



County Donegal

You could spend weeks losing yourself in wild and woolly Donegal. The county's stark beauty captivates you and, over time, seeps down to your core. Tortuous country roads skirt stark mountains, rugged sea cliffs, craggy peninsulas, remote Gaeltacht communities, sheep-studded pastures, pristine strands, icy streams and horizons carpeted with bog and heather. Reaching up to the island's northernmost point, the county seems eternally braced to hold its own on its own. For although political and economic turmoil have eased off, the county endures its fair share of Atlantic squalls to stave off complacency.

Due to its isolation, Ireland's second-largest county (only Cork is larger) feels like its own country. It was severed from its traditional province when most of Ulster became Northern Ireland, and it is cut off from the rest of the Republic by the extended finger of County Fermanagh. Donegal was always a stubbornly independent land, largely ignored by those in Dublin's distant driving seat.

The Donegal experience is largely about weather, for here there's no need to set sail to brave the sea – the sea charges ashore and its mists ride stiff winds over fields and into the towns. Storms arrive unannounced, and just as abruptly break into brilliant sunshine, transforming the blue and grey into sparkling greenery. When the weather is kind, Donegal's better beach resorts can rival any in Europe, and make perfect destinations for a summer getaway. Once you've attained the proper come-what-may attitude, you'll know you've been tamed by this uncompromising land.

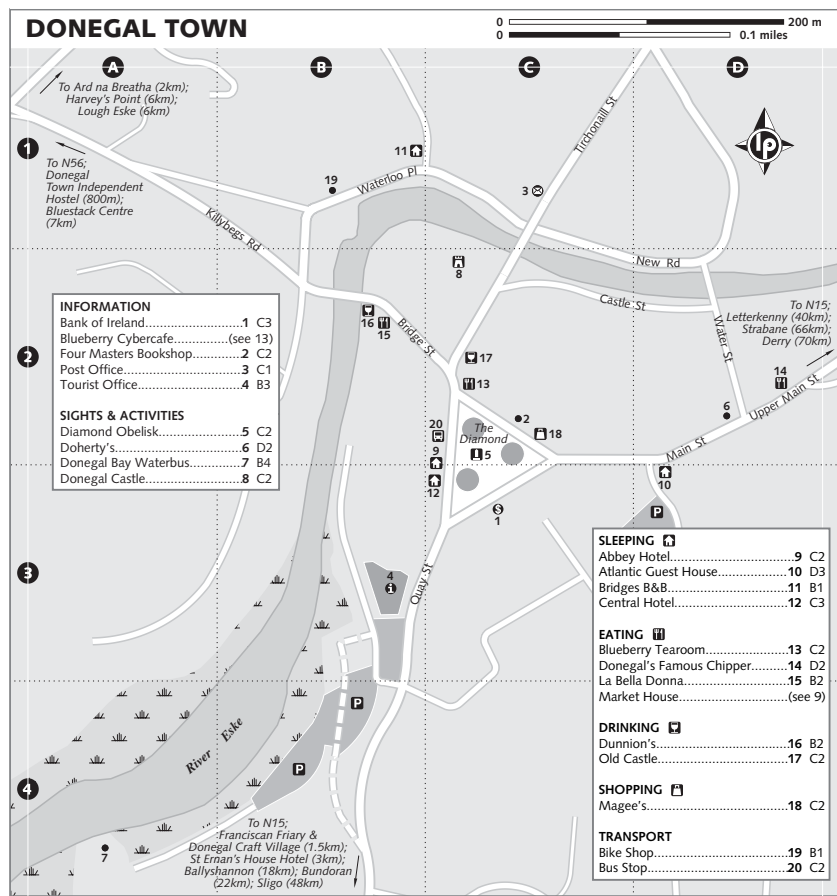
HIGHLIGHTS

- **Multifaceted Natural Beauty** The surf, cliffs, hills and forests of Dunfanaghy (p524)
- **Take to the Hills** The alpine magic around the Glen Gesh Pass (p516)
- **Wild Isolation** Dramatic end-of-the-earth scenery at Malin Head (p537)
- **Cliff-top Vertigo** Europe's highest sea cliffs, Slieve League (p514)
- **Ancient Encounter** The views from Grianán of Aileach (p540) hilltop ringfort



■ POPULATION: 147,250

■ AREA: 3001 SQ KM



Blueberry Tearoom. Check in at the counter downstairs before going up.

Four Masters Bookshop (☎ 972 1526; the Diamond)

A good spot for books, maps and travel guides.

Post office (Tírchoinail St) North of the diamond.

Tourist office (☎ 972 1148; donegal@failteireland.ie; Quay St; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, noon–4pm Sun Jul–Aug, 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat Sep–Jun) South of the diamond.

SIGHTS Donegal Castle

Overlooking a wicked bend of the Eske, **Donegal Castle** (☎ 972 2405; Castle St; adult/child €3.70/1.30; ☎ 10am–6pm mid-Mar–Oct, 9.30am–4.30pm Nov–Dec) remains an imperious monument to both Irish and English might. Built by the O'Donnells in

1474, it served as the seat of their formidable power until 1607, when the English decided to be rid of pesky Irish chieftains once and for all. Even in defeat, Rory O'Donnell was no pushover, though. To stop the English getting their grubby hands on it, he torched his own castle before fleeing to France in the infamous Flight of the Earls. Their defeat paved the way for the Plantation of Ulster by thousands of newly arrived Scots and English Protestants, thereby creating the divisions that still afflict the island to this day.

The castle was rebuilt in 1623 by Sir Basil Brooke, along with the adjacent three-storey Jacobean house. Much of the castle is gutted today, but enough has been preserved that it's worth a look-see.

Diamond Obelisk

In 1474 Red Hugh O'Donnell and his wife, Nuala O'Brien, founded a **Franciscan friary** by the shore south of town. It was accidentally blown up in 1601 by Rory O'Donnell while laying siege to an English garrison, and little remains. What makes it famous is that four of its friars, fearing that the arrival of the English meant the end of Celtic culture, chronicled the whole of known Celtic history and mythology from 40 years before the Flood to AD 1618 in *The Annals of the Four Masters*, still one of the most important sources of early Irish history. The **obelisk** (1937), in the diamond, commemorates the work, copies of which are displayed in the National Library in Dublin.

ACTIVITIES Boat Trips

A fantastic way to explore the highlights of Donegal Bay is to take one of the boat tours run by **Donegal Bay Waterbus** (☎ 972 3666; www.donegalbaywaterbus.com; Donegal Pier; adult/child €10/5). Aboard a 20m tour boat, the 1¼-hour tour covers everything from historic sites to seal-inhabited coves, stopping to admire an island manor and a ruined castle along the way. The tour runs up to five times daily during the summer and at least once a day the rest of the year, depending on the weather. Call to check departure times.

Fishing

Permits are required for fishing in the local rivers. Kits and information are available from **Doherty's** (☎ 972 1119; Main St; ☎ 9am–6pm Thu–Tue).

SLEEPING

B&Bs are plentiful around Donegal town, and the tourist office can assist with making bookings.

Budget

Donegal Town Independent Hostel (☎ 972 2805; lincunn8@eircom.net; Killybegs Rd, Doonan; dm/d €16/40; (P)) Privately operated by a friendly couple and their dog, this Independent Holiday Hostels of Ireland (IHH) hostel, 1.2km northwest of town off the Killybegs Rd (N56), has gaudily painted, but exceptionally clean dorms and private rooms. It's within walking distance of town. Pick up can be arranged.

Bluestack Centre (☎ 973 5564; www.donegalbluestacks.com; Drimarone; dm/f €16/50; (P) (♿)) This

is a remote country hostel-cum-community centre with squeaky-clean rooms and a basketball court. It's also a handy point for hikers tackling the Bluestack Mountains. It's often left unmanned, however, so call ahead. It's 7km north of town, signposted from the roundabout northwest of town.

Midrange & Top End

Atlantic Guest House (☎ 972 1187; Main St; s/d from €35/45; (P)) It's not homey or particularly friendly, but this busy old guesthouse, just a block from the diamond, is a convenient and reasonable choice. It has 16 cheery and clean rooms, some with private bathroom. Mattresses are a little thin.

Bridges B&B (☎ 972 1082; Waterloo Pl; s/d €40/70) Facing the castle and the river, this small, family-run B&B is simply tidy, quiet and comfy.

Ard na Breatha (☎ 972 2288; www.ardnabreatha.com; Drumroske Middle; s/d €65/130; (P)) This is a terrific little guesthouse, with a more countrified setting 2.4km out of town. It has modern rooms furnished to the highest standard and charming service. The restaurant is open for dinner at weekends (reservations required). It's signposted off the road to Lough Eske.

Abbey Hotel (☎ 972 1014; www.whites-hotelsireland.com; the Diamond; s/d from €70/130; (P) (♿)) In a great stone building (118 rooms) at the heart of town, the Abbey offers a bit of snazzy, contemporary flair on the inside. Rooms out the back overlook the river. The hotel offers access to a gym and has a stylish restaurant and bar.

Central Hotel (☎ 972 1027; www.centralhoteldonegal.com; the Diamond; s/d €80/140; (P) (♿)) The Abbey's twin is another impressive stone building that presides over the town centre. It offers all the comfort and mod cons of a contemporary establishment. Back rooms have river views and the bar features live music. Enticing specials are offered in winter.

St Ernan's House Hotel (☎ 972 1065; www.sainternans.com; R267; s/d from €150/230, dinner €52; ☎ May–Oct; (P)) If you've ever dreamt of having your own private island, you'll love this place. This magnificent country hotel (built by a nephew of Wellington in 1836) is set on its own wooded islet about 3km south of Donegal town, signposted off the road to Laghey and accessible via a causeway. It's hard not to feel serene with lapping water on all sides. Children under six are not catered for.

EATING

Donegal's Famous Chipper (☎ 972 1428; Upper Main St; fish & chips €5-6; ☎ 12.30-11.30pm Thu-Tue) You've probably never heard of this joint, whose fame spreads as far as the town limit, but it's an excellent place to grab an order of fried cod. You can eat at the Formica counter or take yours to a nearby pub (of which there are plenty).

Blueberry Tearoom (☎ 972 2933; Castle St; mains €7-9; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Piping hot baked goodies, *panini* (type of Italian sandwich) and excellent pies make this snug tearoom a local favourite at any time of the day. Its lunchtime specials are also worth fighting your way in for, and it dabbles in everything from French to Cajun dishes.

Market House (☎ 972 1014; the Diamond; mains €15-25; ☎ noon-2pm, 5-9pm) With tartan carpeting and stone walls, the Market House somehow manages to not feel touristy or old-fashioned. The kitchen tackles surf and turf mainstays with a contemporary ethos: fresh, light and, above all, fine tasting.

La Bella Donna (☎ 972 5790; Bridge St; mains €10-25; ☎ noon-5pm & 7-9.30pm) The Irish enthusiasm for Italian is not lost on far-flung Donegal, as the lively and well-dressed weeknight crowds at this snazzy place attest. Drop by for pizzas, pastas and steaks. Lunchtime *panini* and espressos are a forte.

DRINKING

Donegal's nightlife is a bit hit and miss. Any place with a live-music session on is likely to be your best bet.

Dunnion's (Bridge St) The owner of this old-school pub, next to the river, plays the button-box accordion, and his pals join him in a céilidh most nights. It often has the best craic in town.

Old Castle (☎ 972 1062; Castle St) A grey-stone pub built to match the neighbouring castle with attractive stonework, corbel windows and a low wooden ceiling. It's a relaxing spot to enjoy a sip of stout and swap banter with locals.

SHOPPING

Donegal Craft Village (☎ 972 2225; Ballyshannon Rd; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun) There's not a single canned leprechaun or Guinness T-shirt in sight at this complex of craft studios, 1.5km south of town. Instead, it showcases quality pottery, crystal, hand-woven fab-

rics, jewellery and more – look for the Raw Studio, selling sculpted bogwood by Michael Griffin.

Magee (☎ 972 2660; www.mageedonegal.com; the Diamond; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) Magee is a small department store with a room devoted to Donegal tweed.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Frequent **Bus Éireann** (☎ 913 1008; www.bus.eireann.ie) services connect Donegal with Sligo (€11, 1¼ hours, six daily), Galway (€17 3½ hours, two to three daily) and Killybegs (€6, 35 minutes, three daily) to the west; Derry (€11.50, 1½ hours) and Belfast (€16, 3½ hours) in the North; and Dublin (€16, four hours, six daily) in the southeast. The bus stop is on the western side of the diamond.

Feda O'Donnell (☎ 954 8114; www.fedaodonnell.com) runs to Galway (single/return €15/22, 3½ hours, twice daily, three on Friday and Sunday) via Ballyshannon, Bundoran and Sligo. Departures are from the tourist office. Fares within Donegal range from €6 to €10.

McGeehan Coaches (☎ 954 6150; www.mgbus.com) runs buses to Dublin's Busáras bus station (single/return €16/23, four hours, two daily Monday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, one daily Tuesday to Thursday) from in front of the garda barracks across from the tourist office.

GETTING AROUND

Head to the **Bike Shop** (☎ 972 2515; Waterloo Pl; per day/week €10/60) for bike hire and information on cycling in the area.

AROUND DONEGAL TOWN

LOUGH ESKE

Despite its optimistic name, meaning 'Lake of the Fish', this picturesque spot northeast of Donegal town isn't the fishpond it once was, but it's still terrific territory for cycling or walking over the majestic Blue Stack Mountains.

Sleeping & Eating

Ardeevin Guest House (☎ 074-972 1790; http://ardeevin.tripod.com; Lough Eske; s/d €50/75; P) Great views

of the lake are just one of this B&B's selling points. Running for 40 years, it has evolved into a large rambling house with charming rooms and an old-fashioned garden. It's 4km north of Donegal town off the Letterkenny road (N15). Take the second left and follow the signs.

Harvey's Point Country Hotel (☎ 074-972 2208; www.harveyspoint.com; Harvey's Point; d €199-299, 4-course dinner €50; P) This is an elite retreat. With expansive grounds lapping the edge of the lake, it has large guestrooms, Jacuzzi baths, a top-notch French restaurant and a helicopter pad that's not just for show. Harvey's is 6km north of Donegal town.

Getting There & Away

From the diamond in Donegal, take the N56 to Killybegs. About 300m past the bridge, turn right following the signs to Harvey's Point.

ROSSNOWLUGH

☎ 071 / pop 50

The old-world resort of Rossnowlough (Ross Neamblach), southwest of Donegal town, has a dazzlingly white Blue Flag beach, which extends for nearly 5km and is a popular surfing spot (gentle rollers here). The huge Sandhouse Hotel stands beside a humble caravan park along the beach, and that's about it, really. But if you're after some relaxing rays, this may be your spot.

WALK: BLUE STACK MOUNTAINS

If you're not satisfied with admiring the Blue Stack Mountains from a distance, you can take a rewarding, though difficult, trek along a circuitous 18km path through wild and rugged terrain. A complete circuit should take about seven hours, and entails summiting several peaks topping 600m. The highest of these, at 674m high, is **Blue Stack**, from which the views of southern Donegal are spectacular. Alternatively, you can walk the short (though steep) distance to **Eas Doonan waterfall**, which drops some 30m and is truly spectacular after a good rain. This walk can be done in about one hour. Note that in wet weather the trail can be a bit boggy, surely slowing you down.

The trail head is easy to find, though it sounds complicated. Off the N15 from Donegal Town, look for the signs for Lough Eske. There are three turnoffs, all leading to Lough Eske Dr. Follow the road counterclockwise towards the northern end of the lake, where the road hairpins twice. Off the second hairpin take the small road leading to Edergole, where you'll find a walker sign and space to park your car.

It would be wise to collect more detailed information and perhaps a map before attempting the full circuit. The OSI 1:50,000 map No 11 covers this territory. The information centre in Donegal Town (see p506) is excellent. The Mountain Views website (<http://mountainviews.ie>) is a useful resource with input from hikers who have explored the Blue Stacks and other mountains in Ireland.

Deep in the adjacent forest is a **Franciscan friary** (☎ 985 1342; admission free; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat) with tranquil gardens; the way of the cross takes you through a hillside smothered with rhododendron to spectacular hill-top views.

Smugglers Creek (☎ 985 2367; smugcreek@eircom.net; s/d €45/80; ☎ Easter-Oct; P) is perched dramatically on the hillside above the bay. This pub, restaurant and guesthouse is justifiably popular for its excellent food and sweeping views. Room 4 has the best vantage point and a balcony into the bargain. The pub features live music on summer weekends.

Once an extravagant 19th-century fishing lodge, the **Sandhouse Hotel** (☎ 985 1777; www.sandhouse-hotel.ie; d €189-319; ☎ Apr-Dec; P) continues to project a festive atmosphere and is a fine beach getaway.

BALLYSHANNON

☎ 071 / pop 2230

Pretty Ballyshannon (Béal Átha Seanaidh), crawling up a steep incline above the River Erne, is a world away from the tacky excess of nearby Bundoran, and makes a more tranquil base to explore the coastline.

Information

Bank of Ireland (Market St) Has an ATM.

Post office (Market St) Near the junction.

Tourist information centre (☎ 9.30am-1pm, 2-5pm, closed Oct-Apr) A skeletal operation at the bus station.

Sights & Activities

ALLINGHAM'S GRAVE

As a kid, the poet William Allingham (1824–89) scribbled his first attempts at verse on a window in the AIB bank on Castle St where his dad was the manager. The wordsmith, who is best remembered for his poem *The Fairies*, is now buried in the graveyard beside **St Anne's Church**, the grave marked simply 'poet'. The church is signposted left off Main St after Dorrian's Imperial Hotel.

