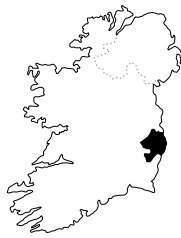


County Wicklow



COUNTY WICKLOW

Wild and often wonderful Wicklow (Cill Mhantáin) is Dublin's favourite playground – its rich and varied landscapes the preferred getaway for many a busy urbanite, many of whom are so taken by the county's beauty that they now reside within its postal districts.

Yet the 'Garden of Ireland' – as the county is known – has been successful in fending off the worst ravages of the urban expansion, mostly because so much of the county remains defiantly opposed to the planners' bulldozers. Strict planning regulations aside, there's little to be done about the county's most imposing natural feature, a gorse-and-bracken mountain spine that is as wildly beautiful as it is impenetrable to the planners who want to lay out yet another housing estate.

Here, history and geology work together to great effect and preserve one of Ireland's most stunning landscapes, replete with dramatic glacial valleys, soaring mountain passes and some of the country's most important archaeological treasures – from breathtaking early-Christian sites to the elegant country homes of the wealthiest of Ireland's 18th-century nobility.

Linking much of Wicklow's attractions is the 132km-long Wicklow Way, the country's foremost walking trail and – if you've got the legs for it – still the best and most satisfying way to explore the county. From the suburbs of southern Dublin to the rolling fields of County Carlow, the Way leads walkers along disused military supply lines, old bog roads and nature trails over the eastern flanks of the mountains.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Monastic Magic** Evocative ruins and marvellous slopes and forests of gorgeous Glendalough (p152)
- **Body & Mind** Treat the body, and the mind will surely follow at Macreddin, home of Brook Lodge and Wells Spa (p164)
- **The Hills are Alive** Ireland's most popular hiking trail, the Wicklow Way (p155)
- **The Art is Hot** Art and atmosphere of magnificent Russborough House (p157)
- **The Glory of the Garden** Gorgeous Italianate gardens and the impressive waterfall at Powerscourt Estate (p148)



■ POPULATION: 114,700

■ AREA: 2025 SQ KM

COUNTY WICKLOW

NATIONAL PARKS

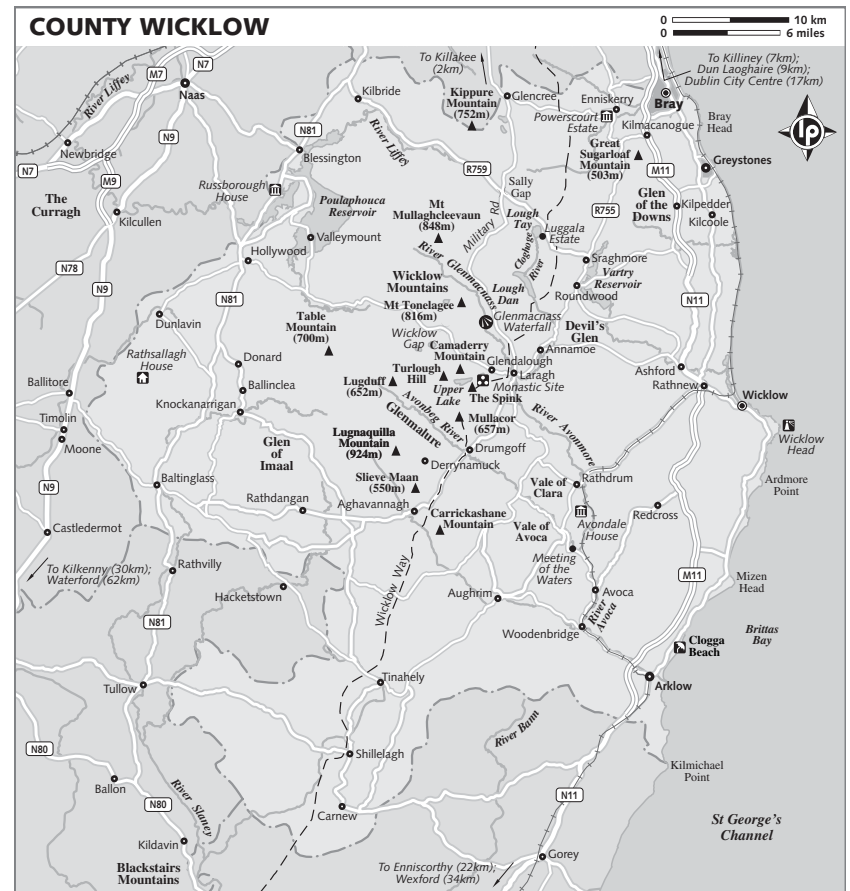
Wicklow Mountains National Park covers more than 20,000 hectares of mountainous blanket bogs and woodland. Eventually, virtually all of the higher ground stretching the length of the mountains will fall under the protection of the national park, which will cover more than 30,000 hectares.

