 2.15pm daily Jun, 2.15pm daily Tue, Sat & Sun May, Sept & Oct) operates 1½-hour cruises on Lower Lough Erne aboard the 56-seat water-

bus, *MV Kestrel*, calling at Devenish Island along the way. It departs from the Round 'O' Quay, just west of the town centre on the A46 to Belleek. There are also Saturday **evening cruises** (adult/child £30/15; ☎ 6pm May–Sept) that include a three-course dinner at the Killyhevlin Hotel.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Bridges Youth Hostel (☎ 6634 0110; www.hini.org.uk; Belmore St; dm/s/tw £15/20/32; P ♿) This modern, purpose-built hostel has a great location overlooking a river in the centre of town. It has mostly four-bed dorms, each with an en suite, plus six twin rooms, a kitchen, a restaurant, a laundry and a bike shed.

COUNTIES FERMANAGH & TYRONE



Rossole Guesthouse (☎ 6632 3462; 85 Sligo Rd; s/d £30/45) A modern Georgian-style house with a sunny conservatory overlooking a small lake, the five-room Rossole is an angler's delight – you can fish in the lake, and there are rowing boats for guests at the bottom of the garden. It's 1km southwest of the town centre on the A4 Sligo road.

Greenwood Lodge (☎ 6632 5636; www.greenwoodlodge.co.uk; 17 Killivilly Ct, Tempo Rd; s/d £28/46; P) The owners of this spacious and modern villa, set on a quiet side street 3km northeast of town off the B80, go out of their way to make you feel welcome. The three homely bedrooms all have en suites, the breakfasts are freshly prepared, and there is secure storage available for bikes.

MIDRANGE

Railway Hotel (☎ 6632 2084; www.railwayhotelenniskillen.com; 34 Forthill St; s/d £37.50/75) Railway memorabilia dots the walls of this welcoming 130-year-old hotel, a reminder of Enniskillen's now-vanished railway line. The 19 rooms offer rather bijou B&B accommodation close to the centre of town; rooms at the front can be a bit noisy.

Mountview Guesthouse (☎ 6632 3147; www.mountviewguests.com; 61 Irvinestown Rd; s/d £40/60; P) Indulge in a spot of country-house comfort in this large, ivy-clad Victorian villa set in wooded grounds. There are three en-suite bedrooms, a luxurious lounge and even a snooker room with a full-size table. The Mountview looks out over Race Course Lough, just a 10-minute (800m) walk, north of the town centre.

Belmore Court Motel (☎ 6632 6633; www.motel.co.uk; Tempo Rd; d £55, apt £75-100; P ♿) Set in a converted row of terrace houses just east of the town centre, the Belmore has family 'mini-apartments' with cooking facilities, as well as four ordinary double rooms. Rates don't include breakfast.

TOP END

Killyhevlin Hotel (☎ 6632 3481; www.killyhevlin.com; Killyhevlin; s/d from £98/135; P ♿) Enniskillen's top hotel is 1.5km south of town on the A4 Maguiresbridge road, in an idyllic setting overlooking Upper Lough Erne. Many of its 43 rooms have lakeside views; there are also 13 two-bedroom lakeside chalets (£250 per weekend April to June, £195 per weekend November to March; £575 per week July to October).

Eating

BUDGET

Johnston's Jolly Sandwich Bar (☎ 6632 2277; 3 Darling St; sandwiches £2-4; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-4pm Sat) A traditional bakery selling excellent pick-and-mix sandwiches, soup, pies and cakes to take away or eat in.

Rebecca's Place (☎ 6632 4499; Buttermarket; snacks £2-5; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) A more traditional café with pine tables and chairs, Rebecca's is set in a craft shop (see p681) and serves good sandwiches, salads and pastries.

Ruby's Coffee & Sandwich Bar (☎ 6632 9399; 10 High St; snacks £2-5; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Tucked upstairs in Eason's bookshop is this comfy nook furnished with sofas and armchairs, offering breakfast bagels and croissants, sandwiches



two on Sundays) via Belcoo, and bus 30 between Dublin (£12, 2½ hours, seven daily Monday to Saturday, four Sunday) and Donegal (one hour) also stops in at Enniskillen and Belleek.

AROUND ENNISKILLEN

Castle Coole

When King George IV visited Ireland in 1821, the second earl of Belmore had a state bedroom specially prepared at Castle Coole in anticipation of a visit from the monarch. The king, however, was more interested in dallying with his mistress at Slane Castle, and never turned up. The bedroom, draped in red silk and decorated with paintings depicting *The Rake's Progress* (the earl's snuffy riposte to the king's extramarital shenanigans), is one of the highlights of the one-hour guided tour around **Castle Coole** (☎ 6632 2690; Dublin Rd, Enniskillen; adult/child £5/2.20; ☎ noon-6pm daily Jul & Aug, 1-6pm Fri-Wed Jun, 1-6pm Sat, Sun & public hols Apr, May & Sep).

Designed by James Wyatt, this Palladian mansion was built between 1789 and 1795 for Armar Lowry-Corry, the first earl of Belmore, and is probably the purest expression of late-18th-century neoclassical architecture in Ireland. It is built of silvery-white Portland stone, which was brought in at great expense from southern England – by ship to Ballyshannon, then overland to Lough Erne, by boat again to Enniskillen, and finally by bullock cart for the last 3km.

Building costs of £70,000 nearly bankrupted the first earl, but that didn't stop his son Somerset Lowry-Corry, the second earl, spending another £35,000 on exuberant Regency furnishings and decoration, best seen in the opulent, oval saloon where the family and friends would gather before dinner. The seventh earl of Belmore, John Armar Lowry-Corry, reserves part of the house for his private use, but most of the building is under the care of the National Trust.

The 600 hectares of landscaped grounds (car/pedestrian £2/free; ☎ 10am-8pm Apr-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Mar) contain a lake that is home to the UK's only nonmigratory colony of greylag geese. It is said that if the geese ever leave, the earls of Belmore will lose Castle Coole.

Castle Coole is on the A4 Dublin road, 2.5km southeast of Enniskillen. You can easily walk there from Enniskillen town centre in 30 minutes – fork left beyond Dunnes Stores and keep straight on along Castlecoole Rd.

Sheelin Irish Lace Museum

This **museum** (☎ 6634 8052; www.irishlacemuseum.com; Bellanaleck; adult/child £3/1.50; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct) houses a collection of beautiful Irish lace dating from 1850 to 1900. Lace making was an important cottage industry in the region both before and after the Famine – prior to WWI there were at least 10 lace schools in County Fermanagh. The museum is just over 6km southwest of Enniskillen in the village of Bellanaleck.

UPPER LOUGH ERNE

About 80km long, Lough Erne is made up of two sections: the Upper Lough to the south of Enniskillen, and the Lower Lough to the north. The two are connected by the River Erne, which begins its journey in County Cavan and meets the sea at Donegal Bay west of Ballyshannon.