ABBEY MILLS

Waterwheels have been harnessing the river's power for centuries at **Abbey Assaroo** (☎ 985 8966; Abbeylands; admission free; ☞ 11am–7pm Jun–Sep, 2.30–7pm Sun Oct–May; **P**). The site was founded in the late 12th century by Cistercian monks from County Roscommon. Now restored to working order, the mills are open as a heritage centre. Take the road to Rosnowlough (R231) and after 2km, signs indicate Abbey Mills on the left.

Festivals & Events

The exuberant **Ballyshannon Folk & Traditional Music Festival** (www.ballyshannonfolkfestival.com) arrives for the last weekend in July or the first in August. The schedule is available online.

Sleeping & Eating

Lakeside Caravan & Camping (☎ 985 2822; lakesidecentre@eircom.net; Belleek Rd; camp sites from €17 ☞ Mar–Sep) Nestling on the shore of Assaroo Lake, this four-star camping ground is worth the trip. It's especially well equipped for kids. From Ballyshannon, take the N3 for 1km towards Belleek.

Breesy Centre (☎ 982 2925; www.breescycentre.com; Cashelard; dm/d €20/40, breakfast €5; **P** ☞) This remote country hostel has sparkly and cheerful dorms with private bathrooms, and a tranquil village setting 6km northeast of Ballyshannon. Head north on the N15, turn east after 5km (there's a sign for Cashelard) and continue 1km. You'll see the hostel, opposite a modern-looking pub.

Cavangarden House (☎ 985 1365; www.littleireland.ie/cavangardenhouse; Donegal Rd; s/d €44/70; **P**) This Georgian country house is a beauty amid expansive lawns trees alive with birdsong. Guestrooms have sturdy antique beds, and evening meals can be arranged. To find it, take the N15 3km north of town and look for the signs.

Shannon's Corner (☎ 985 1180; Main St; mains €6–10; ☞ 8.30am–4.30pm) In-the-know locals pile into this unassuming bistro for its home-cooked lunches and smashing sarnies.

Drinking

Fin McCool's (☎ 985 2677; Main St) A traditional pub with occasional music sessions.

Thatch Pub (Bishop St) This picturesque place, just off the top of Main St, is a great place to grab a pint and a few snapshots.

Getting There & Away

There are regular daily **Bus Éireann** (☎ 074-912 1309) services to Bundoran (€2.10, 10 minutes), Sligo (€9, 50 minutes), Galway (€17, 3½ hours), Donegal (€5, 25 minutes), and Dublin (€16, 4½ hours; via Enniskillen, Cavan and Navan). The bus station is between the bridge and the Gallogly Jewellers clock tower.

Feda O'Donnell (☎ 074-974 8114) buses depart from opposite the bus station for Donegal (€5, 15 minutes) and Letterkenny (€6, one hour) twice daily, four times on Friday. For Sligo (€6, 45 minutes) and Galway (€15, three hours) they leave from outside Maggie's Bar, south of the river near the roundabout, twice daily, three times Friday and Sunday.

BUNDORAN

☎ 071 / pop 1680

It's one of Ireland's tackiest holiday resorts, with an assortment of unappealing arcades and fast-food diners, but not all is lost in Bundoran (Bun Dobhráin). The big draw here is the surf, for which Bundoran is renowned. The strand and nearby dunes are beautiful, offering scenic spots for walking, sunbathing and horse riding. If you stay here, mosey over to the less commercial west end of town.

Information

AIB Bank (Main St) Has an ATM and bureau de change.

Post office (Main St)

Tourist office (☎ 984 1350; bundoran@irelandnorthwest.ie; the Bridge, Main St; ☞ 10am–5pm Mon–Fri mid-Mar–Sep, 10am–4pm Fri & Sat Oct–mid-Mar) Seasonal office opposite the Holyrood Hotel.

Activities

SURFING & KITE-SURFING

The breaks of Tullan Strand, just north of the town centre, offer some of the best surfing in Europe, and Bundoran hosts the annual Irish National Surfing Championships,

which are usually held in April. For more information, check out the website of the **Irish Surfing Association** (www.isasurf.ie).

The youth-oriented **Donegal Adventure Centre** (☎ 984 2418; www.donegal-holidays.com; Bay View Ave; surf lessons per 3hr €35) rents gear and runs all-year surf tuition. It also offers kayaking and gorge walking, and for those taking courses, dorm beds are available (€25).

Bundoran Surf Co (☎ 984 1968; www.bundoran-surfco.com; ☞ 9.30am–7pm) offers lessons in kite-surfing and power-kiting. A day-long lesson costs €120. The company also rents standard surf gear (board and wetsuit per half day €30) and gives surf lessons (per three hours €35). Surf and accommodation packages can be arranged (see the website for details).

HORSE RIDING

Family-run, friendly and efficient **Donegal Equestrian Holidays** (☎ 984 1977; www.donegal-equestrianholidays.com), just outside the town, is Bundoran's big draw for non-surfers. The centre offers rides over the dunes and along the beach, lessons for all levels and pony camps for families. Call ahead for reservations. A one-hour trail ride (€45) is your simplest option, but longer rides are available.

WATER ACTIVITIES

Bundoran's beach isn't safe for swimming, so the place to get wet is **Waterworld** (☎ 984 1172; www.waterworldbundoran.com; adult/child under 8 €8.50/3.50), a fun facility with a swimming pool and water slides. It's on the beach. Also on the premises, **Aquamara** (☎ 984 1173; baths from €18; ☞ 11am–7pm) provides a decidedly more sedate form of bathing in its seaweed

baths. See the boxed text, p471, for more on Irish seaweed therapy.

Sleeping

All of the following are in the more pleasant west end of town.

Homefield Hostel (☎ 984 1288; homefield@indigo.ie; Bayview Ave; dm/d €18/40; **P**) This 260-year-old building was once Viscount Enniskillen's holiday play pad, and later served as an altogether more restrained convent. It now has the look and feel of a fun and well-lived-in, budget-oriented lodge. The six-bed dorms and private rooms are in good nick and there are lots of cosy lounges.

Bay View B&B (☎ 984 1237; Main St; s/d €40/64; **P**) Facing the beach, this stately Edwardian town house has a historic feel but is no less inviting for it. Guestrooms are a bit utilitarian, but all are en suite and those in front have unobstructed views of waves crashing ashore.

Fitzgerald's Hotel (☎ 984 1336; www.fitzgeralds-hotel.com; s/d €65/110; **P**) Bundoran's most polished operation is this small hotel, across the street from the strand. It's an older building that has been thoroughly updated with ample personality. Rooms are spacious and many have excellent views. The hotel has an excellent restaurant-bistro.

Eating

La Sabbia (☎ 984 2253; Bay View Ave; lunch €6–9, dinner €9–24; ☞ 9am–late) This colourful Mediterranean bistro has tables spilling out onto the front porch and attracts a lively, upbeat crowd. The menu features seafood specialties (the oyster bar is a good starting point) along with tasty pastas and pizzas. It's also a good spot for strong coffee or a *panini*.

SURF'S UP

It isn't exactly a secret (among surfers, anyway) that the west coast of Ireland offers some of the best surf breaks in Europe. Travellers from as far off as Australia and South Africa regularly arrive in towns like Bundoran and Easky (County Sligo) with their minds singularly focused on the beach breaks, reef breaks and point breaks for which the coast is known.

Towns noted for their surfing activity in Donegal include Rosnowlough (p509), Bundoran (opposite) and Dungloe (p519). In Sligo, the surf is often up in Strandhill (p469) and Easky (p471). Achill Island (p454) in County Mayo also has good surfing. All of these places have outfitters that can take care of the needs of the travelling surfer. If you're not a surfer, many companies will teach you how to do it. All levels can be accommodated for.

The Irish Surfing Association has a useful website at www.isasurf.ie. Surfers can also get recent information from fellow travellers at www.globalsurfers.com. See p702 for more on surfing and swimming.

Fitzgerald's Bistro (☎ 984 1336; Main St; mains €16-24; 🕒 6.30-9pm Wed-Sun Easter-Oct, Fri & Sat only Oct-Easter) Hidden within Fitzgerald's Hotel, this popular bistro looks a little like a hunting lodge, but with cosy plush booths and a friendly staff. Although seafood is the specialty, the kitchen is equally adept with meat and veg. A fun spot.

Drinking

Brennan's (☎ 984 1810; Main St; 🕒 midnight-4am Fri-Sun) is a quiet and neighbourly old pub in the heart of town. It's a refreshing departure from the brash and spangly places up the street.

Getting There & Away

Bus Éireann (☎ 074-912 1309) buses stop on Main St. There are direct daily services to Sligo (€8, 45 minutes), Galway (€17, 2¼ hours), Donegal (€6, 40 minutes) and more. **Ulsterbus/Translink** (☎ 028-9066 6630; www.ulsterbus.co.uk) has three services daily Monday to Friday (one Saturday) to Belfast (€17.50, 3½ hours) via Enniskillen (€12.50, 1¼ hours). **Feda O'Donnell** (☎ 074-974 8114) buses from Crolly (€6, 2½ hours) travelling to Galway (€14, three hours) stop in Bundoran outside the Holyrood Hotel twice daily, three times on Friday and Sunday.

SOUTHWESTERN DONEGAL

MOUNTCHARLES TO BRUCKLESS

Donegal's scenery-o-meter starts to crank up when you reach the coast, just to the west of Donegal town, and it steadily intensifies as you head north. The first coastal communities you'll reach are tiny but no less beautiful. Apart from a scattering of pubs and cafés in Mountcharles and Dunkineely, there are few places to eat (especially in winter), so stock up before leaving Donegal town or Killybegs.

Mountcharles

☎ 074 / pop 430

This hillside village of Mountcharles (Moin Séarlas) is the first settlement along the coastal road (N56) southwest of Donegal town. About 2km south of the village is a safe, sandy beach. The shiny-green **pump** at

the top of this hillside village was once the backdrop for stories of fairies, ghosts, historic battles and mythological encounters. For it was at this point that local boy Séamus MacManus, a poet and *seanachai* (storyteller) of international repute, practised the ancient art in the 1940s and 1950s.

Dunkineely

☎ 074 / pop 350

The dozy little village of Dunkineely (Dún Cionnfhaoilaidh or Dún Cionnaola) is situated a little further west. From here, a minor road runs down the improbably thin finger of land poking into the sea at **St John's Point**. There's a beach with a little bit of sand and sweeping coastal views, and the waters around the point are a prime diving site.

Blue Moon Hostel (☎ 973 7264; http://homepage.iecom.net/~bluemoonhostel; Main St; camp sites per person €5, dm/d €12/30; 📍) is an Independent Hostel Owners of Ireland (IHO) hostel that looks unexceptional, even a little dowdy. Its three-tier bunk beds are comfy enough and it offers two kitchens, a washer/dryer and plenty of information on local goings-on such as deep-sea diving and sea angling.

Castle Murray (☎ 973 7022; www.castlemurray.com; St John's Point; s/d €90/140; mains €17-24; 🕒 6.30-9.30pm; 📍) Overlooking the sea cliffs, this is no castle, but a rather small and welcoming hotel in an old beach house. It has 10 playfully updated guestrooms, each conveying a cultural theme – the décor is sure to date badly, but the rooms are unquestionably comfortable and the sunset views can't be beat. Breakfast is superb, and it's little wonder, for the place is equally known for its restaurant, which specializes in seafood with some admirable French influences. Prawns and monkfish in garlic butter is a specialty.

Bruckless

☎ 074 / pop 180

The scattered settlement of Bruckless (An Bhroclais) is the next stop, about 2km west of Dunkineely. Horse riding and pony trekking are available at **Deane's Equestrian Centre** (☎ 973 7160; deanesquestrian@eircom.net; Darney, Bruckless; 🕒 10am-4pm), including lessons, five-minute pony rides for children (€5) and longer excursions (adult/child from €17/20). Advance booking is required.

The luxury, ivy-clad, Georgian B&B **Bruckless House** (☎ 973 7071; www.iol.ie/~bruc/bruckless

.html; d €120; 🕒 Apr-Sep; 📍) is simply gorgeous. Fronted by a traditional cobbled farmyard, it is home to a stud farm for Connemara ponies. Guests will enjoy wandering its 18 acres of gardens, whichlope down to the shore. The interior is furnished with antique oriental influences. It's signposted off the main road approximately 3km after Dunkineely.

Getting There & Away

Bus Éireann (☎ 972 1008) bus 490 from Donegal to Killybegs stops near the Village Tavern in Mountcharles, the Inver post office in Bruckless and the Dunkineely Furniture Centre in Dunkineely.

KILLYBEGS

☎ 074 / pop 1400

A fishy fragrance welcomes you to Killybegs (Ceala Beaga), Ireland's most important fishing port and home to a large fishmeal processing plant. Apart from that, it's a fairly charming town, with a number of oddly angled streets colliding at its diamond, a block from the pier. Deep-sea angling is the top tourist activity here, but Killybegs is also a convenient base for the spectacular cliff scenery beyond Kilcar.

The community-run **tourist office** (☎ 973 2346; Quay St; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) is in a cabin near the harbour. The **Bank of Ireland** (Main St) has an ATM and bureau de change.

Sights & Activities

A right turn in town up a steep hill brings you to **St Mary's Church**, outside which stands the extraordinary **tombstone of Niall Mór MacSweeney**, head of the MacSweeney clan, one of Donegal's ruling families before 1607. It clearly depicts a chain-mailed warrior with a plumed helmet, his battle-axe raised and sword at the ready. This warlike figure is a *gallowglass*, a Scottish mercenary who first came to the north and west of Ireland in the late 13th century.

Several operators offer **fishing** expeditions with the opportunity to catch pollock, cod and whiting. **Killybegs Angling Charters** (☎ 973 1144; www.killybegsangling.com; Blackrock Pier) runs fishing charters (€400 for the boat). The **Harbour Store** (☎ 973 1569; the Harbour), by the wharf, sells fishing gear.

The wild, secluded **Fintragh Bay**, about 3km west and down a big-dipper of a road, is fun

to explore and the water is clean and safe for swimming.

Sleeping

Ritz (☎ 973 1309; www.theritz-killybegs.com; Chapel Brae; dm/d/f €20/60/70; 📍) For the price, this place ain't at all bad. It is an IHO hostel, but rooms provide the privacy and comfort of a hotel. It has an enormous modern kitchen, colourful rooms with private bathroom and TV, and cosy common areas. A light breakfast is included. It's a good family choice.

Seawinds B&B (☎ 973 2003; www.seawindsireland.com; the Diamond; s/d €40/60; 📍) In the heart of town, this friendly B&B has basic and cheery rooms, all with no-fuss holiday-home décor. Another good choice for families.

Tara Hotel (☎ 974 1700; www.tarahotel.ie; Main St; s/d €80/120; 📍) Just a few skips from the harbour, this thoroughly modern hotel gives Killybegs an unexpected tinge of minimalist swank. Guestrooms come with the usual frills (including TV and internet). Ask for one of six sea-view rooms with balcony (costing €10 extra in summer).

Eating

Shines (☎ 973 1996; Killybegs; fish & chips €6; 🕒 11am-2pm, 4-11.30pm Wed-Sat, 3-11.30pm Sun) If the official town aroma has you craving something with gills and fins, this spic-and-span chip shop can take care of your needs without further ado. It does a brisk takeaway business. Salt yours down and take it to the beach.

22 Main Street (☎ 973 2876; www.22mainstreet.com; Main St; mains €11-22; 🕒 5-10pm) If you crave something other than seafood but your partner has to have something fished from the local waters, then this Mediterranean-style bistro's your ticket. In the heart of the town, it cranks out pizzas and pastas, along with piping hot seafood pies, fish and chips and prime Irish beef.

Kitty Kelly's (☎ 973 1925; www.kittykellys.com; Kilcar Rd; mains €16-20; 🕒 6.30-9.30pm daily Easter-Sep, Thu-Sun Oct-Mar) Run by a gregarious local celebrity, this 200-year-old farmhouse restaurant puts on what feels like an intimate dinner party. As you would expect in such a setting, the menu is traditional Irish, with some praiseworthy seafood selections. It's on the coast road, 5km west of Killybegs. Reservations recommended.

Getting There & Away

Bus Éireann (☎ 912 1008) service 492 to Donegal (€6, 30 minutes) from Killybegs runs four times daily Monday to Saturday. Bus 490 heads west to Kilcar (€4, 20 minutes) and Glencolumbcille (€8, 45 minutes) once daily Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and twice on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. In July and August an extra bus runs daily, and buses continue to Malinmore twice daily, Monday to Saturday.

KILCAR & CARRICK

☎ 074 / pop 260

Kilcar (Cill Chártha) and its more attractive neighbour Carrick (An Charraig) are small country towns that make good bases for exploring the breathtaking coastline of south-western Donegal, especially the stunning sea cliffs at Slieve League. Kilcar is also famous for the manufacture of Donegal tweed. Just outside Kilcar is a small, sandy beach.

This is lovely walking country, particularly if you don't mind hoofing up and down a few hills. Kilcar Tourism has some pointers for walking the Kilcar Way; ask at the **Aisleann Cill Cartha** (☎ 973 8376; Main St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri), a community centre that provides information for tourists.

More tourist information is available from the cultural centre, **Ionad Cultúrach Sliabh Liag** (Slieve League Cultural Centre; ☎ 973 9077; www.sliabhleague.com; Teelin, Carrick), which also has a pleasant coffee shop. There are no banks. The post office is off Main St past O'Gara's pub.