Within the boundaries of the protected area are two nature reserves, owned and managed by the Heritage Service, and legally protected by the Wildlife Act. The larger reserve, west of the Glendalough Visitor Centre, conserves the extensive heath and bog of the Glendalough Valley plus the Upper Lake and valley slopes on either side. The second, Glendalough Wood Nature Reserve, conserves oak woods

stretching from the Upper Lake as far as the Rathdrum road to the east.

Most of Ireland's native mammal species can be found within the confines of the park. Large herds of deer roam on the open hill areas, though these were introduced in the 20th century after the native red-deer population became extinct during the first half of the 18th century. The uplands are the preserve of foxes, badgers and hares. Red squirrels are usually found in the pine woodlands – look out for them around the Upper Lake.

The bird population of the park is plentiful. Birds of prey abound, the most common being peregrine falcons, marlins, kestrels, hawks and sparrowhawks. Hen harriers are a



rarer sight, though they too live in the park. Moorland birds found in the area include meadow pipits and skylarks. Less common birds such as whinchats, ring ouzels and dippers can be spotted, as can red grouse, whose numbers are quickly disappearing in other parts of Ireland. For information, call in or contact the **National Park Information Point** (☎ 0404-45425; www.wicklownationalpark.ie; Bolger's Cottage, Miners' Rd, Upper Lake, Glendalough; ☞ 10am-6pm May-Sep, 10am-dusk Sat & Sun Oct-Apr), off the Green Rd that runs by the Upper Lake, about 2km from the Glendalough Visitor Centre. There's usually someone on hand to help, but if you find it closed the staff may be out running guided walks. *Exploring the Glendalough Valley* (Heritage Service; €1.80) is a good booklet on the trails in the area.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

It's a cinch to get to Wicklow from Dublin. The main routes through the county are the N11 (M11), which runs north-south from Dublin all the way through to Wexford, taking in all of the coastal towns; and the N81, which runs down the western spine of the county through Blessington and into County Carlow. The Dublin Area Rapid Transport (DART) line runs southward from Dublin as far as Bray, and there are regular train and bus connections from the capital to Wicklow town and Arklow.

For Glendalough, **St Kevin's Bus** (☎ 01-281 8119; www.glendaloughbus.com) runs twice daily from Dublin and Bray, also stopping in Roundwood. For the western parts of the county, Dublin Bus 65 runs regularly as far as Blessington. For more details, see the Getting There & Away section for each town.

WICKLOW MOUNTAINS

No sooner do you leave Dublin and cross into Wicklow than the landscape changes – dramatically. From Killakee, still in Dublin, the Military Rd begins a 30km southward journey across vast sweeps of gorse-, bracken- and heather-clad moors, bogs, and mountains dotted with small corrie lakes.

The numbers and statistics aren't all that impressive. The highest peak in the range, Lugnaquilla (924m), is really more of a very large hill, but that hardly matters here. This vast granite intrusion, a welling-up of hot ig-

neous rock that solidified some 400 million years ago, was shaped during the Ice Ages into the schist-capped mountains visible today. The peaks are marvellously desolate and as raw as only nature can be. Between the mountains are a number of deep glacial valleys, most notably Glenmacnass, Glenmalure and Glendalough, while corrie lakes such as Lough Bray Upper and Lower, gouged out by ice at the head of the glaciers, complete the wild topography.

Beginning on Dublin's southern fringes, the narrow Military Rd winds its way through the most remote parts of the mountains, offering some extraordinary views of the surrounding countryside. The best place to join it is at Glencree (from Enniskerry). It then runs south through the Sally Gap, Glenmacnass, Laragh, Glendalough and on to Glenmalure and Aghavannagh.

On the trip south you can divert east at the Sally Gap to look at Lough Tay and Lough Dan. Further south you pass the great waterfall at Glenmacnass before dropping down into Laragh, with the magnificent monastic ruins of Glendalough nearby. Continue south through the valley of Glenmalure and, if you're fit enough, climb Lugnaquilla.

ENNISKERRY & POWERSCOURT ESTATE

☎ 01 / pop 2800

On a summer's day there are few lovelier spots than the village of Enniskerry, replete with art galleries and the kind of all-organic gourmet cafés that would have you arrested if you admitted to eating battery eggs. It's all a far cry from the village's origins, when Richard Wingfield, earl of nearby Powerscourt, commissioned a row of terraced cottages for his labourers in 1760. These days, you'd want to have laboured pretty successfully to get your hands on one of them.