Upper Lough Erne is not so much a lake as a watery maze of islands (more than 150 of them), inlets, reedy bays and meandering backwaters. Bird life is abundant, with flocks of whooper swan and goldeneye overwintering here, great crested grebes nesting in the spring, and Ireland's biggest heronry in a 400-year-old oak grove on the island of Inishfendra, just south of Crom Estate.

Lisnaskea is the main town, with shops, pubs, ATMs and a post office. An island at the north end of the lough, near Lisbellaw, is home to the **Belle Isle School of Cookery** (☎ 6638 7231; www.irish-cookery-school.com) which offers a range of cookery and wine courses lasting from one day to four weeks, with luxurious accommodation in Belle Isle Castle and its estate cottages. One-day courses cost £100, not including accommodation.

Crom Estate

Home to the largest area of natural woodland in Northern Ireland, the National Trust's beautiful **Crom Estate** (☎ 6773 8118; Newtownbutler; car/pedestrian £5.50/free; ☎ grounds 10am-7pm Jun-Aug, to 6pm mid-Mar-May & Sep; visitor centre 10am-6pm Easter Week & May-mid-Sep, to 6pm Sat & Sun mid-Mar-Apr & late Sep; ☎) is a haven for pine martens, rare bats and many species of bird.

You can walk from the visitor centre to the ruins of old Crom Castle, with its old walled garden, abandoned bowling green and ancient yew trees, and views over the reed-fringed lough to an island folly. There

are rowing boats for hire (£5 per hour), and camping facilities (£10 per tent per night).

Check the **National Trust website** (www.ntni.org.uk) for details on bat-watching and other wildlife events.

The estate is on the eastern shore of the Upper Lough, 5km west of Newtownbutler.

Tours

The **Inishcruiser** (☎ 6772 2122; adult/child/family £7/5/20; ☎ 2.30pm Sun & public hols Easter-Sep; ☎) offers 1½- to two-hour cruises on the lough leaving from the Share Holiday Village 5km southwest of Lisnaskea.

Activities

Day boats can be hired for fishing or exploring from **Knockninny Marina** (☎ 6774 8590; near Derrylin) on the west shore of the lough; rates are £40/60 per half-/full-day for a six-seater motor boat with cabin. The marina also rents bikes for £4.50/10 a half-/full-day. It is signposted from the main road just north of Derrylin.

Guests at the **Share Holiday Village** (☎ 6772 2122; www.sharevillage.org) near Lisnaskea can take part in canoeing, windsurfing, dinghy sailing, archery, orienteering and other activities for £10 per person per 2½-hour session.

Sleeping & Eating

Lisnaskea Caravan Park (☎ 6772 1040; Gola Rd, Mully-nascarty; camp/caravan sites £8/12; ☎ Apr-Oct) This local council-run site enjoys a beautiful wooded setting on the banks of the Colebrooke River about 2km northwest of Lisnaskea, on the B514 road towards Enniskillen.

Share Holiday Village (☎ 6772 2122; www.sharevillage.org; Smiths Strand, Lisnaskea; camp/caravan sites £9.50/13.50; ☎ Easter-Sep) Share is a charity that works towards the integration of people with and without disabilities through a range of activities and courses. The holiday village is mostly occupied by groups, but it also has a touring site with space for 13 caravans and 10 tents. Booking is strongly recommended. The village is 5km southwest of Lisnaskea, off the B127.

Donn Carragh Hotel (☎ 6772 1206; www.donn carraghhotel.com; Main St, Lisnaskea; s/d £40/70; ☎) There's not too much in the way of hotel or B&B accommodation around Upper Lough Erne; this pleasant but unexceptional 18-room hotel in the middle of Lisnaskea is the best of what there is.

Knockninny House (☎ 6774 8590; www.knockninny marina.com; near Derrylin; apt from £75/250/400 a night/weekend/week; mains £3-7; ☎ cafe 10am-5.30pm; ☎) A Victorian villa and Lough Erne's first hotel, Knockninny House, built in the 1870s, enjoys an idyllic lakeside setting, and now offers accommodation in two luxurious self-catering apartments (one sleeps five, the other seven), available by the night (weekdays only), weekend or week. There's also a café-patisserie with an outdoor terrace overlooking the marina, and a tiny sandy beach.

Kissin Crust (☎ 6772 2678; 125 Main St, Lisnaskea; mains £2-5; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) Very popular with local people, this friendly coffee shop is stacked with home-baked apple pie, lemon meringue pie, quiches and scones, and serves up a lunch menu of home-made soup, freshly made sandwiches and a hot dish of the day.

Getting There & Away

From Enniskillen, Ulsterbus service 95 runs along the east side of the lough to Lisnaskea (£3, 25 minutes, five daily Monday to Friday, three on Saturdays, plus one on Sundays in July and August only), while bus 58 goes down the west side to Derrylin (£3, 40 minutes, six daily Monday to Friday, four on Saturdays), and continues to Belturbet in County Cavan.

LOWER LOUGH ERNE

Lower Lough Erne is a much more open expanse of water than the Upper Lough, with its 90-odd islands clustered mainly in the southern reaches. In early Christian times, when overland travel was difficult, Lough Erne was an important highway between the Donegal coast and inland Leitrim, and there are many ancient religious sites and other antiquities dotted around its shores. In medieval times the lough was part of an important pilgrimage route to Station Island in Lough Derg, County Donegal.

The following sights are described travelling anticlockwise around the lough from Enniskillen.

Devenish Island

Devenish Island (Daimh Inis, meaning Ox Island) is the biggest of several 'holy islands' in Lough Erne. The remains of an **Augustinian monastery**, founded here in the 6th century by St Molaise, include a superb 12th-century **round tower** in near perfect condition, the ruins of St Molaise's Church and St Mary's Abbey,

an unusual 15th-century high cross, and many fascinating old gravestones. Four ladders allow you to climb to the top of the round tower for a cramped view out of the five tiny windows.

A speedboat **ferry** (☎ 6862 1588; adult/child return £3/2; ⚓ 10am, 1pm, 3pm & 5pm daily Apr-Sep) crosses to Devenish Island from Trory Point landing. From Enniskillen, take the A32 towards Irvinestown and after 5km look for the sign on the left, just after a service station and immediately before the junction where the B82 and A32 part company. At the foot of the hill by the lough, turn left for the jetty.

You can also visit as part of a cruise with Erne Tours (p678) from Enniskillen.