Sights

STUDIO DONEGAL

Beside the community centre is the **Studio Donegal** (☎ 973 8194; www.studiodonegal.ie; the Glebe Mill, Kilcar; admission free; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon, 9am-5.30pm Tue-Thu, 9.30am-5pm Fri), a shop where tweeds are spun and loomed by hand. Sometimes visitors are invited upstairs to see spinners and weavers in action.

SLIEVE LEAGUE

The Cliffs of Moher get more attention from photographers, but the Slieve League is higher. Driving up to these spectacular polychrome sea cliffs, the highest in Europe dropping some 600m into the sea, is a hair-raising – but exhilarating – experience. From the car park, there's a path skirting

up around the near-vertical rock face to the aptly named **One Man's Pass**.

Take the turn-off signposted Bunglass from the R263 at Carrick, 5km northwest of Kilcar, and continue beyond the narrow track signposted Slieve League to the one that's signposted Bunglass.

Activities

Three walks that start in Kilcar are collectively known as the **Kilcar Way**. From Teelin, experienced walkers can spend a day walking north via Bunglass and the cliff-top One Man's Path – not for the faint hearted – to Malinbeg, near Glencolumbcille. It shouldn't be attempted in windy conditions or if bad weather is likely to impede visibility.

Sleeping & Eating

Dún Ulún House (☎ 973 8137; dunulunhouse@eircom.net; Coast Rd; camp sites €10, dm €15, d €45; Ⓟ) The sweeping view down to a ruined ringfort is what strikes you first about this inn, run by an older couple. If you're a single traveller open to sharing a room, they'll arrange a bed for the night, hostel-style. Accommodation is simple but homey, and the owners can be helpful with travel plans, Gaelic lessons and genealogy. Breakfast (€7.50) is optional. A little camping ground is ensconced in the tiered hillside. The house is 1km west of the village.

Derrylahan Hostel (☎ 973 8079; derrylahan@eircom.net; Derrylahan, Kilcar; camp sites €12, dm/d €14/36; Ⓟ) The best option for hostellers and campers is this friendly IHH hostel. It's a working farm, and the hostel is very well run and friendly. The dorms are comfortable, there are plentiful cooking facilities and a 20-person group house. It also rents bikes. It's 3km west of the village on the coast road. Pick-ups can be arranged.

Ostan Sliabh Liagh (☎ 973 9973; www.ostansliabhliagh.com; Carrick; s/d €35/70; bar food €4-9; Ⓟ) In the heart of the sweet little hamlet of Carrick, this B&B is above the town's largest pub and offers rooms that are barebones but pass military inspection for tidiness. Most rooms are en suite. The pub grub isn't bad, either.

Blue Haven (☎ 973 8090; Kilcar-Killybegs Rd; mains €12-25; ☎ 6-10pm, noon-3pm Sun) It's modern and stylish, but this restaurant aspires merely to serve 'home cooking' prepared with fresh local produce. The place can be quite festive, and its sunset views are stunning.

Getting There & Away

Bus Éireann (☎ 912 1309) service 490 connects Kilcar and Carrick with Killybegs and Glencolumbcille once daily Monday to Friday (twice daily Saturday, once Sunday). In July and August an extra bus runs Monday to Saturday. **McGeehan Coaches** (☎ 9546150) has a daily service from Glencolumbcille to Dublin that stops at Carrick and Kilcar. There are extra buses in summer.

GLENCOLUMBCILLE & AROUND

☎ 074 / pop 255

It's not much more than a gash in the rocks, making Glencolumbcille (Glenn Cholm Cille, 'Glen of Columba's Church') a remote and starkly beautiful coastal haven. Approaching the town via the Glen Gesh Pass perfectly illustrates how cut off Glencolumbcille is from the rest of the world, as you drive through miles and miles of hills and bogs before the ocean appears – and there you'll see a narrow, green valley and the small Gaeltacht village within it.

This spot has been inhabited since 3000 BC and you'll find plenty of Stone Age remains throughout the collection of tiny settlements. It is believed that the 6th-century St Colmcille (Columba) founded a monastery here (hence the valley's name) and incorporated Stone Age standing stones called *turas* into Christian usage by inscribing them with a cross.

At midnight on **Colmcille's Feast Day** (9 June) penitents begin a walkabout of the *turas* and the remains of Colmcille's church before attending Mass at 3am in the local church.

Information

Teach Alasa (☎ 973 0116; Cashel; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Apr, Jun & Sep-mid-Nov, 9.30am-9pm Mon-Sat, noon-6pm Sun Jul & Aug) dispenses limited tourist information. There are no banks or ATMs but the post office has a bureau de change.

Sights & Activities

FATHER MCDYER'S FOLK VILLAGE

A museum with a mission, this **folk centre** (☎ 973 0017; www.glenfolkvillage.com; Doonalt; adult/child €3/2; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-6pm Sun Easter-Sep; Ⓟ) was established by the forward-thinking Father James McDyer in 1967 to freeze-frame traditional folk life for posterity. It's housed in a huddle of replicated thatched cottages of the 18th and 19th centuries, with genuine period fittings. The *shebeen* (illicit drinking

place) sells unusual local wines (made from ingredients such as seaweed and fuchsias) alongside marmalade and whisky truffles. Admission includes a tour. It's 3km west of the village, by the beach.

BEACHES

There are two sandy beaches with brisk waves in **Doonalt**, immediately west of the village. Another gorgeous little beach can be found at **Malinbeg**, a perfect sheltered bay bitten out of low cliffs and filled with firm red-tinged sand. Its just down the coast road, in the direction of Slieve League.

WALKING

A couple of loop walks will get you off into the blustery wilds beyond the town. The **Tower Loop** (10km, two to three hours) takes you up over some stunning coastal cliffs, while the more arduous **Drum Loop** (13km, three to four hours) heads into the hills, northeast of the town. Both walks start and finish at Colmcille's church. At the time of research, finishing touches were being put on a new **walking centre** (☎ 973 0302), near the beach, which will offer information, guided walks and showers.

Courses

Oideas Gael (☎ 973 0248; www.oideas-gael.com; ☎ mid-Mar–Oct), at the Foras Cultúir Uladh (Ulster Cultural Foundation) 1km west of the village centre, offers a range of 'cultural activity holidays' – adult courses in Irish language and traditional culture, including dancing, pottery and music. The centre also leads hillwalking programmes in the Donegal highlands. Three-day courses cost from €100. Accommodation can be arranged – you'll have a choice of homestay or self-catering, with prices of around €20 to €40 per person per night.

Sleeping

Dooley Hostel (☎ 973 0130; www.dooleyhostel.com; camp sites/dm/d 7.50/13/28; Ⓟ) This ageing IHO hostel has character in spades, in part because it's owned by an elderly, wild-haired chain smoker who calls herself 'Mad' Mary O'Donnell. The hostel is actually built *into* the hillside, with rock and dripping greenery bulging into its inner corridor. It has a superb hilltop view to boot. Facilities are rustic, but each dorm has its own bath and kitchen. A group house for 20 is available. Drivers should take the

turn beside the Glenhead Tavern for 1.5km; walkers can take a short cut beside the Folk Village. Cash only.

Malinbeg Hostel (☎ 973 0006; www.malinbeghoste.com; Malinbeg, Glencolumbcille; dm/s/d €16/25/40; ☹ closed Dec & early Jan; (P)) The Dooney's opposite is the thoroughly modern and comfortable Malinbeg. It sports spotless rooms with private bathroom and scores big for its proximity to a beautiful beach, a food store and restaurant. Call ahead for a pick-up.

Glencolumbcille Hotel (Óstán Ghleann Cholm Cille; ☎ 973 0003; www.glenhotel.com; s/d €60/110; (P)) This canary-coloured hotel stands amid the rolling countryside, with its own golf course slowly taking shape at its rear. Its 40 classy rooms are extremely spacious. For something special, request the suite facing the coast. To get there, continue past the folk museum towards Malinbeg.

Eating

During the winter there are few eating options within the town itself. The food store, next to the Malinbeg Hostel, can provide ready-made sandwiches.

An Cistin (the Kitchen; ☎ 973 0213; Glencolumbcille; mains €10-22; ☹ 9am-9pm Easter-Oct) You won't find a better spot to chow down than this café-restaurant attached to Oideas Gael. It serves up a surprisingly gourmet selection, including superb seafood, to a soundtrack of mellow jazz.

Silver Strand House (☎ 973 0220; Malinbeg; mains €15-20; ☹ 9am-9.30pm daily May-Sep, Sat & Sun Oct-Apr; (P)) For those staying towards the tip of Malinbeg, this catch-all restaurant by the beach proffers a great fisherman's platter so you can sample most of the local haul.

Shopping

Glencolumbcille Woollen Mill (☎ 973 0070; www.rossanknitwear-glenwoolmill.com; Malinmore; ☹ 10am-8pm Mar-Oct, to 5.50pm Nov-Feb) is the place to stock up on woollies. Rossan knitwear is manufactured locally, but you can also pick up Donegal tweed jackets, caps and ties alongside lamb's-wool scarves and shawls. It's 3km southwest of Cashel.

Getting There & Away

Bus Éireann (☎ 912 1309) service 490 leaves for Killybegs daily (€8, 45 minutes) with an extra service on Saturday and in July and August.

McGeehan Coaches (☎ 954 6150) leaves from 's Pub for Killybegs (€5, one hour) and Dublin

(€20, five hours, twice daily). McGeehan also runs to Ardara, Dungloe and Glenties.

MAGHERY & THE GLEN GESH PASS

☎ 074 / pop 640

A tiny village on the northern edge of the peninsula, Maghery has a picturesque waterfront, and if you follow the strand westward, you'll get to a rocky promontory full of caves. During Cromwell's 17th-century 'Irish destruction tour', 100 villagers sought refuge here but all except one were discovered and massacred.

About 1.5km east of Maghery is enchanting **Assarancagh Waterfall**, beyond which is the beginning of a 10km marked trail to the **Glen Gesh Pass** (Glean Géis, meaning 'Glen of the Swans'), one of the most beautiful spots in Europe. It's almost alpine in appearance; cascading mountains and lush valleys dotted with isolated farmhouses and small lakes. If you're driving or cycling, you can get to the pass directly from Glencolumbcille by following the road signs for Ardara.

ARDARA

☎ 074 / pop 580

Exquisite and scenically positioned Ardara (Árd an Rátha) represents the heart of Donegal's knitwear and hand-woven tweed tradition. There isn't a whole lot going on here, although the town has a couple of sterling pubs. Once you've restocked on winter woollies, head for the switchbacks of the beautiful Glen Gesh Pass, which begins just west of the town.

Tourist information is available from the Triona Design visitor centre (see Shopping, opposite). On the diamond there's an Ulster Bank with an ATM; the post office is a short walk away on Main St.

Festivals & Events

The trad-music **Cup of Tae Festival** (www.cupoftaefestival.com) takes place at the end of April or early May. It includes a school of music, as well as dancing and storytelling.

Sleeping & Eating

Drumbarron Hostel (☎ 954 1200; jfeeneyardara@eircom.net; the Diamond; dm/d €16/36) This Georgian-style two-storey house has utilitarian dorms furnished with comfortable bunk beds. It's equipped with a large kitchen and has a wel-

coming parlour. Knock at the B&B opposite if there's nobody in the hostel. Cash only.

Drumbarron House (☎ 954 1200; jfeeneyardara@eircom.net; the Diamond; s/d €40/70) In the family for three generations, this large B&B is efficiently run and cosy. Its owner is an artist, who has hung modern art all over the house. Cash only.

Green Gate (☎ 954 1546; http://thegreengate.eu; Ardvally, Ardara; s/d from €40/70; (P)) This idyllic hill-top B&B is owned by a gregarious Frenchman named Paul Chatenoud, and if you stay here chances are you'll get to know him rather well (he's a character who likes to spend time with his guests). Accommodation is spread out over several patchily restored cottages and the compound has hares who casually trim the grass and sweeping views down to the bay. Follow the tiny pictorial signs of a gate beyond Woodhill House.

Woodhill House (☎ 954 1112; www.woodhillhouse.com; d €98-150; (P)) This 17th-century manor house is rich in history and old-world style. The courtly gardens are a huge bonus, and its cosy restaurant has a wine list to leave any connoisseur drooling. It's 400m south-east of the centre.

Nancy's Bar (☎ 954 1187; Front St; mains €8-12) This pub-restaurant successfully makes its guests feel as though they're sitting in Nancy's living room. It serves superb seafood and chowder, and is also the best place in town to savour a social pint or two.

Entertainment

Corner House (☎ 954 1736; the Diamond) is a good spot to listen to an Irish music session (nightly from June to September) while savouring a drop or two of the black stuff. Occasionally, someone will spontaneously break out in song, and if the mood is right the rest of the pub will join in.

Shopping

Ardara is a great place to stock up on winter woollens and warm tweed. There are half a dozen outlets specialising in local knitwear.

Triona Design (☎ 914 1422; www.trionadesign.com; Main St; ☹ 9am-7pm) There is a staff of weavers here who keep traditional skills alive while demonstrating their techniques for visitors. It's a good place to learn about the profession's rich history and purchase quality items.

Kennedy's (☎ 954 1106; Front St) In business for over a century, Kennedy's helped establish Ardara's reputation as a sweater mecca.

Getting There & Away

In July and August, **Bus Éireann** (☎ 912 1309) service 492 from Killybegs (€4, 25 minutes) stops three times daily Monday to Friday, in each direction, outside O'Donnell's in Ardara. June to mid-September **McGeehan Coaches** (☎ 954 6150) runs a service to Dublin (€17.50, 4½ hours) twice daily via Donegal (€4, 50 minutes).

Getting Around

Don Byrne's of Ardara (☎ 954 1638; Main St), east of the centre, rents bikes for €15/60 per day/week.

DAWROS HEAD

The outer reaches of beautiful Loughrea Peninsula, north of Ardara, glistens with a multitude of tiny lakes cupped by gentle, undulating hills. The twin resort towns of **Narin** and **Portnoo** also tend to be swamped with summer week-enders, attracted by the beautiful wishbone-shaped Blue Flag beach at Narin.

The beach's sandy tip points towards the protective bulk of **Iniskeel Island**, and at low tide you can walk out to this island. St Connell, a cousin of St Colmcille, founded a monastery here in the 6th century. Hardly any trace of the monastery remains but the island is nevertheless studded with interesting early medieval Christian remains.

Another adventurous diversion is to track down **Lough Doon**, 3km south of Narin, in the centre of which sits the 2000-year-old **Doon Fort**, a fortified oval settlement. To reach the fort, you need to hire a rowing boat (around €10) from an adjacent farm. Pick a day that's not too windy.

If the fort whets your appetite for archaeology, pay a visit to the **Dolmen Ecocentre** (☎ 074-954 45010; www.dolmencentre.com; Killeelone; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri), which can point you towards several other prehistoric sites, including a delightful tortoiselike passage tomb a short walk up a track left of the church.

Also on the peninsula, hemmed in by grassy dunes, is **Tramore Beach**. In 1588 part of the Spanish Armada ran aground here. The survivors temporarily occupied O'Boyle's Island in Kiltloorish Lake, but then marched to Killybegs, where they set sail again in the

Girona. The *Girona* met a similar fate that year in Northern Ireland, with the loss of over a thousand crew (see the boxed text, p661).

Sleeping

Narin and Portnoo have B&Bs aplenty, which are generally open from April to September.

Tramore Beach Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 074-955 1491; campbella@eircom.net; Rosbeg; camp sites €14) This remote place has 24 sandy camp sites sheltered amid dunes, just a short hop from the beach. Take the road from Ardara to Narin then turn left, following the signposts to Tramore Beach.

Lackagh Mor Cottages (☎ 074-954 5935; mgyo@eircom.net; Lackagh; s/d €35/60; (P)) This assemblage of stone cottages makes a great romantic getaway or family vacation spot. The ocean is a short walk from here, or you can just admire it from your cottage. It's just outside the village of Portnoo.

Getting There & Away

From Monday to Saturday in July and August, **Bus Éireann** (☎ 074-912 1309) service 492 runs between Killybegs and Portnoo (€9, 55 minutes, twice daily).

GLENTIES

☎ 074 / pop 790

This sure is a tidy town, just as the sign informs you as you roll in on the highway. Glenties (Na Gleannta) may be a little too fussily kept up – you have the feeling an old lady will follow you around with a broom and a dustpan – but there's no denying its beautiful location at the foot of two valleys with a southern backdrop laid on by the Blue Stack Mountains. It's a good spot for **fishing** and there are some cracking **walks** in the surrounding countryside.

A **summer school** (www.patrickmacgill.com) is held in August in honour of plucky Patrick MacGill (1891–1963), the 'navvy poet' who was sold by his parents at a hiring-fair, later escaped and eventually ended up writing for the English *Daily Express*. Glenties is also linked with playwright Brian Friel, whose play (and later star-studded film), *Dancing at Lughnasa*, is set in the town.

On the main street there's a Bank of Ireland, with an ATM and bureau de change, and a post office.

St Connell's Museum & Heritage Centre (☎ 955 1227; Main St; adult/child €2.50/1; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-4.30pm

Mon-Sat Apr-Sep), beside the old courthouse at the western end of town, has a fusty ragbag of local artefacts.

Sleeping & Eating

Campbell's Holiday Hostel (☎ 955 1491; www.campbellireland.com; dm/d €12/28; ☎ Apr-Oct; (P)) A spic-and-span hostel with colour-coded six-bed dorms and comfortable doubles, plus a couple of kitchens and a laundry. It's hidden behind the museum as you enter from Ardara town on the N56.

Brennan's B&B (☎ 955 1235; Main St; s/d €45/70; (P)) This family run B&B is right on the main drag, among a crop of inviting pubs and shops. Guest rooms are comfortable and lovingly tended to by the elderly matron of the house.