Killadeas

The churchyard at Killadeas, 11km north of Enniskillen on the B82, contains several unusual carved stones. Most famous is the 1m-high **Bishop's Stone**, dating from between the 7th and 9th centuries, which has a Celtic head reminiscent of the White Island figures carved on its narrow western edge, and an engraving of a bishop with bell and crozier on the side. Located nearby is a slab set on edge, with several deep cup-marks (possibly bullauns) on one side, and a cross within a circle on the other. You will also find a broken phallic column and a large, perforated stone.

TOURS

The **Lady of the Lake** (☎ 6862 2200; www.ladyofthelake.tours.com), based at the Erne Palace restaurant 2km north of the Manor House, offers cruises on the lough on Saturday and Sunday.

SLEEPING & EATING

The **Manor House Country Hotel** (☎ 6862 2211; www.manor-house-hotel.com; Killadeas; s/d from £100/125; Ⓟ) A grand, 19th-century country house overlooking Lough Erne. It has had a thorough makeover in neoclassical style, complete with Greek temple-style lobby, Romanesque pool and Jacuzzis with a view over the lough. The public areas are impressive but the rooms, though luxurious, are a bit on the bland side. The hotel's **Watergate Bar** serves decent pub grub (mains £8 to £12), and has live music at weekends.

Castle Archdale Country Park

This **park** (☎ 6862 1588; Lisnarick; admission free; ⚓ 9am-dusk), has pleasant woodland and lake-shore walks and cycle tracks in the former

estate of 18th-century Archdale Manor. The island-filled bay was used in WWII as a base for Catalina flying boats, a history explained in the **visitor centre** (admission free; ⚓ 11am-7pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug, noon-6pm Sun Easter-Jun).

You can hire bikes for £4/8/12 per hour/half-day/day, or swap two wheels for four legs – the park offers pony trekking (£15 per hour) and short rides (£5 per 15 minutes) for beginners. There are also boats for hire (£30/45/60 per two hours/half-day/day), and you can also rent fishing rods (£5 a day including bait).

The park is 16km northwest of Enniskillen on the B82, near Lisnarick.

SLEEPING & EATING

Castle Archdale Caravan Park (☎ 6862 1333; www.castlearchdale.com; Castle Archdale Country Park; camp sites £10-15, caravan sites £15; ⚓ Easter-Oct) This attractive, tree-sheltered site is dominated by onsite caravans, but has good facilities, including a shop, launderette, playground and restaurant.

ourpick Cedars Guesthouse (☎ 6862 1493; www.cedarsguesthouse.com; Drummal, Castle Archdale; s/d from £40/60; Ⓟ) Set in a former rectory just south of the park entrance, this peaceful 10-room guesthouse goes for a Victorian country house feel, with rose-patterned bedspreads and antique-style furniture.

Rectory Bistro (mains £11-15; ⚓ 6-9pm Wed-Sat, 12.30-3pm & 5-9pm Sun) Adjoining the Cedars Guesthouse, this bistro has a welcoming open fireplace, lots of golden pine lit by chunky candles and a sprinkling of Gothic motifs, with an aspirational menu that ranges from seafood chowder to monkfish fried with black pepper and ginger.

White Island

White Island, in the bay to the north of Castle Archdale Country Park, is the most haunting of Lough Erne's monastic sites. At the eastern tip of the island are the ruins of a small 12th-century church with a beautiful Romanesque door on its southern side. Inside are six extraordinary Celtic stone figures, thought to date from the 9th century, lined up along the wall like miniature Easter Island statues.

This line-up is a modern arrangement; most of them were discovered buried in the walls of the church in the 19th century, where the medieval masons had used them as ordinary building stones. The six main figures, all created by the same hand, are flanked on the left by a sheila-na-gig, which is probably

contemporary with the church, and flanked on the right by a scowling stone face. The age and interpretation of these figures has been the subject of much debate; it has been suggested that the two central pairs, of equal height, were pillars that once supported a pulpit, and that they represent either saints or aspects of the life of Christ.

The first figure is holding a book (Christ the Evangelist?) and the second holds a bishop's crozier and bell (Christ as Bishop?). The third has been identified as the young King David, author of the Psalms. The fourth is holding the necks of two griffins (symbols of Christ's dual nature as both human and divine?). The fifth bears a sword and shield (Christ's Second Coming?) and the sixth is unfinished.

A **ferry** (☎ 6862 1892; adult/child £3/2; ⚓ 11am-6pm daily Jul & Aug, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Jun & Sep) crosses to the island hourly, on the hour (except for 1pm) from the marina in Castle Archdale Country Park; buy your ticket from the Billieve Boat Hire office. The crossing takes 15 minutes, and allows you around half an hour on the island.

Boa Island

Boa Island, at the northern end of Lower Lough Erne, is connected to the mainland at both ends – the main A47 road runs along its length. Spooky, moss-grown Caldragh graveyard, towards the western end of the island, contains the famous **Janus Stone**. Perhaps 2000 years old, this pagan figure is carved with two grotesque human heads, back to back. Nearby is a smaller figure called the **Lusty Man**, brought here from Lusty More island. Their origin and meaning have been lost in the mists of time.

There's a small sign indicating the graveyard, about 1.5km from the bridge at the western tip of the island.

SLEEPING & EATING

Lusty Beg Island (☎ 6863 3300; www.lustybeg.co.uk; Boa Island, Kesh; s/d £65/90; Ⓟ) This private island retreat, reached by ferry from a jetty halfway along Boa Island, has self-catering chalets to let (£435 to £740 a week in July and August, sleeping four to six people) but also offers B&B in its rustic 18-room Courtyard Motel. There's a tennis court, nature trail and canoeing on the lough for residents

The informal **Island Lodge Restaurant** (☎ 6863 1342; bar meals £7-12, 4-course dinner £25; ⚓ 1-9pm Jul & Aug) on the island is open to all,

and serves everything from baked potatoes to smoked Irish salmon. You can summon the ferry from a telephone in the blockhouse on the slipway.

Castle Caldwell Forest Park

Castle Caldwell, built between 1610 and 1619, is nothing but a ruin, but the **park** (admission free; ⚓ 24hr), about halfway between Boa Island and Belleek, has a nature reserve full of bird life, and is a major breeding ground for the common scoter.

At the entrance to the park is the **Fiddle Stone** (in the shape of a fiddle). The inscription, now too worn to read, commemorated a favourite musician who fell out of a boat while drunk:

On firm land only exercise your skill; there you may play and safely drink your fill. To the memory of Denis McCabe, Fiddler, who fell out of the St Patrick Barge belonging to Sir James Caldwell Bart. and Count of Milan and was drowned off this point August ye 13 1770.

Belleek

pop 550
Belleek's (Beal Leice) village street of colourful, flower-bedecked houses slopes up from a bridge across the River Erne, where it flows out of the Lower Lough towards Ballyshannon and the sea. The village is right on the border – the road south across the bridge passes through a finger of the Republic's territory for about 200m before leaving again – and shops accept both sterling and euros.

The imposing Georgian-style building beside the bridge houses the world-famous **Belleek Pottery** (☎ 6865 9300; www.belleek.ie; Main St; ⚓ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun Mar-Oct, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri & 10am-5.30pm Sat Nov & Dec, 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri Jan & Feb), founded in 1857 to provide local employment in the wake of the Potato Famine. It has been producing fine Parian china ever since, and is especially noted for its delicate basketware. The visitor centre houses a small museum, showroom and restaurant, and there are **guided tours** (adult/child £4/free) of the pottery every half-hour from 9.30am to 12.15pm and 1.45pm to 4pm (till 3pm on Friday) Monday to Friday year round.

SLEEPING & EATING

Moohan's Fiddlestone (☎ 6665 8008; 15-17 Main St; s/d £35/50; (P)) This is a traditional Irish pub offering B&B in five en-suite rooms upstairs. The lively bar downstairs is a popular venue for impromptu music sessions, so don't expect peace and quiet in the evenings.

Hotel Carlton (☎ 6865 8282; www.hotelcarlton.co.uk; Main St; s/d £60/90; (P)) Though the rooms are plush and luxurious, the family-friendly Carlton has a welcoming and informal feel to it, and a lovely setting on the banks of the River Erne. There are frequent live music sessions in Potters Bar at the hotel.

Thatch Coffee Shop (☎ 6865 8181; 20 Main St; mains £4-5; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) This cute little thatched cottage may be Belleek's oldest building (late 18th century), but it serves a thoroughly modern cup of coffee plus a range of home-made cakes and scones, soup and sandwiches.

Black Cat Cove (☎ 6865 8942; 28 Main St; mains £6-10; ☎ noon-9pm) This friendly, family-run pub with antique furniture and an open fire, that serves excellent bar meals. It also has music on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights from May to September.

Activities**FISHING**

The lakes of Fermanagh are renowned for both coarse and game fishing. The Lough Erne trout-fishing season runs from the be-

ginning of March to the end of September. Salmon fishing begins in June and also continues to the end of September. The mayfly season usually lasts a month from the second week in May. There's no closed season for coarse fish.

You'll need both a licence (issued by the Fisheries Conservancy Board) and a permit (from the owner of the fishery). Licences and permits can be purchased from the tourist information centre (p677) and Home, Field & Stream (p681), both in Enniskillen, and from the marina in Castle Archdale Country Park (p684), which also hires out fishing rods. A combined licence and permit for game fishing on Lough Erne costs £8.50/23 for three/14 days.

The **Belleek Angling Centre** in the Thatch Coffee Shop (left) in Belleek sells fishing tackle and can arrange boat hire for anglers, and you can get expert instruction in fly-casting from **Michael Shortt** (☎ 6638 8184; fish.teach@virgin.net).

Enniskillen's tourist information centre also provides a free guide to angling in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, which has full details of lakes and rivers, fish species, seasons and permit requirements.

BOAT HIRE

A number of companies hire out day boats at Enniskillen, Killadeas, Castle Archdale Country Park, Kesh and Belleek. Rates are about

£10 to £15 per hour for an open rowing boat with outboard motor, to £50/75 per half-/full-day for a six-seater with cabin and engine. The tourist information centre in Enniskillen has a full list of companies and costs.

CANOEOING

The **Lough Erne Canoe Trail** (www.nicanoeing.com) highlights the attractions along the 50km of lough and river between Belleek and Belturbet. The wide open expanses of the Lower Lough can build up big waves in a strong breeze, and is best left to experts, but the sheltered backwaters of the Upper Lough are ideal for beginners and families.

You can pick up a map and guide (£1.50), showing public access points, camping sites and other facilities along the trail from the tourist information office in Enniskillen (p677). Canoe hire is available from the Lakeland Canoe Centre (p677), also in Enniskillen, and Ultimate Watersports (see below).

WATERSPORTS

Working out of Castle Archdale marina and Lusty Beg island, **Ultimate Watersports** (☎ 07808-736818 or 07863-344172; www.ultimatewatersports.co.uk) offer equipment hire and instruction in water-skiing, wakeboarding, jet-skiing, canoeing, dinghy sailing and power-boating.

Getting There & Away

On the eastern side of the lough, Ulsterbus service 194 from Enniskillen to Pettigo via Irvinestown (four or five daily Monday to Saturday) stops near Castle Archdale Country Park (35 minutes) and Kesh (one hour). Bus

99 goes from Enniskillen to Belleek (£4, 45 minutes, four daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sundays) along the western shoreline via Blaney, Tully Castle and the Cliffs of Magho car park, terminating at Bundoran.

Bus 64 travels from Enniskillen to Belcoo (£2, 25 minutes, seven or eight daily Monday to Friday, three on Saturdays, one on Sundays); the Sunday bus and two of the Thursday buses continue to Garrison, Belleek and Bundoran.

WEST OF LOUGH ERNE**Florence Court**

Part of the motivation for the first earl of Belmore to build Castle Coole (near Enniskillen; p682) was keeping up with the Joneses – in the 1770s his aristocratic neighbour William Willoughby Cole, the first earl of Enniskillen, had overseen the addition of grand, Palladian wings to the beautiful, baroque country house called Florence Court, named after his Cornish grandmother Florence Wrey.

Set in lovely wooded grounds in the shadow of Cuiilcagh Mountain, **Florence Court** (☎ 6634 8249; Swanlinbar Rd, Florencecourt; adult/child £5/2.20; ☎ noon-6pm daily Easter Week, Jul & Aug, 1-6pm Wed-Mon Jun, 1-6pm Sat, Sun & public hols Apr, May & Sep) is famous for its rococo plasterwork and antique Irish furniture. The house was badly damaged by a fire in 1955 and much of what you see on the one-hour guided tour is the result of meticulous restoration, but the magnificent plasterwork on the ceiling of the dining room is original.

Florence Court feels more homely and lived-in than the rather cold and austere Castle Coole, especially since the family

WALK: THE CLIFFS OF MAGHO

The Cliffs of Magho – a 250m-high and 9km-long limestone escarpment – dominate the western end of Lough Erne, rising above a fringe of native woodland on the south shore. The view from the cliff top is one of the finest in Ireland, especially towards sunset, looking out over the shimmering expanse of lough and river to the Blue Stack Mountains, the sparkling waters of Donegal Bay and the sea cliffs of Slieve League. The hike to the top is strenuous, but not too long (2.5km round trip; allow one to two hours); the path is rough, and crumbling in places, so you'll need good hiking boots.

Begin at the Lough Navar Forest Park car park on the A46 road, 13km east of Belleek. Head straight uphill on a gravel track and the woodland path beyond. As the slope increases, the path begins to zigzag steeply up through broad-leaved woodland; the ground is bright with primroses in springtime. At the top, as the angle eases, the path cuts back right; where it forks, keep right. As you emerge from the trees the view bursts upon you unexpectedly, a fine reward for your efforts. You can follow the path along the cliff top for another 500m, with a choice of prime spots to sit down and enjoy a picnic.