Highlands Hotel (☎ 955 1111; http://homepage.eircom.net/~highlandshotel; Main St; s/d €52/96; mains €12-24) This laid-back country hotel dominates the western end of town. It serves excellent all-day food in substantial proportions using the freshest of produce. Rooms are nothing fancy, but are properly kept up and spacious.

Entertainment

Spot the thatched roof and you might assume **Paddy's Bar** (☎ 955 1158; Main St) is a relic favoured by old men. Inside, though, it's completely remodelled and seems to attract all ages. It has a pool table and features traditional céilidh sessions several nights a week.

Getting There & Away

Bus Éireann (☎ 912 1309) service 492 from Donegal to Dungloe stops off in Glenties (€7, 45 minutes) one to two times daily Monday to Friday.

FINN VALLEY & AROUND

Off the beaten track, even by Donegal standards, the Finn valley makes a serene escape for fishing, hill walking or cycling. The River Finn is a good **salmon-fishing** river. There's also good **hill walking** on the Blue Stack Mountains and along the Ulster Way (p700), but you do need to be equipped with maps and provisions. Finn Farm Hostel can dispense maps and advice for the area. A long, one-day trek could start from the hostel and end in Glenties.

The main town is **Ballybofey** (Bealach Féich), linked to adjoining **Stranorlar** by an arched bridge over the Finn. There's a locally run **tourist office** (☎ 074-913 2377; Main St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) in the Ballybofey Balor

Theatre. In Ballybofey's Protestant church is the **grave** of Isaac Butt (1813–79), founder of the Irish Home Rule movement.

Sleeping & Eating

Finn Farm Hostel (☎ 074-913 2261; Cappry, Ballybofey; camp sites/dm/d €10/15/30; (P)) This hostel occupies a working farm, replete with horse stables. The place exudes old Irish character, and is quite friendly, though finicky guests sometimes complain it's run down. It also offers horse-riding lessons and organised walks. Finn Farm is about 2km southwest of Ballybofey; the turning is signposted simply 'Hostel' off the N15 Donegal road.

Getting There & Away

Bus Éireann (☎ 074-912 1309) express service 64 between Galway (€17, 4¾ hours) and Derry (€7, 35 minutes) via Sligo (€12, two hours), Donegal (€6, 30 minutes) and Letterkenny (€5, 25 minutes) stops up to six times daily in Ballybofey. Local buses connect Ballybofey with Killybegs and also Letterkenny.

McGeehan Coaches (☎ 074-954 6150) runs services from Glencolumbcille (€8, 1¾ hours) to Letterkenny (€5, 35 minutes), with a stop in front of the Fintown post office at 8.40am and 1.20pm Monday to Saturday and 5.55pm Sunday. Going the other direction, it stops in Fintown at 11.35am and 5.45pm Monday to Saturday, 3pm Sunday.

NORTHWESTERN DONEGAL

There are few places in Ireland that are more savagely beautiful than northwestern Donegal. Humans have been unable to tame the wild and breathtakingly spectacular landscape. The rocky Gaeltacht area between Dungloe and Crolly is known as the Rosses (Na Rossa), and contains numerous tiny lakes and a coastline of clean, sandy beaches. Further northwest, between Buncbeg and Dunfanaghy, the scenery is softer but more stunning – to many visitors, this is the epitome of what unspoilt Ireland should look like. Offshore, the islands of Arranmore and Tory are both beautiful and fascinating to those eager for a glimpse of a more traditional way of life.

DUNGLOE & AROUND

☎ 074 / pop 950

A Number One pop song from the late 1960s, 'Mary from Dungloe', by Emmet Spiceland, helped put this little pit stop on the map. Each year the town hosts an international film festival, during which a 'new Mary' is crowned, keeping the flame alive after all these years. Apart from that, though, don't expect too much greatness from Dungloe (An Clochán Liath). It's standout feature is that it's the hub of the Rosses, with ample lodging and services for anyone visiting this spectacular locale. The nearby village of **Kincasslagh** is far more picturesque.

The **tourist office** (☎ 952 1297; ☎ 10am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun Jun-Sep) is off Main St behind the Bridge Inn. The **Bank of Ireland** (Main St) has an ATM and bureau de change. The **post office** (Quay Rd) is off Main St.

Activities

Fishing for salmon and trout on Dungloe River and Dungloe Lough is popular and you can get tackle and permits from **Bonner's** (☎ 21163; Main St). The nearest good beach is 6km southwest of town at **Maghera Bay**.

Kevin Tobin, a former national surf champ, runs the local **Dooley Surf School** (Scoil na dTonn; ☎ 952 2468; www.dooleysurfschool.com; 2hr lesson €25).

Festivals & Events

Crooner Daniel O'Donnell, pin-up to pensioners across England and Ireland, returns to his home town to host the 10-day **Mary from Dungloe Festival** (☎ 952 1254; www.maryfromdungloe.com) in late July/early August. Thousands pack the town for all kinds of revels culminating in a pageant where the year's 'Mary' is selected.

Sleeping & Eating

Iggy's B&B (☎ 954 3112; Main St, Kincasslagh; s/d €25/50; ☎ Jun-Sep; (P)) This country inn is a treasure. Rooms are kept tidy with grandmotherly care and the downstairs pub is a rolling social spot, with old Iggy himself pulling pints. Seafood dishes are also served here. Nothing fancy, just heart-warming.

Carey's Viking House Hotel (☎ 954 3295; careysvikinghouse@eircom.net; Kincasslagh; s/d €60/80; (P)) This family-run hotel is a polished operation with a restaurant, views of the beach and proximity to a challenging golf course.

It's a modern hotel, but small and with a traditional approach. Rooms are impeccable and cheerful.

Riverside Bistro (☎ 952 1062; Main St; mains €14-24; ☎ 12.30-3pm & 6-10pm) A lively French theme pervades this colourful little bistro, which is a good spot for candle-lit dinners and a choice of surprisingly daring Irish and international dishes, including a few for vegetarians.

Getting There & Away

McGeehan Coaches (☎ 954 6150) runs a service from Dungloe to Dublin (€17.50, 4½ hours, two daily, three Sunday) via Glenties (€4, 30 minutes) and Donegal (€6, one hour). No transit serves Kincasslagh.

BURTONPORT

☎ 074 / pop 345

This pocket-sized port village is the embarkation point for Arranmore Island, which looks near enough to wade to. Burtonport (Ailt an Chorráin) has attracted some famously off-the-wall characters over the years. In the 1970s, the Atlantis commune was established here, and practised a primal therapy that earned it the nickname 'the Screamers'. Eventually it relocated to the Colombian jungle. Later, the three Silver Sisters chose Burtonport to live out their Victorian lifestyle, complete with Victorian dress. The town seems perfectly ordinary today, though it is pretty.

For **fishing** trips contact **Inishfree Charters** (☎ 954 2245; www.burtonport.com; boat per day €270). It'll do half-day excursions. Alternatively, you can check in at the cabins by the pier.

The giant fibreglass lobster clinging precariously to the outer wall at **Lobster Pot** (☎ 954 2012; Main St; mains €10-20; ☎ noon-2pm & 6-9.30pm) is an unsuitable clue to the menu here: freshly netted seafood. It's a fine, neighbourly sort of place with an obsession for football.

Lough Swilly (☎ 912 2863) buses stop in Burtonport en route from Dungloe to Derry.

ARRANMORE ISLAND

☎ 074 / pop 600

Blessed by dramatic cliff faces, sea caves and clear sandy beaches, the small island of Arranmore (Árainn Mhór) lies a short ferry trip from the mainland. Measuring just 9km by 5km, the island has been uninhabited since the early Iron Age (800 BC), and a prehistoric triangular fort can be seen on the southern side. The western and northern parts are wild and

rugged, with few houses to disturb the sense of isolation. A walking path, the **Arranmore Way**, circles the island (allow three to four hours) and off the southwestern tip is **Green Island**, a bird sanctuary for corncrakes, snipes and a variety of seabirds that you can see from Arranmore (but not visit). You'll hear mostly Irish spoken on Arranmore Island, although most of the people are bilingual.

Sleeping & Eating

Arranmore Hostel (☎ 952 0015; www.arainnmhor.com; Leabgarrow; dm/d €14/32) A short walk left of the ferry terminal, and beautifully positioned next to a beach, is this civilised 30-bed hostel. Originally a post office, its owners live off-site so call ahead.

Arranmore House Hotel (☎ 952 0918; www.arainmorehousehotel.ie; Plohogue; d €40-60; mains €11-19) A modern and perky hotel, with a fine little restaurant and comfortable rooms. It's near the beautiful beach at Aphort Strand.

Entertainment

The island's all-night festivities are renowned. Half a dozen pubs put on turf fires and traditional music sessions, and some stay open 24 hours a day to sate thirsty fishermen.

Getting There & Around

The **Arranmore Ferry** (☎ 952 0532; www.arainnmhor.com/ferry) plies the 1.5km from Burtonport to Leabgarrow (€9 return; 25 minutes; seven Sunday, eight Monday to Saturday July and August and three Sunday, five Monday to Saturday September to June). It also takes cars (€26 return).

Once there, you can save your legs by taking an island tour with **O'Donnell Taxis** (☎ 087-260 6833). **Bikes** (per day €15) can be hired at the port.

GWEDORE & AROUND

☎ 074 / pop 1390

The Irish-speaking district of Gweedore (Gaoth Dobhair) is a loose assembly of small towns between the coast and the impressive peak of Mt Errigal. The area is commonly used as a base for trips to Tory Island and Glenveagh National Park. Its rugged coast, dotted with white, sandy beaches, has been overrun by holiday-home mania. Consequently, Derrybeg (Doiri Beaga) and Bunbeg (Bun Beag) virtually run into each other along the R257. A few kilometres east on the R258,

a few hotels are scattered along the roadside – that's Gweedore for you.

Thankfully, the developers haven't yet ventured inland. Away from the coast, habitations are few and far between, and the only feature breaking up the bleak landscape is the presence of dozens of small fishing lakes.

On the main road in Bunbeg there's an National Irish Bank with an ATM and bureau de change, while Derrybeg has a post office. Ferries depart Bunbeg for Tory Island (see right).

Activities

The most beautiful walking trail in the area is the **Tullagobegley Walk** (Siúlóid Tullagobegley), a historical trample over **Tievealehid** (Taobh an Leithid; 431m), which was used for centuries by locals carrying corpses to the 13th-century graveyard in Falcarragh. The 5½-hour walk begins at Lough Nacung (Loch na Cuinge), just east of Gweedore off the N56. The path brings you past some 19th-century silver mines to Keeldrum, a small townland on the outskirts of Gortahork, before finishing up at the Tullagobegley graveyard in Falcarragh.

Unfortunately, the walk is not waymarked so we strongly advise that you carry an OS Sheet 1 of the area.

Sleeping & Eating

Screag an Iolair Hil Hostel (☎ 954 8593; isaj@eircom.net; Tor, Crolly; dm/d €12.50/36; ☎ Mar-Oct) This is an enchanting little farmyard hostel enveloped in the remote, rocky landscape 5km above Crolly, southwest of Gweedore on the N56. It combines unforced rustic charm with knowledgeable owners who welcome guests as old friends – highly recommended.

Sleepy Hollows Campsite (☎ 954 8272; www.sleepyhollows.ie; Meenaleck, Crolly; camp sites €18; ☎) The grassy camp sites here are in secluded woods, thoughtfully removed from the un-gainly caravan parking lot. It's 200m past Leo's Pub in the village of Crolly.

Bunbeg House (Teach na Céidhe; ☎ 953 1305; www.bunbeghouse.com; s/d €50/80) This is a sweet, sweet spot. In a converted corn mill, this B&B sits directly by Bunbeg harbour, within earshot of wooden boats knocking against each other. It's a cosy place filled with wood panelling and rattan furniture, and was immortalised in Tony Hawke's much-loved *Round Ireland with a Fridge* travelogue.

Seaview Hotel (Óstán Radharc na Mara; ☎ 953 1159; www.visitgweedore.com/seaview.htm; Bunbeg; s/d from €80/140; ☎) This historic hotel, on the main road, was revamped and brought up to date just a few years ago. It retains much of its historic appeal, and its beachfront location is unbeatable. It has 40 spacious rooms.

Tábhairne Hughie Tim (mains €12-26; ☎ 1-9.30pm) Attached to the Seaview Hotel, this place whips up good bar food.

Gola Bistro (dinner €45; ☎ 6-10pm) An elegant place to enjoy a relaxed four-course meal.

Leo's Tavern also does good food.

Entertainment

You never know who'll drop by for a sing-along at **Leo's Tavern** (☎ 954 8143; Meenaleck, Crolly), Donegal's most famous pub. It is owned by Leo and Baba Brennan, parents of Máire, Ciarán and Pól, who were the core of the group Clannad. Another sibling, Enya, needs no introduction to fans of contemporary Irish music. The pub glitters with gold, silver and platinum disks and various other mementos of the successful kids. It is in the townland of Meenaleck, about 3km south of Gweedore. At Crolly, take the R259 1km towards the airport, and look for the signs for Leo's.

Getting There & Away

Feda O'Donnell (☎ 954 8114) runs a service twice daily (three Friday and Sunday) from Gweedore to Letterkenny (€5, 1½ hours), Donegal (€6, 1¾ hours), Sligo (€10, 3¼ hours) and Galway (€20, 5½ hours).

BLOODY FORELAND

Named for the crimson colour of the rocks at sunset, Bloody Foreland (Cnoc Fola) is a dramatic stretch of coast that regularly bears the full brunt of the Atlantic's fury. Unfortunately, vacation homes have entered into the scenery here. In any case, the foreland is little more than something to admire on your way elsewhere. The coast road to the north and south of here nevertheless remains wonderfully remote, scenic and ideal for cycling.

TORY ISLAND

☎ 074 / pop 190

Swept by sea winds and stung by salt spray, the remote crag of Tory Island (Oileán Thorai) has taken its fair share of batterings. With nothing to shield it from savage Atlantic squalls, it's a tribute to the hardiness of Tory Islanders that

THE BUNGALOW BLITZ

Although Donegal is Ireland's most remote corner, it hasn't been spared the real estate boom, and in spots its coastline has fallen prey to an insidious invasion – a bungalow blight. As rows of kit housing have gone up, the natural beauty of some parts of the county have clearly diminished over the past 15 years. Areas such as the Bloody Foreland, long celebrated for its stunning sunset views, are now known as 'Legoland'.

Around two-thirds of construction undertaken in Donegal today is aimed at the second-home market. Already, almost a quarter of the county's homes lie empty for much of the year. In an effort to limit the damage to Donegal's natural environment, county officials have pressed for tighter zoning laws that stipulate future development be restricted to full-time residents. Construction of holiday homes can be expected to continue for some time, though, as a backlog of permits has already been issued.

the island has been inhabited for over 4500 years. Although it's only 11km north of the mainland, the rough sea has long consolidated the island's staunch independence.

So it's no surprise that Tory is one of the last places in Ireland that holds onto, rather than simply paying lip service to, traditional Irish culture. The island has its own dialect of Irish and even has an elected 'king', and over the decades its inhabitants had a reputation for distilling and smuggling contraband *poitín* (a peaty whisky). However, the island is perhaps best known for its 'naive' (or outsider) artists, many of whom have attracted the attention of international collectors (see boxed text, right).

In 1974, after an eight-week storm that lashed the island mercilessly, the government made plans to evacuate Tory permanently. Thankfully this did not happen, due in part to the efforts of Father Diarmuid Ó Peicín, who spearheaded an international campaign to raise funds, create a proper ferry service, establish an electrical supply and more. The demise of the fishing industry has brought its own share of problems, but the community still doggedly perseveres.

The island has just one pebbly beach and two recognisable villages: West Town (An Baile Thiar), containing most of the island's facilities, and East Town (An Baile Thoir). Its eastern end is dominated by jagged quartzite crags like colossal keys, while the southwest slopes down to wave-washed bedrock.

Information is available from the **Tory Island Co-op** (Comharchumann Thoraí Teo; ☎ 913 5502; www.oileanthetairai.com).

Sights & Activities

Cottages mingle with ancient ecclesiastical treasures in West Town. St Colmcille is

said to have founded a monastery here in the 6th century, and reminders of the early church are scattered throughout the town. One example is the 12th-century **Tau Cross**, an odd, T-shaped cruciform that suggests the possibility of seafaring exchanges with early Coptic Christians from Egypt. The cross greets passengers disembarking from the ferry. Also nearby is a 6th- or 7th-century **round tower**, with a circumference of nearly 16m and a round-headed doorway high above the ground.

The island is a wondrous place for **bird-watching**: over 100 species of sea bird inhabit the island, and among the cliffs in the northeast you can see colonies of puffin (around 1400 are thought to inhabit the island).

Sleeping & Eating

Teach Bhíllie (☎ 916 5145; www.toraigh.net; West Town; s/d €25/40) From the ferry, walk 300m left to this unmarked, yellow B&B. It contains spartan but spotless rooms enlivened with bright splashes of colour, and welcomes guests with genuine warmth.

Graceanne Duffy's (☎ 913 5136; East Town; s/d €30/56, dinner €13; ☹ May-Oct) A B&B in the smaller of Tory's two villages, Graceanne's has three simple but comfortable bedrooms (two with showers) and meals include organic produce.

Tory Hotel (Óstán Thoraí; ☎ 913 5920; www.toryhotel.com; West Town; s/d €75/120, mains €8-11; ♿) Located by the pier, this is a modern, 14-room hotel where you can stay in pastel-coloured rooms, get the low-down on Tory from helpful staff, and enjoy good pub food or full meals. Two- and three-night packages are far more economical. It also has a club (at the People's Bar) for island music and dance.