Note: you can also reach the Magho viewpoint by car. The vehicle entrance to Lough Navar Forest Park (car £3; ☎ 10am-dusk) is on the minor Glennasheevar road between Garrison and Derrygonnelly, 20km southeast of Belleek (take the B52 towards Garrison, and fork left after 2.5km). Not as satisfying as the hike, though.

CRUISING HOLIDAYS ON LOUGH ERNE

If you fancy exploring Lough Erne as captain of your own motor cruiser, well, you can – and without any previous experience or qualification. Several companies in Fermanagh hire out self-drive, live-aboard cabin cruisers by the week, offering a crash course (not literally, you hope) in boat-handling and navigation at the start of your holiday. Weekly rates in high season (July and August) range from about £600 for a two-berth to £1000 for a four-berth and £1600 for an eight-berth boat. Low- and mid-season rates are around 70% to 90% of the high-season rates.

The main cruiser hire companies in Fermanagh are:

Aghinver Boat Company (☎ 6863 1400; www.abcboats.com; Lisnarick, Lower Lough Erne)

Carrick Craft (☎ 3834 4993; www.cruise-ireland.com; Tully Bay, Lower Lough Erne)

Carrybridge Boat Company (☎ 6638 7034; Carrybridge, Lisbellaw, Upper Lough Erne)

Corraquill Cruising Holidays (☎ 6774 8712; www.corraquill.co.uk; Drumetta, Aghalane, Derrylin, Upper Lough Erne)

Manor House Marine (☎ 6862 8100; www.manormarine.com; Killadeas, Lower Lough Erne)

belongings of the sixth earl were returned. (The earl had a falling out with the National Trust in 1974 and stomped off to Scotland with all his stuff; it was returned after the death of his widow in 1998.) The library, in particular, feels as if the last earl has just nipped out for a stroll and could return at any minute.

In the **grounds** (car/pedestrian £3.50/free; ☎ 10am-8pm May-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-Apr) you can explore the walled garden and, on the edge of Cottage Wood, southeast of the house, admire an ancient Irish yew tree. It's said that every Irish yew around the world is descended from this one.

The house is 12km southwest of Enniskillen. Take the A4 Sligo road and fork left onto the A32 to Swanlinbar. Ulsterbus service 192 from Enniskillen to Swanlinbar can drop you at Creamery Cross, about 2km from the house.

Marble Arch Caves

To the south of Lower Lough Erne lies a limestone plateau, where Fermanagh's abundant rainwater has carved out a network of subterranean caverns. The largest of these is **Marble Arch Caves** (☎ 6634 8855; www.marblearchcaves.net; Marlbank Scenic Loop, Florencecourt; adult/child £8/5; ☎ 10am-5pm Jul & Aug, to 4.30pm Easter-Jun & Sep), first explored by the French caving pioneer Edouard Martel in 1895, but not opened to the public until 1985.

The 1¼-hour tour of the caves begins with a short boat trip along the peaty, foam-flecked waters of the underground River Cladagh to Junction Jetty, where three subterranean streams – the Owenbreen, the Aghinrawn and the Sluh Croppa, which drain the northern slopes of Cuilcagh Mountain – meet up. You then continue on foot past the Grand Gallery and Pool Chamber,

regaled all the time with food-related jokes from your guide. A man-made tunnel leads into the New Chamber (pioneering cave explorers originally wriggled through a natural tunnel high above here), from which the route follows the underground Owenbreen River, through the Moses Walk (a pathway sunk waist-deep into the river) to the Calcite Cradle, where the most picturesque formations are to be found. The caves are very popular, so it's wise to phone ahead and book a tour, especially if you're in a group of four or more. (The listed closing time is the starting time of the last tour.)

The caves take their name from a natural limestone arch that spans the River Cladagh where it emerges from the caves; you can reach it via a short walk along a signposted footpath from the visitor centre.

Unexpected serious flooding of the caves in the 1990s was found to have been caused by mechanised peat-cutting in the blanket bog – one of Ireland's biggest – on the slopes of Cuilcagh Mountain, whose rivers feed the caves. **Cuilcagh Mountain Park** was then established to restore and preserve the bog environment, and in 2001 the entire area was designated a Unesco Geopark. The park's geology and ecology are explained in the caves' visitor centre.

The Marble Arch Caves are 16km southwest of Enniskillen, and some 4km from Florence Court (an hour's walk), reached via the A4 Sligo road and the A32.

Loughs Melvin & Macnean

Lough Melvin and Lough Macnean are situated along the border with the Republic, on the B52 road from Belcoo to Belleek. Lough Melvin is famous for its salmon and trout fishing, and is home to two unusual trout species – the sonaghan, with its distinctive black spots, and the crimson-spotted gillaroo – that are unique to the lough, as well as brown trout, ferox trout and char.

The lakeside **Lough Melvin Holiday Centre** (☎ 6865 8142; www.melvinholidaycentre.com; Garrison; camp sites £9, caravan sites £13.50, dm £17-20, d from £30) offers caving, canoeing, walking and fishing holidays, and also has a camp site, dorm accommodation, en-suite rooms, and a restaurant and a coffee shop.

Corralea Activity Centre (☎ 6638 6668; www.activityireland.com; Belcoo), based on Upper Lough Macnean, hires out bicycles (£10/15 per half-/

full-day) and two-person canoes (half-/full-day £15/20). It also offers instruction in activities such as caving, canoeing, climbing, windsurfing and archery from £22 per day.

The **Customs House Country Inn** (☎ 6638 6285; www.customshouseinn.com; Main St, Belcoo; s/d from £40/60; 2-/3-course dinner £18/21; ☎) is a welcoming pub decked out in acres of waxed oak and pine, with a cosy, candlelit restaurant and nine en-suite bedrooms, many with good views of Lough Macnean.

There is also gourmet dining a few hundred metres across the border in Blacklion, County Cavan (p483).

COUNTY TYRONE

OMAGH

pop 20,000

Situated at the confluence of the Rivers Camowen and Drumragh, which join to form the River Strule, Omagh is a busy market town that serves as a useful base for exploring the surrounding area by car.

Sadly, for a long time to come Omagh (An Óghmagh) will be remembered for the devastating car bomb in 1998 that killed 29 people and injured 200. Planted by the breakaway group Real IRA, the bomb was the worst single atrocity in the 30-year history of the Troubles. A memorial garden on Drumragh Avenue, 200m east of the bus station, remembers the dead.

The **tourist information centre** (☎ 8224 7831; tourism@omagh.gov.uk; Strule Arts Centre, Town Hall Sq, Bridge St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, Mon-Fri Oct-Mar) is in the new arts centre, just across the river from the bus station. It has a Town Trail leaflet that guides you around Omagh's remaining historic buildings.

Sleeping & Eating

Omagh Independent Hostel (☎ 8224 1973; www.omaghhostel.co.uk; 9a Waterworks Rd; dm/tw from £10/24, camp sites £12; ☎ Mar-Oct) This peaceful, family-friendly and eco-friendly hostel is 4km northeast of town, tucked away on a back road off the B48 to Gortin. The lovely, rural setting is awash with flowers in summer; if you prefer, you can pitch a tent outside. If you ring from the bus station someone will come and pick you up.

our pick Mullaghmore House (☎ 8224 2314; www.mullaghmorehouse.com; Old Mountfield Rd; s £34-42, d £78;

WALK: CUILCAGH MOUNTAIN VIA THE LEGNABROCKY TRAIL

Rising above Marble Arch and Florence Court like a miniature Mount Roraima, Cuilcagh (pronounced cull-kay) Mountain (666m) is the highest point in Counties Fermanagh and Cavan, its summit right on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic.

The mountain is a geological layer cake, with a cave-riddled limestone base, shale and sandstone flanks draped with a shaggy tweed skirt of blanket bog, and a high gritstone plateau ringed by steep, craggy slopes, all part of the Marble Arch Caves European Geopark (www.europeangeoparks.org).

Hidden among the sphagnum moss, bog cotton and heather of the blanket bog, you can find the sticky-fingered sundew, an insect-eating plant, while the crags echo to the 'krok-krok-krok' of ravens and the mewing of peregrine falcons. The otherworldly summit plateau, strewn with boulders and riven by deep fissures in the gritstone bedrock, is a breeding ground for golden plover and is rich in rare plants such as alpine clubmoss.

The hike to the summit is a 15km round trip (allow five or six hours); the first part is on an easy gravel track, but you'll need good boots to negotiate the boggy ground and steep slopes further on. Start at the Cuilcagh Mountain Park car park, 300m west of the entrance to Marble Arch Caves visitor centre (grid reference 121335; you'll need the Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 Discovery series map, sheet 26). Right next to the car park is the Monastir sink hole, a deep depression ringed by limestone cliffs where the Aghinrawn River disappears underground for its journey through the Marble Arch Caves system. (Note that the OS map has wrongly labelled this river the Owenbreen.)

Climb the stile beside the gate and set out along the Legnabrocky Trail, a 4WD track that winds through rich green limestone meadows before climbing across the blanket bog on a 'floating' bed of gravel and geotextiles – boardwalks off to one side offer a closer look at bog regeneration areas. The gravel track comes to an end at a gate about 4.5km from the start. From here you follow a line of waymarked wooden posts, squelching your way across spongy bog (don't stray from the route – there are deep bog holes where you can get stuck) before climbing steeply up to the summit ridge, with great views west to the crags above little Lough Atona. The waymarkers come to an end here, so you're on your own for the final kilometre across the plateau, aiming for the prominent cairn on the summit (a map and compass are essential in poor visibility).

The summit cairn is actually a Neolithic burial chamber; about 100m south of the summit you will find two rings of boulders, the foundations of prehistoric huts. On a clear day the view extends from the Blue Stack Mountains of Donegal to Croagh Patrick, and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Irish Sea. Return the way you came.

☑ (P) Offering affordable country-house luxury, this beautifully restored Georgian villa boasts a gleaming mahogany-panelled library, billiards room and marble-lined steam room. The bedrooms have period cast-iron fireplaces and antique furniture, and the owners run courses on antique restoration and traditional crafts. It's 1.5km northeast of the town centre.

Riverfront Coffee Shop (☎ 8225 0011; 38 Market St; sandwiches £2-4; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) This lively little eatery serves up excellent coffee, cakes, quiche, home-made soup, and mix-your-own sandwiches on baguettes, *panini* or ciabatta rolls, and also provides vegetarian, coeliac-friendly and low-carb options.

Grant's of Omagh (☎ 8225 0900; 29 George's St; mains £7-15; ☎ 4-10pm Mon-Fri, noon-10pm Sat & Sun) Grant's – as in US president Ulysses S Grant – bathes in a golden glow of Irish emigrant nostalgia, from the fiddle and bodhrán on the wall above the smoke-blackened fireplace in the front bar to the American-themed restaurant in the back, with a menu that ranges from steak, burgers and lasagne to Cajun chicken and spicy enchiladas.

Getting There & Away

The bus station is on Mountjoy Rd, just north of the town centre along Bridge St.

Goldline Express bus 273 goes from Belfast to Omagh (£9, 1¼ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, six on Sundays) via Dungannon and on to Derry (£7, 1¼ hours). Bus 94 goes to Enniskillen (£6, one hour, five or six daily Monday to Friday, three on Saturdays, one on Sundays) where you can change for Donegal, Bundoran or Sligo. Goldline Express bus 274 runs from Derry to Omagh (£7, one hour, every two hours), and continues to Dublin (£11, three hours) via Monaghan.

AROUND OMAGH Ulster American Folk Park

In the 18th and 19th centuries thousands of Ulster people left their homes to forge a new life across the Atlantic; 200,000 emigrated in the 18th century alone. Their story is told here at one of Ireland's best museums, the **Ulster American Folk Park** (☎ 8224 3292; www.folkpark.com; Mellon Rd; adult/child £4.50/2.50; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6.30pm Sun & public holidays Apr-Sep, 10.30am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar). Last admission is 1½ hours before closing.

The Exhibition Hall explains the close connections between Ulster and the USA – the American Declaration of Independence was

signed by several Ulstermen – and includes a genuine Calistoga wagon. But the real appeal of the folk park is the outdoor museum where the 'living history' exhibits are split into Old World and New World areas, cleverly linked by passing through a mock-up of an emigrant ship. Original buildings from various parts of Ulster have been dismantled and re-erected here, including a blacksmith's forge, a weaver's thatched cottage, a Presbyterian meeting house and a schoolhouse. In the 'American' section of the park you can visit a genuine 18th-century settler's stone cottage and a log house, both shipped across the Atlantic from Pennsylvania.

Costumed guides and artisans are on hand to explain the arts of spinning, weaving, candle making and so on, and various events are held throughout the year, including re-enactments of American Civil War battles, a festival of traditional Irish music in May, American Independence Day celebrations in July, and the Appalachian and Bluegrass Music Festival in September. There's almost too much to absorb in one visit and at least half a day is needed to do the place justice.

The park is 8km northwest of Omagh on the A5. Bus 97 to Strabane stops outside the park (15 minutes). Buses depart from Omagh at 7.55am and 1.25pm Monday to Friday, and return at 3.20pm and 4.50pm. On Saturdays there are buses at 7.25am and 2.25pm, returning at 4.45pm (check times at the tourist office; p689).