TORY ISLAND 'NAIVE' ART

You expect to encounter unique cultures on remote islands, but rarely does that include a distinctive school of painters that have come to be internationally recognised. The Tory Island painters lack formal training, but they have cultivated a style that's both folksy and expressive.

In the 1950s the English painter Derrick Hill began to spend much of his time on the island, where he produced many paintings. The islanders took a natural interest in Hill, often watching him as he worked. As the story goes, one of the islanders approached Hill and said, 'I can do that.' He was James Dixon, a self-taught painter who used boat paint and made his own brushes with donkey hairs. Hill was impressed with the 'painterly' quality of Dixon's work and the two formed a lasting friendship. Other islanders were soon inspired to follow suit, each forging unique styles while portraying rugged island scenes. These included Ruairi Rodgers, Anton Meenan and Patsy Dan Rodgers, who along with Dixon began to exhibit overseas in the late 1960s. Their work has shown in Chicago, New York, Belfast, London and Paris and fetches impressive prices at auctions. Patsy Dan has ridden his fame to the furthest possible extent, having been elected 'King' of Tory Island.

Many of these artists are still painting (Dixon passed away in 1970, age 93) and their work is frequently shown at the **Dixon Gallery** (☎ 916 5420) by the Tory Hotel. On the mainland, you can always see Tory Island work at the Glebe Gallery (p529), which also shows the work of Derrick Hill.

Entertainment

Club Sóisialta Thórai (Tory Social Club; ☎ 916 5121; West Town) The island's social life revolves around this merry club, which presents regular céilidhs.

People's Bar (☎ 913 5920; West Town) The pub at the Tory Hotel is a relaxed place to enjoy a drop of the black stuff, swap stories and listen to traditional music sessions.

Getting There & Away

Bring waterproofs for the trip – it can be a wild ride. **Donegal Coastal Cruises** (Turasmara Teo; ☎ 953 1340) runs boats to Tory (adult/child/student return €22/11/16.50) from Bunbeg (daily June to September, Monday to Friday October to May) and Magheraroarty (two daily June to September, with an extra trip daily July and August). Magheraroarty is reached by turning off the N56 at the western end of Gortahork near Falcarragh; the road is signposted Coastal Route/Bloody Foreland.

There's also a seasonal service from Portna-Blagh, 2km east of Dunfanaghy (same price, Wednesday July and August).

Call ahead, as weather and tides affect sailings. It's not uncommon for travellers to be stranded on the island in bad weather.

Getting Around

Bike hire is available from **Rothair ar Cíos** (☎ 916 5614; West Town; per day €10).

FALCARRAGH & GORTAHORK

☎ 074 / pop 850

The Irish-speaking Falcarragh (An Fál Carrach) and neighbouring Gortahork (Gort an Choirce) are small workaday settlements. You'll find more tourist amenities up the road in Dunfanaghy, but these towns afford an opportunity to experience life in the Gaeltacht region and there's a good beach nearby.

The 19th-century police barracks now houses **Falcarragh Visitor's Centre** (An tSeán Bheairic; ☎ 918 0888; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun), which has tourist information and a café. The Bank of Ireland at the eastern end of Main St has an ATM and bureau de change, and the post office is at Main St's western end in Falcarragh.

Sights & Activities

It's 4km to the windswept **beach**; follow the signs marked Trá from either end of Main St. The beach is superb for walking, but currents make swimming unsafe.

The grey bulk of **Muckish Mountain** (670m) dominates the coast between Dunfanaghy and the Bloody Foreland. The top has sweeping views to Malin Head and Tory Island. It can be climbed from southeast of Falcarragh by way of the inland road through Muckish Gap.

Sleeping & Eating

Loistin Na Seamroige (Shamrock Lodge; ☎ 913 5057; Main St, Falcarragh; dm/d €15/40; ☹ mid-Jan–mid-Dec)

This independent hostel is upstairs from Falcarragh's best pub. Dorms are very basic but decent. The owner, Margaret, grew up on the premises, and on a good night her pub will seem like the town's living room.

Ostán Loch Altan (☎ 913 5267; www.ostanlochaltan.com; Gortahork; s/d €55/110, mains €14-21; (P)) Resembling an American chain hotel, the rooms here lack personality, but make up for it with comfort. The restaurant (open from April to October) dishes up decent local fare.

Maggie Dan's (☎ 916 5022; www.maggiedans.ie; An Phanc, Gortahork; pizzas €5-10; ☎ 6pm-midnight; (P)) A piano player tinkles the ivory most nights in this excellent pizzeria. It's a little bit of bohemia in the countryside, with occasional theatre performances put on by the Maggie Dans Café Theatre Group. Facing the Market Sq, it's one of the few places open year-round along this stretch of the coast.

Entertainment

Teach Ruairi (☎ 913 5428; Beltany, Gortahork) is a traditional bar about 1km west of Gortahork, signposted off the Gweedore road. There is live acoustic music most nights, and the atmosphere is as authentic as can be.

Getting There & Away

The **Feda O'Donnell** (☎ 954 8114) bus from Crolly stops on Main St, Falcarragh (twice daily, Monday to Saturday, three Friday and Sunday). From Falcarragh it travels on to Letterkenny (€5, one hour) and Galway (€20, 5½ hours).

The **John McGinley** (☎ 913 5201) bus from Anagry to Dublin stops at Gortahork (4.50am, 7.15am & 3.35pm) and Falcarragh (ten minutes after Gortahork; €16, five hours). There are additional trips Friday and Sunday.

DUNFANAGHY & AROUND

☎ 074 / pop 300

This is a beautiful spot. The village is attractive, but more importantly the coast and the surrounding terrain offer a varied range of natural settings. Beautiful beaches, stunning coastal cliffs, mountain trails and even a forest are all within a few kilometres of the town centre. Add to that some fine dining options and one of Ireland's more intriguing hostels, and you've got an unbeatable package.

Information

The Allied Irish Bank, opposite the Carrig Rua Hotel, has no ATM, but you'll find one

in Ramsey's Shop on the waterfront. The **post office** (Main St; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Sat) has a bureau de change.

Sights

HORN HEAD

The towering headland of **Horn Head** (Corrán Binne) has some of Donegal's most spectacular coastal scenery and plenty of birdlife. Its dramatic quartzite cliffs, covered with bog and heather, rear over 180m high, and the view from their tops is heart-pounding.

Go by bike or car from the Falcarragh end of Dunfanaghy. The road circles the headland (best to approach it in a clockwise direction) and offers tremendous views on a fine day: Tory, Inishbofin, Inishdoeey and tiny Inishbeg islands to the west; Sheep Haven Bay and the Rosguill Peninsula to the east; Malin Head to the northeast; and even the coast of Scotland beyond. Take care in bad weather as the route can be perilous.

ARDS FOREST PARK

This forested **park** (☎ 912 1139; admission free), about 5km southeast of Dunfanaghy off the N56, is crisscrossed by marked nature trails varying in length from 2km to 13km. It covers the northern shore of the Ards Peninsula and there are walks to its clean beaches. The woodlands are home to several native species, including ash, birch and sessile oak. Introduced species, both broadleaf and conifer, also proliferate, and you may even encounter foxes, hedgehogs and otters. In 1930 the southern part of the peninsula was taken over by Capuchin monks; the grounds of their friary are open to the public.

DUNFANAGHY WORKHOUSE

This grim building was the local workhouse, built to keep and employ the destitute. Conditions were excessively harsh. Men, women, children and the sick were separated from one other, and their lives were dominated by grueling work. Dunfanaghy's workhouse was soon inundated with starving people as the Famine took grip. Just two years after it opened in 1845, it accommodated some 600 people – double the number originally planned.

The workhouse, west of the centre up past the post office, is now a **heritage centre** (☎ 913 6540; simmonsjanis@hotmail.com; Main St; adult/child €4.50/2; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun mid-Mar-Sep), which tells the history of 'Wee

Hannah's' and her passage through the institution. On some mornings the place is overrun with busloads of school children.

DUNFANAGHY GALLERY

Just up the road from the heritage centre, **Dunfanaghy Gallery** (☎ 913 6224; Main St; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) started life as a fever hospital. The gallery has several rooms, which showcase paintings old and new, historic photos printed from original glass plates, hand-woven tweeds, pottery, jewelry and books.

DOE CASTLE

The early 16th-century **Doe Castle** (Caisléan na dTuath; Creeslough) was the stronghold of the Scottish MacSweeney family until it fell into English hands in the 17th century. The castle is picturesquely sited on a low promontory with water on three sides and a moat hewn out of the rock on the landward side. The best view is from the Carrigart-Creeslough road. The interior isn't open to the public.

The castle is around 16km from Dunfanaghy on the Carrigart road and is clearly signposted.

CREESLOUGH & MUCKISH MOUNTAIN

The distinctive shape of Muckish Mountain (670m) – when it's not shrouded in the cloud and mist that locals call *smir* – is an eye-catching landmark and a good climb. You can get to it via the village of Creeslough, 11km south of Dunfanaghy on the N56, and home to an extraordinary **modern church**, resembling a half-melted sugar cube, whose snowy bulk is intended to mirror the mountain's shape. To get to Muckish, take a right about 2km northwest of the village and continue for about 6km, where a rough track begins the ascent.

BEACHES

Dunfanaghy is blessed with the fabulous **Killyhoey Beach**, a wide, sandy, virtually empty beach that leads right into the heart of the village. **Marble Hill Beach**, about 3km east of town in Port-na-Blagh, is more secluded but very popular, and is usually crammed in summer. Reaching Dunfanaghy's loveliest spot, **Tramore Beach**, requires hiking 20 minutes through the grassy dunes immediately south of the village (see Walking, right).

Activities

WALKING

For an exhilarating hike, take the road from Dunfanaghy towards Horn Head until the bridge. After crossing, go through the gate on your left and stroll along the track until you reach the dunes. A well-beaten path will lead you to the magnificent **Tramore Beach**. Turn left and follow it to the end, where you can find a way up onto a path leading north to **Pollaguill Bay**. Continue to the cairn at the end of the bay and follow the coastline for a stupendous view of the 20m **Marble Arch**, carved out by the sea.

A shorter walk begins at Marble Hill Beach in Port-na-Blagh. Take the path on the left side of the beach past the cottage and work your way about 500m through the brush and along the top of the cliff until you reach **Harry's Hole**, a small crevice in the cliff that is popular with daredevil kids, who dive 10m into the water below.

GOLF

Dunfanaghy Golf Club (☎ 913 6335; www.dunfanaghygolfclub.com) is a stunning waterside 18-hole links course just outside the village on the Port-na-Blagh road.

HORSE RIDING

This is a terrific way of exploring the expansive beaches and surrounding countryside. It can be arranged through **Dunfanaghy Stables** (☎ 910 0980; www.dunfanaghystables.com; Main St; per hr €25).

SEA ANGLING & DIVING

Richard Bowyer (☎ 913 6640; Port-na-Blagh) organises sea-angling trips from the small pier in Port-na-Blagh between Easter and September. Local diving trips are also run by **Diveology** (☎ 086-809 5737; www.diveology.com).

WINDSURFING & KITE-SURFING

Windsurfing lessons and gear hire are available through **Marble Hill Windsurfing** (☎ 913 6231; richardharshaw@eircom.net; the Cottage, Marble Hill, Port-na-Blagh; ☎ daily Jul & Aug, by appointment May, Jun & Sep). Lessons start from €40.

Sleeping

The Mill House (☎ 913 6409; www.corcreggan.com; Corcreggan Mill, Dunfanaghy; camp sites per person €8, dm €20, d €40-55, tr €70; (P)) Part of the busy Corcreggan Mill compound (but owned and operated separately) is the lovingly rebuilt Mill House, just a few paces from the railway

car hostel. It has spotless dormitory-style accommodation (with firm mattresses), along with private rooms for couples and families (one room even has a crib for babies). Campers can pitch tents on a cushy lawn beside an organic vegetable garden. There's lots going on amid several comfortable sitting rooms and halls, with music sessions, massage services and meditation seminars. Throw in a continental/full breakfast for an additional €5/7. It's 4km southwest of Dunfanaghy on the Falcarragh road (N56). Buses stop outside.

our pick **The Carriage Hostel** (☎ 910 0814; www.the-carriage-hostel-corrreggan.com; Correggan Mill, Dunfanaghy; dm €14-17; s €25-35, d €35-42; (P)) If you're after ordinary dormitory accommodation, look elsewhere. The Carriage Hostel, on the site of an historic mill, comprises of a 19th-century mahogany railway carriage parked alongside an old kiln. You have a choice of shacking up in the railway's private cabins – not luxurious, but a cool experience and open year round – or in the rustic old stone Kiln House (open May to September). Be sure to specify your preference. Dorms have just three or four beds. Cosy sitting rooms exude historic Irish comfort.

Rosman House (☎ 913 6273; www.rosmanhouse.ie; Figart, Dunfanaghy; s/d €45/60; (P)) With six flowery, spotless rooms, this B&B is very homey – in fact, a family of six live here. It's surrounded by fields and gardens. You'll find it just down the road from the workhouse.

Arnold's Hotel (☎ 913 6208; www.arnoldshotel.com; Main St; s €92-109, d €124-158; ☎ Apr-Oct; (P)) Open since 1922, Arnold's is a self-assured, 30-room hotel overlooking the waterfront in Sheep Haven Bay. Strewn with deep armchairs and backed by neatly trimmed terrace gardens, it is a relaxing place to stay. However, it also offers all manner of activity holidays (see the website).

Shandon Hotel (☎ 913 6137; www.shandonhotel.com; Sheep Haven Bay, Dunfanaghy; d €250, 2-night min; (P) (E)) Donegal's swankiest modern accommodation is to be had at this hilltop hotel-spa, with a spectacular vantage of Marble Hill Beach. Rooms, all facing the ocean, are spacious and elegantly attired. However, it's the spa that's the class of the outfit. It has a stylishly designed pool, a children's pool, steamrooms and a fully equipped gym, and guests can pamper themselves with a range of health treatments. A good choice for families.

Eating

Muck 'n' Muffins (☎ 913 6780; Main Sq; sandwiches & snacks €3-8; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun, wine bar from 8pm daily Aug, Fri & Sat Sep-Jul) A 19th-century rough-stone grain store now hosts this three-storey café and craft shop by the waterfront. The perfect place for healthful sandwiches, tempting cakes and muffins. During summer it opens some evenings as a wine bar, serving tapas and cheeseboards.

Mill (☎ 913 6985; www.themillrestaurant.com; Figart, Dunfanaghy; 3-course dinner €39; ☎ 7-9pm Tue-Sun Mar-Dec) An exquisite country setting and perfectly composed meals make this friendly spot a treat. It occupies an old flax mill that was for many years the home of Frank Eggington, a locally renowned painter. It's just south of the town on the Falcarragh road. Book ahead. It also offers a high-class B&B (single/double €65/95).

our pick **Cove** (☎ 913 6300; Rockhill, Port-na-Blagh; 4-course dinner €40; ☎ 6-10pm Wed-Mon, 1-4pm Sun) For a fun and stylish evening out, you can do no better. Owners Siobhan Sweeney and Peter Byrne are perfectionists who tend to every detail in the kitchen, the dining room and, most importantly, on your plate. Food is inventive and deceptively simple – you may discover subtle Asian influences. After dinner, retire to the elegant lounge upstairs. It's on the coast road in Port-na-Blagh.

Getting There & Away

Feda O'Donnell (☎ 954 8114) buses from Crolly (€5, 40 minutes) to Galway (€20, five hours) stop in Dunfanaghy square twice daily Monday to Saturday, three Friday and Sunday.

John McGinley (☎ 913 5201) buses to Dublin stop in Dunfanaghy (€16, 4¾ hours). The **Lough Swilly** (☎ 912 2863) Dungloe–Derry bus stops in Dunfanaghy (€7, 1½ hours) twice daily Monday to Friday, three times on Saturday.

EASTERN DONEGAL

LETTERKENNY

☎ 074 / pop 12,000

Donegal's largest town is growing rapidly, and it has the traffic congestion to prove it. Letterkenny (Leitir Ceanainn) is undergoing great change as the local economy picks up, which is obviously great for most of its

inhabitants. Expect even more growth in the years ahead if plans materialize for a new tech-oriented industrial development on Letterkenny's outskirts.

The town is also enjoying a cultural upswing, particularly in the form of its esteemed theatre, and pubs and clubs buzz with students and young professionals. But the town's energy, while novel to its inhabitants, won't necessarily entice visitors. Most passers-through will be on their way to Donegal's more alluring northern corners. Letterkenny is particularly relevant as a gateway to the remote Inishowen Peninsula. Travellers using public transport are likely to stop here for at least a short period.

Orientation

Main St, said to be the longest high street in Ireland, runs from Dunnes Stores at one end to the courthouse at the other, and divides into Upper and Lower Main Sts. At the top of Upper Main St there is a Y-junction: High Rd veers left, while Port Rd goes right to the bus station and the road out to Derry.

Information

Check out www.destinationletterkenny.com for some useful information.

AIB (Main St) Bank branch with ATM.

Bank of Ireland (Main St)

Cyberworld (☎ 912 0440; Lower Main St; per hr €2) Internet café.

Duds 'n' Suds Laundrette (☎ 912 8303; Pearse Rd; load from €8)

Northwest Tourist Office (☎ 912 1160; www.donegaldirect.ie; Neil Blaney Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, noon-3pm Sat & Sun Jun & Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) Run by Fáilte Ireland (Irish Tourist Board), this office is far inferior to the tourist office in Donegal town. It's 1km southeast of town at the end of Port Rd.