SPERRIN MOUNTAINS

When representatives of the London guilds visited Ulster in 1609 the Lord Deputy of Ireland made sure they were kept well away from the Sperrin Mountains, fearing that the sight of these bleak, moorland hills would put them off the idea of planting settlers here. And when it rains there's no denying that the Sperrins can be dismal, but on a sunny spring day, when the russet bogs and yellow gorse stand out against a clear blue sky, they can offer some grand walking. The area is also dotted with thousands of standing stones and prehistoric tombs.

The main ridge of the Sperrins stretches for 30km along the border with County Derry. The highest summit is Mt Sawel (678m), rising above the B47 road from Plumbridge to Draperstown, a right little roller-coaster of a road that undulates across the southern slopes

of the Sperrins. Halfway along it you'll find the **Sperrin Heritage Centre** (☎ 8164 8142; 274 Glenelly Rd, Cranagh; adult/child £2.70/1.65; ☎ 11.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 11.30am-6pm Sat, 2-6pm Sun Easter-Oct) which offers an insight into the culture, natural history and geology of the region. Gold has been found in the Sperrins, and for an extra 85/45p you can try your luck at panning for gold in a nearby stream.

If you're thinking of walking up Mt Sawel, enquire at the Sperrin Heritage Centre about the best route. The climb is easy enough in good weather, but some farmers are not as accommodating as others about hikers crossing their land.

Gortin

The village of Gortin, about 15km north of Omagh, lies at the foot of Mullaghcarn (542m), the southernmost of the Sperrin summits (unfortunately capped by two prominent radio masts). Hundreds of hikers converge for a mass ascent of the hill on **Cairn Sunday** (the last Sunday in July), a revival of an ancient pilgrimage that first petered out in the 19th century. There are several good walks around the village, and a scenic drive to **Gortin Lakes**, with views north to the main Sperrin ridge.

A few kilometres south of Gortin, towards Omagh, is **Gortin Glen Forest Park** (☎ 8167 0666; Gortin Rd; car/pedestrian £3/free; ☎ 10am-dusk), whose dense conifer woodland is home to a herd of Japanese sika deer. An 8km scenic drive offers the chance to enjoy the views without breaking into a sweat.

There is hostel accommodation at the **Gortin Accommodation Suite** (☎ 8164 8346; www.gortin.net; 62 Main St; dm/f £10/50), a modern outdoor activity centre in the middle of Gortin village; it also has en-suite family rooms with one double and two single beds.

Creggan

About halfway along the A505 between Omagh and Cookstown (20km east of Omagh) is **An Creagán Visitor Centre** (☎ 8076 1112; www.an-creagan.com; Creggan; admission free; ☎ 11am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 11am-4.30pm Oct-Mar), with an exhibition covering the ecology of the surrounding bogs and the archaeology of the region. There's also a restaurant and gift shop.

There are 44 prehistoric monuments within 8km of the centre, including the **Beaghmore Stone Circles**. What this site lacks in stature – the stones are all less than 1m tall –

TOP FIVE TRADITIONAL PUBS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- Bittle's Bar (p601)
- Blake's of the Hollow (p681)
- Grace Neill's (p616)
- Dufferin Arms (p621)
- Peadar O'Donnell's (p652)

it makes up for in complexity, with seven stone circles (one filled with smaller stones, nicknamed 'dragon's teeth') and a dozen or so alignments and cairns. The stones are signposted about 8km east of Creggan, and 4km north of the A505.

Getting Around

Ulsterbus service 403, known as the *Sperrin Rambler*, runs twice daily Monday to Saturday between Omagh and Magherafelt, stopping at Gortin, the Sperrin Heritage Centre and Draperstown (in County Derry). The morning bus leaves Omagh at 10.05am, arriving at the Sperrin Heritage Centre at 11am; the return bus leaves the centre at 2.40pm.

COOKSTOWN & AROUND

Cookstown boasts the longest (2km) and widest (40m) street in Ireland, the legacy of an over-ambitious 18th-century town planner, but apart from that there's not much to see in town. The main sights here are in the surrounding countryside.

The **tourist information centre** (☎ 8676 9949; www.cookstown.gov.uk; Burn Rd, Cookstown; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat year round, 2-4pm Sun Jul & Aug) is in the Burnavon Arts and Cultural Centre, west of the main street.

Wellbrook Beetling Mill

Beetling, the final stage of linen making, involved pounding the cloth with wooden hammers, or beetles, to give it a smooth sheen. Restored to working order by the National Trust, 18th-century **Wellbrook Beetling Mill** (☎ 8674 8210; 20 Wellbrook Rd, Corkhill; adult/child £3.50/2; ☎ 2-6pm daily Easter Week, Jul & Aug, 2-6pm Sat, Sun & public hols mid-Mar–Jun & Sep) still has its original machinery, and stages demonstrations of the linen-making process led by guides in period costume. The mill is on a pretty

stretch of the Ballinderry River, 7km west of Cookstown, just off the A505 Omagh road.

Ballyronan Marina

Tucked in the northwest corner of Lough Neagh (see boxed text, p638), 16km north-east of Cookstown, Ballyronan Marina is the home port of the recently restored **Maid of Antrim** (☎ 2582 2159; www.maidofantrim.com). Built on Scotland's River Clyde in 1963, this vintage boat offers a range of cruises on the lough in the summer months, including a two-hour trip to National Trust-owned **Coney Island** in the south (adult/child £12/8).

Ardboe High Cross

A 6th-century monastic site overlooking Lough Neagh is home to one of Ireland's best-preserved and most elaborately decorated Celtic stone crosses. The 10th-century **Ardboe high cross** stands 5.5m tall, with 22 carved panels depicting biblical scenes. The western side (facing the road) has New Testament scenes: (from the bottom up) the Adoration of the Magi; the Miracle at Cana; the miracle of the loaves and fishes; Christ's entry into Jerusalem; the arrest (or mocking) of Christ; and, at the intersection of the cross, the Crucifixion.

The more weathered eastern face (towards the lough) shows Old Testament scenes: Adam and Eve; the Sacrifice of Isaac; Daniel in the Lions' Den; the Three Hebrews in the Fiery Furnace. The panels above may show the Last Judgement, and/or Christ in Glory. There are further scenes on the narrow north and south faces of the shaft.

Ardboe is 16km east of Cookstown. Take the B73 through Coagh and ignore the first (white) road sign for Ardboe. Keep straight on until you find the brown sign (on the right) for Ardboe High Cross.

Sleeping & Eating

Drum Manor Forest Park (☎ 8676 2774; Drum Rd, Oaklands; camp & caravan sites £9.50-11; ☞ Easter-Sep) This is a pleasant site 4km west of Cookstown on the A505, with lakes, forest trails, a butterfly farm and an arboretum.