Post office (Upper Main St)

Sights & Activities

Dominating the town's hillside profile, the enormous Gothic-style **St Eunan's Cathedral** (1901) thrusts skyward on Sentry Hill Rd (take Church Lane up from Main St) and contains much intricate Celtic carving.

Outside the town, salmon and trout populate the rivers and lakes. Equipment and information is available from **Top Tackle** (☎ 916 7545; 55 Port Rd; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat).

Festivals & Events

The **Letterkenny Festival** (☎ 912 7856) is a four-day international festival of music and dance held at the end of August.

Sleeping

Port Hostel (☎ 912 5315; www.porthostel.ie; Port Rd; camp sites €20, dm €15, d €36-40; (P)) This purpose-built hostel, though modern, has a well-used college dormitory atmosphere, especially in the huge downstairs dorm. It attracts a steady stream of visitors from Northern Ireland, especially on holiday weekends, when all Letterkenny takes on a holiday atmosphere. Then, this hostel can feel like the centre of the action. Its setting is appealing, though: it's up a crooked lane that swerves uphill behind the An Griánán Theatre. Karen, the gregarious owner, is a good source of Donegal info.

Letterkenny Court Hotel (☎ 912 2977; www.letterkennycourthotel.com; Main St; s/d from €49/98; (P)) In a historic building that sports a bright, colourful paint job, this hotel is a polished operation on the main drag. Service, style and location are its selling points. Rooms have a pastel, fresh-as-spring feel, and about a dozen pubs are within a few stagers of the front door.

Cove Hill House (☎ 912 1038; Port Rd; with/without bathroom s €45/35, d €60/50; (P)) This B&B has a comfortable and cheerful feel. It's on the tolerable side of dainty, crammed with homey knickknacks and nuzzled by a beautiful garden. Credit cards are accepted. It's behind the theatre and next to Port Hostel.

Castle Grove (☎ 915 1118; www.castlegrove.com; Ramelton Rd; s/d €105/170; (P)) Ignore Letterkenny's slew of swanky business hotels. The place for a luxurious stay is this grandiose Georgian manor 5km out towards Ramelton. Its enormous estate rolls down unimpeded to the estuary and the impossibly neat lawn seems cut with nail clippers. Award-winning Irish/French food in its restaurant clinches the deal.

Eating

Simple Simon's (☎ 912 2382; St Oliver Plunkett Rd; soups & salads €3-6.50; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) 'Genetically modified' is a dirty term at this passionate natural-products shop and attached café. The on-site bakery produces delightful treats for every special diet imaginable and it stocks a good selection of organic veggies.

Sienna (☎ 912 8535; Upper Main St; mains €5-9; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-5.30pm Sun) Tops

among Letterkenny's stylish contemporary eateries, Sienna is a great spot for ciabatta and *panini* sandwiches and strong coffee during the daytime. At night, the place becomes dimly lit and romantic, and the menu converts to more sophisticated Mediterranean fare. A nice wine selection and live jazz complement the cosmopolitan vibe.

Brewery (☎ 912 7330; Upper Main St; bar food around €8, mains €13-26; ☎ 3-9pm) There's a choice between top-notch bar food downstairs or enormous platters upstairs at this happening pub-restaurant overlooking the small square.

Yellow Pepper (☎ 912 4133; www.yellowpepperrestaurant.com; 36 Lower Main St; dinner mains €16-20; ☎ noon-10pm) A popular place among locals not looking to impress each other. It's family-run, and feels like it – it's cheery and comfortable. Don't be misled, however: this place is often touted as Letterkenny's best restaurant. It stakes its reputation on excellent fish dishes.

Drinking

Cottage Bar (☎ 912 1338; 49 Upper Main St) Watch your head on entering Letterkenny's most appealing pub. From the low ceilings hang all manner of interesting bric-a-brac. Once you're safely seated with a pint, you'll enjoy studying the stuff. If it's nippy out, try to snag a seat by the open fire. Thursday night music sessions sweeten the deal.

Entertainment

Casbah (Main St) Letterkenny's most happening club draws a diverse (though generally young) crowd. The place rocks when live shows are on in its basement.

An Grianán Theatre (☎ 912 0777; www.angrianan.com; Port Rd) An Grianán Theatre is both a community theatre and major arts venue for the northwest, presenting national and international drama, comedy and music. It also has a good café and bar.

Getting There & Away

Letterkenny is a major bus hub for northwestern Ireland. The bus station is by the roundabout at the junction of Ramelton Rd and the Derry road. It will look after luggage for €2.

Bus Éireann (☎ 912 1309) express bus 32 runs to Dublin (€16, four hours) six times daily (four on Sunday) via Omagh (€11, one hour) and Monaghan (€13, 1½ hours). The Derry (€7, 35 minutes) to Galway (€15, 4¾ hours) bus 64 stops at Letterkenny three times daily

(twice on Sunday) before continuing to Donegal (€8, 50 minutes), Bundoran (€12, 1½ hours), Sligo (€12, 2¼ hours) and Galway (€17, 3½ hours) The Derry–Cork express bus 53 connects Letterkenny and Donegal (45 minutes), and Sligo (€12, two hours). It runs three times daily (once on Sunday).

John McGinley (☎ 913 5201) buses run twice daily Sunday to Thursday (three times Friday, once on Saturday) from Annagry to Dublin (€15, 3¾ hours) through Letterkenny and Monaghan.

Lough Swilly (☎ 912 2863) has regular services from Derry (€6.60, one hour) to Dungloe (€8, two hours), via Letterkenny and Dunfanaghy, as well as direct to Letterkenny.

Feda O'Donnell (☎ 954 8114) runs a bus from Crolley (€5, 1½ hours) to Galway (€16, four hours) twice daily via Letterkenny, Donegal, Bundoran and Sligo. Buses stop on the road outside the bus station.

McGeehan Coaches (☎ 954 6150) runs a service from Letterkenny to Glencolumbcille (€10, 2¼ hours) daily except Sunday.

Getting Around

Taxis can be ordered from **A Cabs** (☎ 912 2272). There are taxi stands on Main St opposite the square, and opposite the bus station.

LOUGH GARTAN

☎ 074

The patriarch of Irish monasticism, St Colmille (or Columba), was born in a lovely setting near the glassy Lough Gartan, and some isolated stone structures and crosses remain from his lifetime. The lake is 17km northwest of Letterkenny. It's beautiful driving country.

Colmille Heritage Centre

This **heritage centre** (☎ 913 7306; Gartan; adult/concession €2/1.50; ☎ 10.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-6.30pm Sun, May-Sep), on the shore of Lough Gartan, is Colmille's Hall of Fame, with a lavish display on the production of illuminated manuscripts.

Colmille's mother, on the run from pagans, supposedly haemorrhaged during childbirth and her blood is believed to have changed the colour of the surrounding Gartan Clay from brown to pure white. Ever since, the clay has been regarded as a charm. Ask nicely and the staff may produce some from under the counter.

On the way to the heritage centre you'll also see signs to the stone pile that once was

Colmille's Abbey. Further down the road, on hillside overrun by bleating sheep, is the **saint's birthplace**, marked by a hefty cross. Beside it is an intriguing prehistoric tomb strewn with greening coppers that's popularly known as the Flagstone of Loneliness, on which Columba supposedly slept. The chunky slab was once believed to cure homesickness.

To reach the heritage centre, leave Letterkenny on the R250 road to Glenties and Ardra. After a few kilometres, turn right on the R251 to Churchhill village and follow the signs. Alternatively, from Kilmacrennan on the N56, turn west and look for signs.

Gartan Outdoor Education Centre

Courses including rock climbing, sea kayaking, sailing, surfing, windsurfing, hill climbing and more are offered for both adults and children at this **adventure centre** (☎ 913 7032; www.gartan.com; Gartan, Churchhill). It's located 18km northwest of Letterkenny, and set in its own 35-hectare estate on the shores of Lough Gartan.

Glebe Gallery & House

The English painter Derrick Hill bought historic **Glebe House** (☎ 913 7071; Churchhill; adult/child/concession €2.75/1.25/2; ☎ 11am-6.30pm daily Easter, Sat-Thu only mid-May-Sep; P ☎) in 1953, providing him with a gorgeous base on the Irish mainland, not far from his beloved Tory Island. Before Hill arrived, the house served as a rectory and then a hotel. The mansion is sumptuously decorated, alive with colour, flair and an evident love of all things exotic.

The house's real appeal, however, is Hill's astonishing art collection. In addition to works by Hill and the 'naive' artists of Tory Island (see the boxed text, p523) are works by Picasso, Landseer, Hokusai, Jack B Yeats and Kokoschka. The woodland gardens are also wonderful. A guided tour of the house takes about 45 minutes.

DUNLEWY & AROUND

☎ 074 / pop 700

Blink and you could miss the tiny village of Dunlewy (Dún Lúiche), sitting at the foot of Mt Errigal beside Lough Dunlewy. You won't miss Mt Errigal, however, which towers over the town. It's a modest little gateway to Glenveigh National Park.

Sights & Activities

DUNLEWY LAKESIDE CENTRE

The catch-all **lakeside centre** (Ionad Cois Locha; ☎ 953 1699; www.dunlewycentre.com; Dunlewy; admission house & grounds or boat trip adult/child €5.75/3.75, combined ticket €9.50/6.50; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun Easter-Oct) offers something for everybody, especially kids. It includes the thatched cottage of Manus Ferry, a local weaver who earned world renown for his tweeds (he died in 1975). It's also an activity centre with a petting zoo, lakeside walks, pony trekking and, best of all, excellent boat trips on the lake with a storyteller who vividly brings to life local history, geology and ghoulish folklore. In summer there are traditional music concerts. There's also a good café with a turf fire and craft shop. The centre is currently expanding, and will soon include a theatre and concert venue.

MT ERRIGAL & THE POISONED GLEN

Scree-scarred Mt Errigal (752m) is one of Ireland's highest peaks. It looms over Dunlewy, seemingly daring walkers to attempt the tough but beautiful climb to its conical peak. Anyone keen to take on the challenge should pay close attention to the weather. It's a dangerous climb on misty or wet days, when the mountain is shrouded in cloud and visibility is minimal.

There are two paths to the summit: the easier route, which covers 5km and takes around two hours; and the more difficult 3.3km walk along the northwestern ridge, which involves scrambling over scree for about 2½ hours. Details of both routes are available at the Dunlewy Lakeside Centre.

Legend has it that the stunning ice-carved rock-face of the Poisoned Glen got its sinister name when the ancient one-eyed giant king of Tory, Balor, was killed here by his exiled grandson, Lughaidh, whereupon the poison from his eye split the rock and poisoned the glen. The less interesting truth, however, lies in a cartographic gaffe. Locals were inspired to name it An Gleann Neamhe (the Heavenly Glen), but when an English cartographer mapped the area, he carelessly marked it An Gleann Neimhe – the Poisoned Glen.

The R251 has several viewpoints overlooking the glen. It's possible to walk through it, although the ground is rough and boggy. From the lakeside centre a return walk along the glen is 12km and takes two to three

hours. Just watch out for the green lady – the resident ghost!

Sleeping

Errigal Hostel (☎ 953 1180; www.errigalhostel.com; Dunlewy; dm/d €18/50; (P)) Just 2km north of Dunlewy at the base of Mt Errigal, this purpose-built, modern An Óige hostel was under construction at the time of research. It is due to open by the time you read this. Ring ahead to reserve a bed.

Radharc an Ghleanna (☎ 953 1835; radharcang@hotmail.com; Moneymore, Dunlewy; s/d €35/60; (P)) The four comfy rooms at this country bungalow are as clean as laboratories, while the views over the lough and to the Poisoned Glen are eye-popping. It's down a small lane a short drive east of the hostel.

GLENVEAGH NATIONAL PARK

Lakes cluster like dew in the mountainous valley of **Glenveagh National Park** (Pairc Náisiúnta Ghleann Bheatha; glenveaghnationalpark@duchas.ie; admission free; ☎ 10am–6pm Feb–Nov, last admission 5pm), one of the most beautiful spots in Ireland. Alternating between great knuckles of rock, green-gold swathes of bog and scatterings of oak and birch forest, the 16,500-sq-km protected area makes wonderful walking country. It is also home to a variety of wildlife, including the golden eagle, which was hunted to extinction here in the 19th century but was reintroduced in 2000.

Yet such serenity came at a heavy price. The land was once farmed by 244 tenants, who were forcibly evicted by landowner John George Adair in the winter of 1861 following what he called a ‘conspiracy’, but really because their presence obstructed his vision for the valley.

Adair put the final touches on his paradise (1870–73) by building the spectacular lakeside Glenveagh Castle, while his wife, Adelia, introduced two things that define the national park's appearance: the herd of red deer and the rhododendrons. Green fingers and a love of animals notwithstanding, the Adair name still meets with dripping scorn. However, a rather poetic revenge was enacted when Adair's body was to be buried in 1885. As the funeral cart rolled up to his grave, it's said they found a donkey already occupying his would-be home for eternity.

If anything, things got even more surreal after Adair's death. The castle was briefly oc-

cupied by the IRA in 1922. Then in 1929 the property was acquired by Kingsley Porter, professor of art at Harvard University, who mysteriously disappeared in 1933 (presumed drowned, but rumoured to have been spotted in Paris afterwards). Six years later the estate was bought by his former student, Henry McIlhenny, once described by Andy Warhol as ‘the only person in Philadelphia with glamour’. In 1975 McIlhenny sold the whole kit and caboodle to the Irish government and it is now administered by Dúchas, the Heritage Service.

The park features nature trails along lakes, through woods and blanket bog, as well as a viewing point that's a short walk behind the castle.

The **Glenveagh Visitor Centre** (☎ 074-913 7090; Churchill) has a 20-minute audiovisual display on the ecology of the park and the infamous Adair. The restaurant serves hot food and snacks, and the reception sells the necessary midge repellent, as vital in summer as walking boots and waterproofs are in winter. Camping is not allowed.

Glenveagh Castle

This delightfully showy **castle** (adult/child €3/1.50; ☎ 10am–6pm Easter–Oct) was modelled in miniature on Scotland's Balmoral Castle. Henry McIlhenny made it a characterful home with liberal reminders of his passion for hunting deer. In fact you'll be hard pressed to find a single room without a representation – or taxidermied remains – of a stag.

An entertaining guided tour takes in a series of flamboyantly decorated rooms that look as if McIlhenny just left them. The most eye-catching, including the tartan- and-antler-covered music room and the pink candy-striped room demanded by Greta Garbo whenever she stayed here, are in the round tower. The drawing room has a splendid 300-year-old fireplace bought by McIlhenny from the Ards estate near Dunfanaghy.

The exotic gardens are similarly spectacular. They've been nurtured for decades and boast a host of terraces, an Italian garden, a walled kitchen garden, and the Belgian Walk, built by Belgian soldiers who stayed here during WWI. Their cultured charm is in marked contrast to the wildly beautiful landscape that enfolds the area.

The last guided tours of the castle leave about 45 minutes before closing time. **Mini-**

buses (adult/child return €2/1) run from the visitor centre to the castle roughly every 15 minutes. The last one returns from the castle at 6pm.

DOON WELL & ROCK OF DOON

In centuries past wells were commonly believed to cure afflictions and judging by the shimmering rosaries, multicoloured rags and trinkets bejewelling nearby bushes, many still believe this to be true of **Doon Well** (Tobar an Duin). Despite its decoration, the well itself looks more like a kitchen cupboard than a wishing well.

A sign points to the overgrown **Rock of Doon** (Carrraig an Duin), which has some far-reaching views. This is where the O'Donnell kings were crowned – presumably so they could get a squiz at what they were inheriting.

Take the signposted turn-off from the N56 just north of Kilmacrennan. The well and rock are about 1.5km north of the village.

LIFFORD

☎ 074 / pop 1400

Nudging the border by Strabane in County Tyrone, the dwindling town of Lifford (Leifear) was formerly the judicial capital of Donegal. While its powerful past is long gone, its spirit lives on in the daunting 18th-century **Old Courthouse** (☎ 914 1733; www.liffordoldcourthouse.com; adult/concession €5/3; ☎ 10am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, 12.30–4.30pm Sun; (P)). The courthouse is home to an excellent **heritage centre** with creepily lifelike re-creations that use actors' faces projected onto waxworks. In this manner, Manus O'Donnell tells the story of Donegal's Gaelic chieftains and several bona-fide trials are re-enacted in the austere courtroom (including that of Napper Tandy, John 'half-hanged' McNaughten and the Lord Leitrim murder). A guard will take you down to the prison cells, accompanied by sounds of banging doors and ominous footsteps, to be locked up for sheep-stealing or the like.

Getting There & Away

Bus Éireann's (☎ 912 1309) express service 32 from Dublin (€16, 3¼ hours) to Letterkenny (€6.50, 20 minutes) stops in Lifford up to five times daily. Local buses connect Lifford with Letterkenny, Ballybofey and Strabane.

NORTHEASTERN DONEGAL

ROSGUILL PENINSULA

☎ 074

The best way to explore Rosguill's rugged splendour is by driving, cycling or even walking the 15km Atlantic Dr, signposted to your left as you come into the sprawling village of **Carrigart** (Carrraig Airt) from the south. There are plenty of pubs in the village to cure your thirst and a nice, secluded beach at **Trá na Rossan**. On no account should you swim in Boveeghter or Mulroy Bay – both are unsafe. Perhaps this is why the summer crowds don't linger here, preferring instead to travel 4km northward to **Downings**, where the beach is spectacular but the village has a slightly abused feel to it.

Activities

The superb links of **Rosapenna Golf Club** (☎ 915 5301; www.rosapennagolflinks.ie; Downings; green fees €50–75), designed by St Andrew's Old Tom Morris in 1891 and remodelled by Harry Vardon in 1906, is one of the outstanding seaside courses in Ireland. The scenery is spectacular as is the layout, which can challenge even the lowest handicapper.

Sleeping

Casey's Caravan Park (☎ 915 5301; rosapenna@eircom.net; Downings; camp sites €10–20; ☎ Apr–Sep) You won't get closer to Downing's Blue Flag beach than at this extremely popular camp site right beside the dunes. The village is just around the corner. Book ahead.

Trá na Rosann Hostel (☎ 915 5374; www.anoige.ie; Downings; dm €15; ☎ Apr–Oct) Knockout views and a terrific atmosphere are the biggest draws at this chalet-like former hunting lodge, now an An Óige hostel. The one drawback is that it's 6km east of Downings and you'll have to hitch if you don't have your own wheels.

Beach Hotel (Óstán na Trá; ☎ 915 5303; beachhoteldonegal@eircom.net; Downings; s/d €45/80; ☎ Apr–Oct; (P)) For more of a personal touch, come to this family-run hotel, which has 20 pristine rooms close to the beach. Ask for one of the new rooms, most of which have sea views.

Downings Bay Hotel (☎ 915 5586; www.downingsbayhotel.com; Downings; s/d from €65/100; (P) (S)) This classic beach resort hotel has been thoroughly updated, offering contemporary luxury just a few steps from the strand. Rooms are spacious, comfortable and immaculate. It's very reasonably priced for what it offers, and even better deals can be had in winter.

Eating

Old Glen Bar & Restaurant (☎ 915 5130; Glen, Carrigart, mains €14-23; ☎ 6-11pm) This wonderful pub is entirely authentic and serves a sensational pint. At the back of the pub, though, modernity rules with a contemporary restaurant serving up a fabulous menu of fish, seafood and meat. The tiny hamlet of Glen is signposted off the R245 between Creeslough and Carrigart, about 6km south of the latter.

Haven Restaurant (☎ 915 5586; bar food €10-20, restaurant mains €16-25; ☎ 6.30-9.30pm) In the Downings Bay Hotel, this restaurant deals up above-average meals. Bar food can be ordered in JC's Bar.

Getting There & Around

A local bus connects Carrigart and Downings, but it's of limited use for visitors. You really need your own transport for this area.

FANAD PENINSULA

The second-most northern point in Donegal, Fanad Head thrusts out into the Atlantic to the west of Rosguill. The peninsula curls around the watery expanses of Mulroy Bay to the west, and Lough Swilly to the east, the latter trimmed by high cliffs and sandy beaches. Most travellers stick to the peninsula's eastern flank, visiting the beautiful beach and excellent golf course at Portsalon, and the quiet heritage towns of Ramelton and Rathmullan. Accommodation is relatively limited, so book ahead in summer.

Portsalon & Fanad Head

Once named the second most beautiful beach in the world by British newspaper the *Observer*, the tawny-coloured Blue Flag beach in Ballymastrock Bay, which is safe for swimming, is the principle draw of tiny Portsalon (Port an tSalainn). For golfers, however, the main attraction is the marvellously scenic **Portsalon Golf Club** (☎ 915 9459; Portsalon).

Knockalla Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 074-915 9108; Portsalon; camp sites €14-20; ☎ mid-Mar–mid-Sep) is a short walk from the beach on the lower slopes of Knockalla Mountain and fills up quickly in summer. It has a kitchen, a laundry, a shop, a games room and an outdoor play area.

It's another 8km to the lighthouse on the rocky tip of Fanad Head, the best part of which is the scenic drive there. Driving the rollercoaster road that hugs the cliffs back to Rathmullan, you'll pass the early 19th-century **Knockalla Fort**, built to warn off any approaching French ships.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The **Lough Swilly** (☎ 074-912 2863) bus leaves Letterkenny twice daily for Milford (€3.50, one hour) and continues from Milford to Portsalon (€9, 35 minutes, morning bus only).

Rathmullan

☎ 074 / pop 520

The refined little port of Rathmullan (Ráth Maoláin) has a tranquillity about it that belies the momentous events that took place here from the 16th to 18th centuries. In 1587, Hugh O'Donnell, the 15-year-old heir to the powerful O'Donnell clan, was tricked into boarding a ship here and taken to Dublin as a prisoner. He escaped four years later on Christmas Eve and, after unsuccessful attempts at revenge, died in Spain, aged only 30. In 1607, despairing of fighting the English, Hugh O'Neill, the earl of Tyrone, and Rory O'Donnell, the earl of Tyrconnel, boarded a ship in Rathmullan harbour and left Ireland for good. This decisive act, known as the Flight of the Earls, marked the effective end of Gaelic Ireland and the rule of Irish chieftains. Large-scale confiscation of their estates took place, preparing for the Plantation of Ulster with settlers from Britain. Also in Rathmullan, Wolfe Tone, leader of the 1798 Rising, was captured.

SIGHTS

The picturesque Carmelite **Rathmullan Friary** is so covered in vines that it would probably crumble should they be cleared away. It was founded around 1508 by the MacSweeneys, and was still used in 1595 when English commander, George Bingham, raided the place and took off with the communion plate and priestly vestments. Bishop Knox then reno-

vated the friary in 1618 in order to use it as his own residence.

SLEEPING & EATING

Dinner at the hotels costs from €40 to €45; there are several pubs in town serving bar food.

Knoll (☎ 915 8241; Main St; s/d €35/70; (P)) This genteel black-and-white house was built to house the commander of the North Atlantic Fleet in 1780, and has since been reincarnated as everything from a police station to a post office. Happily for travellers, it now houses a cosy three-room B&B, fronted by beautifully maintained gardens. It's just half a block from the sea.

Rathmullan House (☎ 915 8188; www.rathmullanhouse.com; s/d €115/230; (P) (S)) Just north of town, on the shores of Lough Swilly, this luxurious country house boasts an indoor heated swimming pool, a sauna and tennis courts, and is set in a beautifully wooded garden by the water. Its restaurant, the Weeping Elm, is highly regarded for its innovative use of organic ingredients.

Fort Royal (☎ 915 8100; www.fortroyalhotel.com; s/d €130/190; ☎ Apr-Oct; (P)) This more down-to-earth but equally exclusive waterside hotel has 15 old-fashioned rooms, a wonderful restaurant and rambling gardens that feel as old as the house, built in 1805. Private cottages, oozing traditional rural simplicity, rent for €500-700 per week. The grounds extend to a private beach, and also include a tennis court and pitch-and-putt course.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The **Lough Swilly** (☎ 912 2863) bus from Letterkenny arrives in Rathmullan (€5, 45 minutes, twice daily) en route to Milford and Portsalon (morning bus only).

Ramelton

☎ 074 / pop 1050

The sweet little town of Ramelton (Ráth Mealtainn, also sometimes called Rathmelton) is the first community you come to if you're approaching the peninsula from the east. It's a picture-perfect spot, with rows of handsome Georgian houses and rough-walled stone warehouses following the curve of the River Lennon. If the doctor ordered you to steer clear of any form of excitement, you had probably better drop your bags here for a few days.

The **National Irish Bank** (the Mall), by the River Lennon, has a bureau de change but no ATM. The **post office** (Castle St) is off the Mall.

SIGHTS

Housed in a restored warehouse on the riverfront, the **Donegal Ancestry Family Research Centre & Heritage Centre** (☎ 915 1266; www.donegalancestry.com; the Quay; adult/child €4/2; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Fri) has an exhibition on the history of Ramelton, and also does genealogical research. It costs €15 for an initial consultation.

The ruined **Tullyaughnish Church**, on the hill, is also worth a visit because of the Romanesque carvings in the eastern wall, which were taken from a far older church on nearby Aghinish Island, on the River Lennon. Coming from Letterkenny turn right at the river and follow it round for about 400m.

SLEEPING & EATING

Lennon Lodge (☎ 915 1227; Market Sq; s/d €30/60; (P)) This is a family-run B&B upstairs from a pub. It has basic but clean rooms, a laundry, a large common room and TVs in every room. The pub has live music Friday to Sunday nights, and regular darts competitions.

Crammond House (☎ 915 1055; crammondhouse@ramelton.net; Market Sq; s/d €35/64; ☎ Apr-Oct; (P)) An old-fashioned welcome is found at this sedate Georgian town house at the northern end of Ramelton. Rooms are large and elegantly furnished.

Tanyard (☎ 915 1029; www.thetanyard.com; Bridgend, Ramelton; apt per week €255-470; (P)) If your doctor really did advise you spend a few days in a quiet place like Ramelton, you couldn't do much better than the apartments in this converted Georgian warehouse. It's right on the river, with the water lapping the building's stone back side, and a wee walk from the heart of the town. Apartments sleep up to four people, have kitchens and are rather stylish.

Mirabeau Steak House (☎ 915 1138; the Mall; mains €9-18; ☎ 6-10pm) This dimly lit restaurant claims the old living room of a Georgian house on the riverfront. The cuisine is French with an emphasis on steak and seafood, and portions are colossal.

Bridge Bar (☎ 915 1119; Bridgend; mains €13-25; ☎ 6-11pm) Just over the bridge, about 100m from downtown, the Bridge Bar is one of those lovely old country pubs you came to Ireland for. It has a cosy 1st-floor

restaurant with good seafood dishes, such as roasted swordfish.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Lough Swilly (☎ 912 2863) buses connect Rathmelton with Letterkenny (€2.85, 30 minutes, three times daily from Monday to Saturday).

INISHOWEN PENINSULA

The sprawling Inishowen (Inis Eoghain) Peninsula, with Lough Foyle to the east and Lough Swilly to the west, reaches just far enough out into the Atlantic to qualify as Ireland's northernmost point: Malin Head. It is remote, rugged, desolate and sparsely populated, making it a special and quiet sort of place. Ancient sites and ruined castles abound,

as do traditional thatched cottages that aren't yet being used as storage sheds.

The towns in the next section are part of a route that follows the road west of Derry up the coast of Lough Foyle to Moville and then northwest to Malin Head, before heading down the western side to Bunrana. If you're coming from Donegal, the peninsula can be approached from the southwest by turning off for Bunrana on the N13 road from Letterkenny to Derry.

Moville & Around

☎ 074 / pop 1470

Inishowen's best-looking town is Moville (Bun an Phobail), which essentially amounts to a couple of roads meeting beside a harbour.

Nearly every building is old and well kept up in a way that's more proud than prissy. It can be rather sleepy, but on holiday weekends tourists from Northern Ireland flood the town. Moville was a busy port during the 19th and early 20th centuries, when thousands of emigrants set sail for America from here. The **coastal walkway** from Moville to Greencastle takes in the stretch of coast where the steamers used to moor, and also affords some rewarding **bird-watching** opportunities. There's **fishing** off the pier for mackerel, mullet and coalfish.

Main St has several banks with ATMs and the post office.

SIGHTS

By the gate of the Cooley gravehouse is an unusual 3m-high **cross**. Note the ringhole in its head – through it, the hands of negotiating parties are said to have clasped to seal an agreement. Whether they were uncommonly tall or stood on boxes remains a mystery. In the graveyard is the **Skull House**, which is associated with St Finian, the monk who accused Colmcille of plagiarising one of his manuscripts in the 6th century. He lived in a monastery here that was founded by St Patrick and survived into the 12th century.

Approaching Moville from the south, look out for a turning on the left that has a sign on the corner for the Cooley Pitch & Putt. If

you pass a church, you've gone too far. The graveyard is just over 1km up this road on the right.

FESTIVALS

The cross-border **Foyle Oyster Festival** (☎ 938 2753; Main St) sees much scoffing of seafood in late September.

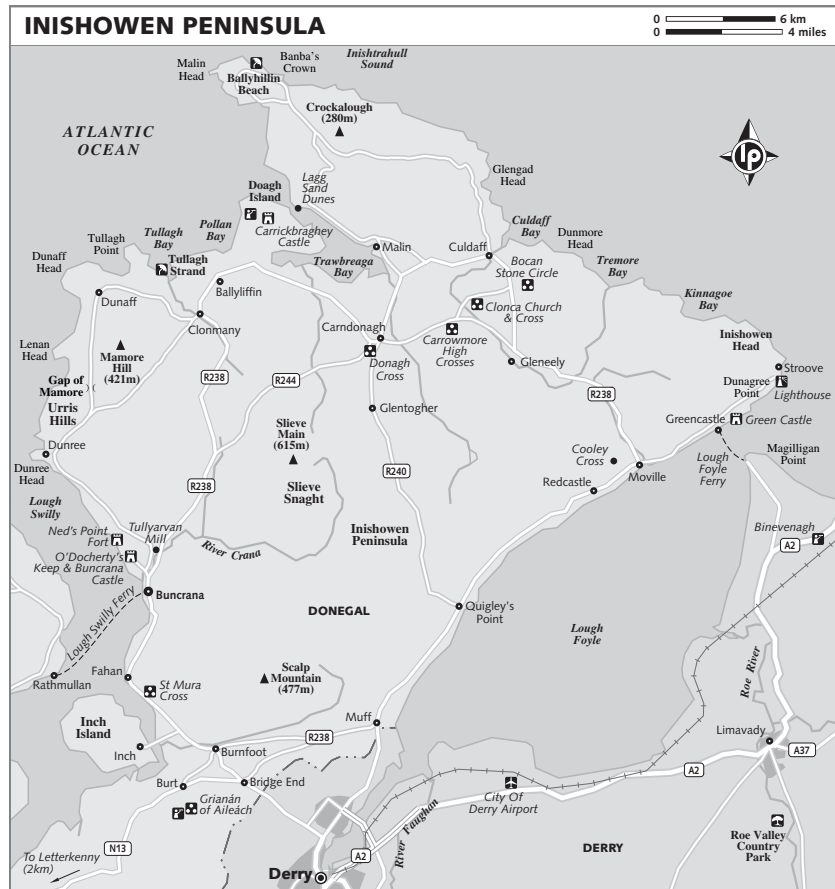
SLEEPING & EATING

Moville Holiday Hostel (☎ 938 2378; Malin Rd; dm €15; Ⓟ) A private, unpaved road curves off the main highway heading west of town, leading into a grove of trees and this secluded hostel. It's in an old stone house beside a bubbling brook. Very peaceful and near enough the main drag to walk.

Barron's Café (☎ 938 2472; Lower Main St; s/d €28/56) The café isn't much to write home about (though it may be convenient), but the guestrooms upstairs are happy little dens and very tidy. It's run by a friendly older couple.

Naomh Mhuire (☎ 938 2091; catherinemcgoarty@eircom.net; Main St; with/without bathroom s €40/35, d €70/60; ☎ Mar-Sep) This pleasant town house sits on a street corner in the heart of the town. It has six plain but well-kept rooms, most of which use a shared bathroom.

Carlton Redcastle Hotel (☎ 938 5555; www.carltonredcastlehotel.com; d €200, mains €14-27; Ⓟ) The peninsula's flashiest luxury resort is along the lough, just north of Moville. It's rooms are indeed



TWITCHING ON INISHOWEN

Because it is surrounded by vast estuarine areas and pokes into the sea at Ireland's northernmost point, the Inishowen Peninsula naturally attracts a lot of birdlife. The variety of species is tremendous, with well over 200 species passing through or residing permanently on the peninsula. Inishowen regularly receives well-travelled visitors from Iceland, Greenland and North America. Thanks to irregularities in the Atlantic winds, rare and exotic species blow in from time to time.

Along the peninsula's Lough Foyle side, particularly north of Moville, a twitcher may hope to spot swans and geese in great numbers, along with cormorants diving into the lough for fish. The gannet, with its 1.8m wingspan, is among Ireland's most impressive birds. Coal tits, herons and puffins all appear along the shore here. Turning to the land, you are likely to see magpies, starlings, wrens, plovers and turtledoves. Sparrow-hawks and peregrine falcons sometimes hover above, in search of prey.

Many of these same species, including the gannet, also appear on Malin Head, the island's northern tip. Here, many birds nest on the cliffs, including guillemots, fulmars and shags. In autumn, manx shearwaters stop on Malin Head, before continuing their long migration to South America.

Inch Island, sitting off the peninsula's Lough Swilly shore, is a protected bird sanctuary that attracts whooper swans by the dozen.

A helpful resource for birders is *Ireland's Birds*, by Eric Demsey and Michael O'Clery. Online, visit www.birdsireland.com.

comfortable and classy, and the resort's Thalasso Spa is a major draw. If you don't require so much pampering, but consider yourself a gastronome, drop in for a meal at the lauded Waters Edge Restaurant, overlooking the estuary. It's in an exquisite setting and the menu fully exploits the local bounty.

DRINKING

There are a couple of friendly pubs along the Malin Rd, less than a block from the Market Sq. **Rawdon's** (☎ 938 2225; Malin Rd) features live music on Friday night. Even better is **Rosato's** (☎ 938 2247; Malin Rd), a smart old joint that also does good Italian food along with bar standards. It has live music on summer weekends.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Lough Swilly (☎ 912 2863) runs four buses daily Monday to Saturday to Moville (€7, 45 minutes) from Derry.

Greencastle

☎ 074 / pop 570

Seals can be spotted bobbing their smooth heads hopefully in the busy little fishing port of Greencastle (An Caisleán Nua), north of Moville. The town gets its name from the castle built in 1305 by Richard de Burgo, known as the Red Earl of Ulster because of his florid complexion. The Green Castle was a supply base for English armies in Scotland, and for this reason was attacked by Robert Bruce in the 1320s. The castle's vine-netted hulk survives.