Avondale B&B (☎ 8676 4013; www.avondalebb.co.uk; 31 Killycolp Rd; r per person £25; (P)) Set in a spacious Edwardian house with a large garden, patio and sun lounge, Avondale offers B&B in two en-suite family rooms (one double and one single bed in each). It's 3km south of Cookstown, just off the A29 Dungannon road.

our pick **Tullylagan Country House** (☎ 8676 5100; www.tullylagan.com; 40b Tullylagan Rd; s/d £55/75; (P)) Set amid beautiful riverside gardens 4km south of Cookstown (just off the A29), the ivy-clad Tullylagan goes for the Victorian country manor feel, with shabby-chic sofas, gilt-framed mirrors on deep red walls, and marble-effect bathrooms with period taps. The **restaurant** (mains £10-15, ☞ noon-3pm & 6.30-9pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-2.30pm & 4-9pm Sun) specialises in fresh seafood and steaks.

Getting There & Away

The bus station is on Molesworth St, east of the main street. Bus 210 connects Cookstown with Belfast's Europa BusCentre (£7, 1¼ hours, four daily Monday to Saturday, two Sunday). Bus 80 shuttles between Cookstown and Dungannon (£3, 45 minutes, hourly Monday to Friday, eight Saturday).

DUNGANNON & AROUND

Dungannon is a pleasant enough market town halfway between Cookstown and Armagh, worth a brief stop in passing if you want to do a spot of shopping.

Killymaddy Tourist Information Centre (☎ 8776 7259; www.flavouroftyrone.com; 190 Ballygawley Rd; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun) is at a caravan site 10km west of Dungannon on the A4 road towards Enniskillen.

Tyrone Crystal

Ireland's first crystal factory was established in Dungannon in 1771 by Benjamin Edwards from Bristol. It closed down in 1870, but in 1968 Tyrone's crystal industry was revived by a local priest, Father Austin Eustace, who raised funding to establish a new factory to help relieve local unemployment.

Today, **Tyrone Crystal** (☎ 8772 5335; www.tyronecrystal.com; Coalisland Rd, Killybrackey; tours adult/child £5/free; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) continues to produce high-quality lead crystal. The factory offers guided tours of the manufacturing process, from the furnace where molten glass is prepared, through hand-blowing and moulding, to cutting and polishing. Admission to the showroom is free, and the tour price is reimbursed if you buy something.

The factory is 2.5km northeast of Dungannon on the A45 towards Coalisland – it's clearly signposted. Bus 80 to Cookstown stops nearby.

Linen Green

Housed in the former Moygashel Linen Mills, the **Linen Green** (☎ 8775 3761; www.thelinengreen.com; Moygashel; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) complex includes a range of designer shops and factory outlets, plus a visitor centre with an exhibition covering the history of the local linen industry. It's a good place to shop for bargain men's and women's fashion, shoes, accessories and linen goods or to stop for lunch at the Deli on the Green (see right).

Donaghmore High Cross

The village of Donaghmore, 8km northwest of Dungannon on the B43 road to Pomeroy, is famed for its 10th-century Celtic high cross. It was cobbled together from two different crosses in the 18th century (note the obvious join halfway up the shaft) and now stands outside the churchyard. The carved biblical scenes are similar to those on the Ardboe cross (see opposite). The nearby **heritage centre** (☎ 8776 7039; Pomeroy Rd; admission free; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) is based in a converted 19th-century school.

Grant Ancestral Homestead

Ulysses Simpson Grant (1822-85) led Union forces to victory in the American Civil War and later served as the USA's 18th president for two terms from 1869 to 1877. His maternal grandfather, John Simpson, emigrated from County Tyrone to Pennsylvania in 1760, but the farm he left behind at Dergenah has now been restored in the style of a typical Ulster smallholding, as it would have been during the time of Grant's presidency.

The furnishings in the **Grant Ancestral Homestead** (Dergina, Ballygawley; admission free; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) are not authentic, but the original field plan of the farm survives together with various old farming implements. There's also an exhibition on the American Civil War, a picnic area and children's playground. Check opening times by calling the Killymaddy tourist information centre (opposite).

The site is 20km west of Dungannon, south of the A4; look out for the signpost 5.5km west of Killymaddy tourist information centre.

Sleeping & Eating

Dungannon Park (☎ 8772 7327; dpreception@dungannon.gov.uk; Moy Rd; camp/caravan sites £8/12; ☞ Mar-Oct) This small (20 pitches) council-run camp site is in a

quiet, wooded location complete with its own trout-fishing lake, 2.5km south of Dungannon on the A29 towards Moy and Armagh.

Grange Lodge (☎ 8778 4212; www.grangelodgecountryhouse.com; 7 Grange Rd; s/d from £55/79, 4-course dinner £28; (P)) The five-room Grange is a period gem set in its own 20-acre grounds. Parts of the house, which is packed with antiques, date from 1698, though most is Georgian with Victorian additions. The landlady is an award-winning cook, and the Grange runs cookery courses. Dinner is available as long as you book at least 24 hours in advance. It's 5km southeast of Dungannon, signposted off the A29 Moy road.

our pick **Deli on the Green** (☎ 8775 1775; 2 Linen Green, Moygashel; mains £5-7; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Take a break from browsing the designer goodies in the Linen Green shops to relax over lunch in this stylish little bistro. As well as the sandwiches and salads on offer at the deli counter, there are succulent home-made steakburgers, curry and pasta with roast pepper, tomato, rocket and goat's cheese sauce.

Viscounts Restaurant (☎ 8775 3800; 10 Northland Row, Dungannon; mains £9-15; ☞ noon-9.30pm Mon-Fri, 12.30-9.30pm Sat & Sun) Set in a converted church, child-friendly Viscounts offers carvery lunches, snacks and à la carte dinners. You can feast on steaks, pasta, stir-fries and vegetarian dishes in a mock medieval setting of knights' armour, swords and jousting banners. Booking is advisable at weekends.

Getting There & Away

Dungannon's bus station is just southwest of the town centre; turn right, cross the bridge and follow Scotch St to reach the main square. Bus 261 runs from Belfast's Europa BusCentre to Dungannon (£7, one hour, hourly Monday to Saturday, two on Sundays) and continues to Enniskillen (£7, 1½ hours). Bus 273 travels from Belfast to Derry via Dungannon and Omagh (hourly Monday to Saturday, six on Sundays).

Bus 80 shuttles between Cookstown and Dungannon (£3, 45 minutes, hourly Monday to Friday, eight on Saturdays). Bus 278 runs from Coleraine to Dungannon (£7, 1½ hours, two a day Monday to Friday, one daily on Saturdays and Sundays) and continues to Armagh (£4, 30 minutes), Monaghan and Dublin.

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