A disarmingly eccentric collection of artefacts can be found at the **Inishowen Maritime Museum and Planetarium** (☎ 938 1363; www.inishowenmaritime.com; museum adult/child €5/3, planetarium €10/6; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-6pm Sun Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct-Mar), in a former coastguard station next to the harbour. The most fascinating exhibits are from the sunken wrecks of Lough Foyle, including, in pride of place, a pair of perfectly preserved military-issue boxer shorts salvaged by marine archaeologists from a ditched WWII bomber. The demise of the Spanish Armada and the departure from these waters of Irish immigrants are two of the museums more compelling themes. Take caution if visiting on a day when local children are testing their home-made rockets out front.

The simple, harbour-side **Kealy's Seafood Bar** (☎ 938 1010; mains €11-27; ☎ 12.30-3pm & 7-10pm

Jun & Aug, Thu-Sun only Sep-May) is decorated with awards for its seafood. If the catch came any fresher you'd have to fight the seals for it.

Five **Lough Swilly** (☎ 912 2863) buses travel daily, Monday to Saturday, between Derry and Shrove, passing through Greencastle (€7.50, one hour).

Lough Foyle Ferry (☎ 938 1901; www.loughfoyleferry.com) also has a car-ferry service to Magilligan roughly every 25 minutes from outside the museum. Single fares per car/motorbike/adult/child cost €9/4.50/2/1, and the crossing takes just 15 minutes. It runs every 15 minutes from 7.20am Monday to Saturday and 9am Sunday year-round. The last ferry is at 9.50pm, April to September, and 7.50pm, October to March.

Inishowen Head

A right turn outside Greencastle leads to Stroove; a sign indicating Inishowen Head is 1km along this road. It's possible to drive or cycle part of the way, but it's also an easy walk to the headland, from where you can see (on a clear day) the Antrim coast as far as the Giant's Causeway. A more demanding walk continues to the sandy beach of **Kinnagoe Bay**.

Culdaff & Around

☎ 074 / pop 180

This is a lovely spot, where sheep vastly outnumber the people. The sleepy, secluded, resort village of Culdaff (Cúil Dabhcha) is surrounded by several ancient sites, but the main draw is a country inn with an impressive live-music venue. The village is on the main Moville-Carndonagh road (R238).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Sheep now wander the remains of the **Clonca church and cross**. Inside, an intricately carved tombstone sporting a sword and hurling-stick motif was erected by one Magnus MacOrristin. The carved lintel over the door is thought to come from an earlier church. Outside, the remains of the cross show the miracle of the loaves and fishes on the eastern face and geometric designs on the sides.

Look for the turn-off to Culdaff, on the right if coming from Moville, on the left after about 6km if coming from Carndonagh. The Clonca church and cross are 1.5km on the right behind some farm buildings. A necklace of around 30 prehistoric stones, called the **Bocan Stone Circle**, embroiders a farmer's

field east of Clonca Church. From Clonca, continue along the road until you reach a T-junction with a modern church facing you. Turn right here and after about 500m turn left (no sign). The Bocan Stone Circle is inside the first heather-covered field on the left.

The plain stumpy-armed **Carrowmore High Crosses** are all that remain of an ancient monastic site straddling a small lane. One is basically a decorated slab showing Christ and an angel, while the other is a taller, unadorned cross.

From Bocan Stone Circle and Clonca Church, retrace the route back to the main Carndonagh-Moville road and turn left, then almost immediately right.

Culdaff has a beach that's good for **swimming** and **windsurfing** and, from Bunagee Pier, **sea angling** and **diving** are popular.

SLEEPING & EATING

McGrory's of Culdaff (☎ 937 9104; www.mcgrorys.ie; Culdaff; s/d €70/120, mains €9-23; ☎ bar food 12.30-8pm, restaurant 6.30-9 Tue-Sat, 1-3pm & 6-8.30pm Sun; ☎) This is a good place to count sheep. It has 17 spiffy rooms, all smartly decorated with a modern eye. Before sleeping, however, head downstairs to catch live music in Mac's Backroom, which books international singer-songwriters. An old stone pub and restaurant serves traditional Irish food.

Malin Head

☎ 074

If you've already seen Ireland's southernmost point and its westernmost point, you'll still be impressed when you lay eyes on Malin Head (Cionn Mhálanna), the island's northern extent. The head's rocky, weather-battered slopes feel like they're being dragged unwillingly into the sea. It's great for wandering on foot, absorbing the stark natural setting and pondering deep subjects as the wind tries to blow the clothes off your back. There are a smattering of farm houses and few services, so pack what you'll be needing.

On the northernmost tip, called **Banba's Crown** (Fíorcheann Éireann), stands a cumbersome cliff-top tower that was built in 1805 by the British admiralty and later used as a Lloyds signal station. Around it are unattractive concrete huts that were used by the Irish army in WWII as lookout posts. To the west from the fort-side car park, a path leads to **Hell's Hole**, a chasm where the incoming waters crash against the rocky formations.

To the east a longer headland walk leads to the **Wee House of Malin**, a hermit's cave in the cliff face.

Several endangered bird species thrive here. This is one of the few places in Ireland where you can still hear the call of the endangered corncrake in summer. Other birds to look out for are choughs, snow bunting and puffins.

The Plantation village of **Malin** (Málainn), on Trawbreaga Bay, 14km south of Malin Head, has a pretty movie-set quality. Walkers can head out from the tidy village green on a circular route that takes in **Knockamany Bens**, a local hill with terrific views, as well as **Lagg Presbyterian Church** (3km northwest from Malin), the oldest church still in use on the peninsula. The massive sand dunes at Five Fingers Strand, another 1km beyond the church, are a dog's dream.

SLEEPING & EATING

Sandrock Holiday Hostel (☎ 937 0289; sandrockhostel@eircom.net; Port Ronan Pier, Malin Head; dm €10-12; ☎) Visitors are welcomed like family at this perennially popular IHH hostel on the western side of the headland. It's situated in a rocky bay, where seafood can sometimes be bought straight off the boats. Sandrock has 20 remarkably cosy beds, laundry facilities, pick-up and bike hire (€9 per day).

Malin Head Hostel (☎ 937 0309; www.malinheadhostel.com; Malin Head; dm/d €13/36; ☎ Jul-Sep; ☎) The picture of orderliness, this friendly 20-bed IHH hostel has free hot showers and an organic garden where you can buy fruit and vegetables. There's also aromatherapy and reflexology treatments (per reflexology/full-body massage €35/45). There's a shop nearby and local buses stop at the hostel.

Malin Hotel (☎ 937 0606; info@malinhotel.ie; Malin; s/d from €65/110, mains €10-23; ☎ bar food 12.30-3pm, restaurant 6-10pm) From the street you'll first spot the old pub, but look beyond it and you'll also see a modern, boxlike hotel piled up to the rear. It has lavishly decorated rooms, and the pub-restaurant serves up good Irish food. There's entertainment at the weekend.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The best way to approach Malin Head is by the R238/242 from Carndonagh, rather than up the eastern side from Culdaff. **Lough Swilly** (☎ 912 2863) operates a bus that runs on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 11am

between Derry and Malin Head via Carn-donagh (€4, 30 minutes); on the same days a bus leaves Carndonagh at 3pm for Malin Head. There are three buses from Derry to Malin Head on Saturday.

Carndonagh

☎ 074 / pop 1680

Carndonagh (Cardomnach), surrounded by hills on three sides, is a busy commercial centre serving the local farming community. It's not a choice locale in these parts, but convenient for gathering information and provisions.

The helpful, locally run **Inishowen tourism office** (☎ 937 4933; www.visitinishowen.com; Chapel St; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri Sep-May, 9.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat Jun & Aug), southwest of the diamond, also sells fishing licences for all of Donegal. There are three banks on the diamond and AIB has an ATM; the post office is in the shopping centre halfway down Bridge St towards the Donagh Cross.

SIGHTS

Once an important ecclesiastical centre, Carndonagh has several early Christian stone monuments. Not least, the delightful 7th-century **Donagh Cross** stands under a shelter by an Anglican church at the Ballyliffin end of town. It's carved with a darling short-bodied, big-eyed figure of Jesus, smiling impishly. Flanking the cross are two small pillars, one showing a man, possibly Goliath, with a sword and shield, the other, David and his harp. In the graveyard there's a pillar with a carved marigold on a stem and nearby a crucifixion scene.

SLEEPING & EATING

If you're off to Malin Head for the day or going on to the camping ground at Clonmany, stock up with provisions at the Costcutter supermarket in the large shopping centre on Bridge St.

Ashdale House (☎ 937 4017; www.ashdalehouse.net; s/d €47/64; ☎ Mar-Nov; P) This large family home, 1km out of town on the road towards Malin, is Carndonagh's best B&B. It's a cheerful modern house that modestly evokes an Irish traditional manor.

Arch Inn (☎ 937 3209; the Diamond; snacks around €5) In the main square, the Arch does good soup and sandwiches by day and hosts a traditional music session on Sunday evening.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

A **Lough Swilly** (☎ 912 2863) bus leaves Buncrana for Carndonagh (€5.30, 45 minutes) three times daily (except Tuesday and Wednesday, when it departs once each day) and Sunday (no service). On weekdays they return from Carndonagh three times daily. Lough Swilly also runs a bus between Derry (€8, 55 minutes) and Malin Head via Carndonagh daily Monday, Wednesday and Friday and three times Saturday.

Ballyliffin & Clonmany

☎ 074 / pop 700

For such a diminutive and remote seaside resort, easygoing Ballyliffin (Baile Lifin) does a roaring summer trade. It has a handful of good hotels, which somehow soak up an army of Northern Irish holidaymakers, who come to play golf on the two championship 18-hole courses, and enjoy the local beaches.

Both villages have post offices but no banks.

SIGHTS

About 1km north of Ballyliffin is the lovely, sandy expanse of **Pollan Strand**, but the crashing breakers make it unsafe for swimming. A walk along the dunes to the north of this beach brings you to **Doagh Island** (now part of the mainland), where the matchbox ruin of 16th-century **Carrickbraghey Castle** (Carraic Brach-aide) is continually battered by the ocean.

Also on the island is the enthusiastically thrown-together **Doagh Famine Village** (☎ 937 8078; www.doaghfaminevillage.com; Doagh Island; adult/child €6/4; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep) in a reconstructed village of thatched cottages. It runs a terrific tour packed with entertaining tidbits about a disappearing way of life, and takes a refreshing approach to the Famine by making insightful comparisons with famine-stricken countries today. Tea and scones are included in the admission fee. Call ahead to book the tour.

The other beach is at **Tullagh Strand**. It's great for an exhilarating walk and, although swimming is possible, the current can be strong and it isn't recommended when the tide is going out. There are walks to **Butler's Glen** and **Dunaff Head** from Clonmany.

ACTIVITIES

With two championship courses, **Ballyliffin Golf Club** (☎ 937 6119; www.ballyliffingolfclub.com; Ballyliffin; green fees weekday/weekend Old Links €50/55,

Glashedy €65/75) is among the best places to golf in Donegal. The scenery is so beautiful that it can distract even the most focused golfer.

SLEEPING & EATING

Tullagh Bay Camping & Caravan Park (☎ 937 8997; Tullagh Bay; camp sites €14; ☎ Easter-Sep) About 5km from Clonmany, this windy but flat park is ideal for the bucket-and-spade brigade as it's just behind the vast, dune-backed Tullagh Strand.

Rossaor House (☎ 937 6498; rossaor@gofree.indigo.ie; Ballyliffin; s €45-50, d €70-80; P) It's worth the extra few euros to stay at this above-average B&B just outside town. Quite apart from its wonderful views, pristine rooms and leafy little garden, where else can you request home-produced honey on your freshly baked scones?

Ballyliffin Lodge (☎ 937 8200; www.ballyliffinlodge.com; d from €200, bar food €6-14, restaurant mains €16-30) This spa hotel is the class of Ballyliffin. Guests are treated to panoramic views, lavishly decorated rooms and mod amenities. The resort's leisure facilities include a state-of-the-art spa and a golf course. The hotel's Holly Tree Restaurant oozes cosmopolitan sophistication, while its bar, Mamie Pat's, is a more laidback spot for a straightforward pub meal.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Lough Swilly (☎ 912 2863) buses run between Clonmany and Carndonagh (€3.50, 20 minutes); see opposite.

Clonmany to Buncrana

There are two routes from Clonmany to Buncrana: the scenic coastal road via the Gap of Mamore and Dunree Head, and the speedier inland road (R238). The **Gap of Mamore** (elevation 262m) descends dramatically between Mamore Hill and Croaghcarragh on its way to Dunree (An Dún Riabhach), where the **Guns of Dunree military museum** (☎ 074-936 1817; www.dunree.pro.ie; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1-6pm Sun Jun-Sep, 10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 1-6pm Sat & Sun Oct-May) sits on a rocky outcrop in a 19th-century fort. It's a beautiful spot. If the guns don't impress you, the scenery and birdlife will.

Buncrana

☎ 074 / pop 3490

Buncrana (Bun Cranncha) is not the wild side of the peninsula, and feels much more connected with the outside world. It's a comely town with its fair share of pubs. A 5km sandy

beach on the shores of Lough Swilly is the town's main attraction, and in summer hordes flock in from Derry.

INFORMATION

Bank of Ireland (Lower Main St) ATM and bureau de change.

Post office (Upper Main St)

Tourist office (☎ 936 2600; Derry Rd; ☎ 11am-3.30pm Fri, 11.30am-2pm Sat summer) One kilometre south of the town centre.

Ulster Bank (Upper Main St) ATM and bureau de change.

Valu Clean (☎ 936 2570; Lower Main St; laundry from €6) Laundry service.

SIGHTS

At the northern end of the seafront the early-18th-century, six-arched Castle Bridge leads to **O'Docherty's Keep**, a tower house built by the O'Dochertys, the local chiefs, in 1430. It was burned by the English and then rebuilt for their own use. At its side is the manor-like **Buncrana Castle**, built in 1718 by John Vaughan, who also constructed the bridge; Wolfe Tone was imprisoned here following the unsuccessful French invasion in 1798. Walking 500m further from the keep (turn left and stick to the shoreline) brings you to **Ned's Point Fort** (1812), built by the British and now under siege from graffiti artists.

SLEEPING & EATING

B&Bs abound, but they can fill up quickly during August.

Tullyarvan Mill (☎ 936 1613; www.tullyarvanmill.com; Carndonagh Rd; dm/d/q €15/40/60; ☎ year-round; P) Amid beautiful riverside gardens, this historic mill has a modern, purpose-built hostel attached to it. Dorms are clean as army barracks and each bed has a locker beside it for personal storage. The compound has a lively vibe, due to the cultural events and conferences that seem to be happening all the time. Head north out of town on the R238 and follow the signs.

Caldra B&B (☎ 936 3703; caldrabandb@eircom.net; Lisnakelly; s/d €25/50, mains €5-15; ☎ food served 8.15am-8pm Mon-Thu, to 9pm Fri & Sat, 10.30am-9pm Sun) This large, modern B&B faces Lough Swilly. Guestrooms are decorated with flair. It's just north of town.

Lake of Shadows Hotel (☎ 936 1005; www.lakeofshadows.com; Grianán Park; s €54-62, d 88-104; P) A fine Victorian façade brings to mind past generations coming to 'take the sea air' here. Its

23 modern, but fading, flowery rooms help maintain the image. To get here from Main St, head down Church St towards the bay.

Beach House (☎ 936 1050; www.thebeachhouse.ie; the Pier, Swilly Rd; mains €11-23; ☎ 5pm-late Tue-Fri, noon-late Sat & Sun) With plate glass windows facing the lough, the location here couldn't be better. The dining room projects an elegant simplicity that complements the contemporary Irish cuisine. Service is friendly and attentive.

ENTERTAINMENT

Dating from 1792, the **Atlantic Bar** (☎ 932 0880; Upper Main St) is Buncrana's oldest pub. Chummy older gents keep the bar, and young and old will pints.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

From Buncrana, **Lough Swilly** (☎ 912 2863) buses run several times daily to Derry and less often to Carndonagh.

Lough Swilly Ferry (☎ 938 1901; www.loughfoyleferry.com) runs from Buncrana to Rathmullan (30 minutes, nine daily, single car/motorbike/adult/concession €12/6/3/2) from mid-June to September. Pick up a current timetable at the tourist office.

South of Buncrana

FAHAN

A monastery was founded in Fahan by St Colmille in the 6th century. Among its ruins is the beautifully carved, 7th-century **St Mura Cross** in the graveyard beside the church. Each face is decorated with a cross, in intri-

cate Celtic weave, and the barely discernible Greek inscription is the only one known from this early Christian period.

GRIANÁN OF AILEÁCH

This amphitheatre-like stone **fort** (admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm; (P)) encircles the top of Grianán Hill like a halo, 18km south of Buncrana near Burt, signposted off the N13. In many ways it's a very theatrical place, offering eye-popping views of the surrounding loughs and all the way to distant Derry. And its miniarena can resemble a circus whenever a tour bus rolls up and spills its load inside the 4m-thick walls.

The fort may have existed at least 2000 years ago, but it's thought that the site itself goes back to pre-Celtic times as a temple to the god Dagda. Between the 5th and 12th centuries it was the seat of the O'Neills, before being demolished by Murtoigh O'Brien, king of Munster. Most of what you see now is a reconstruction built between 1874 and 1878.

The merry-go-round-shaped **Burt Church** at the foot of the hill was modelled on the fort by Derry architect Liam McCormack and built in 1967.

INCH ISLAND

Few tourists make it to tranquil Inch Island, accessible from the mainland by a causeway, but it does have plenty of birdlife, including a sanctuary for swans, two small beaches and the remains of an old fort. **Inch Island Stables** (☎ 074-936 0335) organises horse-riding lessons and trips around the island.