Sights

The village is lovely, but the main reason for its popularity is the magnificent 64-sq-km **Powerscourt Estate** (☎ 204 6000; www.powerscourt.ie; adult/child/student €7.50/4.50/6.50; ☞ 9.30am-5.30pm Feb-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Nov-Jan), which gives contemporary observers a true insight into the style of the 18th-century super-rich. The main entrance is 500m south of the village square.

The estate has existed more or less since 1300 when the LePoer (later anglicised to

Power) family built themselves a castle here. The property changed Anglo-Norman hands a few times before coming into the possession of Richard Wingfield, newly appointed Marshall of Ireland, in 1603 – his descendants were to live here for the next 350 years. In 1731 the Georgian wunderkind Richard Casels (or Castle) was given the job of building a Palladian-style mansion around the core of the old castle. He finished the job in 1743, but an extra storey was added in 1787 and other alterations were made in the 19th century.

The Wingfields left during the 1950s, after which the house had a massive restoration. Then, on the eve of its opening to the public in 1974, a fire gutted the whole building. The estate was eventually bought by the Slazenger sporting-goods family who have overseen a second restoration, as well as the addition of two golf courses, a café, a huge garden centre and a bunch of cutesy little retail outlets as well as a small exhibition on the house's history.

Basically, it's all intended to draw in the punters and wring as many euros out of their pockets as possible in order to finish the huge restoration job and make the estate a kind of profitable wonderland. If you can deal with the crowds (summer weekends are the worst) or, better still, avoid the worst of them and visit midweek, you're in for a real treat. Easily the biggest drawcards of the whole pile are the simply magnificent 20-hectare formal gardens and the breathtaking views that accompany them.

Originally laid out in the 1740s, the gardens were redesigned in the 19th century by Daniel Robinson, who had as much fondness for the booze as he did for horticultural pursuits. Perhaps this influenced his largely informal style, which resulted in a magnificent blend of landscaped gardens, sweeping terraces, statuary, ornamental lakes, secret hollows, rambling walks and walled enclosures replete with more than 200 types of trees and shrubs, all beneath the stunning natural backdrop of the Great Sugarloaf Mountain to the southeast. Tickets come with a map laying out 40-minute and hour-long tours of the gardens. Don't miss the exquisite Japanese Gardens or the Pepperpot Tower, modelled on a three-inch actual pepperpot owned by Lady Wingfield. Our own favourite, however, is the animal cemetery, final resting place of the Wingfield pets and even some of their favourite milking cows. Some of the epitaphs are astonishingly personal.

A 7km walk to a separate part of the estate takes you to the 130m **Powerscourt Waterfall** (☎ 204 6000; adult/child/student €5/3.50/4.50; ☞ 9.30am-7pm May-Aug, 10.30am-5.30pm Mar-Apr & Sep-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Jan). It's the highest waterfall in Britain and Ireland, and is most impressive after heavy rain. You can also get to the falls by road, following the signs from the estate. A nature trail has been laid out around the base of the waterfall, taking you past giant redwoods, ancient oaks, beech, birch and rowan trees. There are plenty of birds in the vicinity, including the chaffinch, cuckoo, chiffchaff, raven and willow warbler.

Activities

One of the best health spas around is **Powerscourt Springs Health Farm** (☎ 276 1000; Coolakay; day programme €255), the perfect spot for a bit of pampering. The full-day treatment includes a three-course lunch, use of all of the facilities and a full body treatment.

Tours

All tours that take in Powerscourt start in Dublin.

Bus Éireann (☎ 836 6111; www.buseireann.ie; Busáras; adult/child/student €28.80/18/25.20; ☞ 10am mid-Mar-Oct) A whole-day tour that takes in Powerscourt and Glendalough (all admissions included), departing from Busáras.

Dublin Bus Tours (☎ 872 0000; www.dublinbus.ie; 59 Upper O'Connell St; adult/child €25/12; ☞ 11am) A visit to Powerscourt is included in the four-hour South Coast & Gardens tour, which takes in the stretch of coastline between Dun Laoghaire and Killiney before turning inland to Wicklow and on to Enniskerry. Admission to the gardens is included.

Grayline Tours (☎ 872 9010; www.irishcitytours.com; Gresham Hotel, O'Connell St; adult/child €38/19; ☞ 10am Sun) Incorporating Wicklow's big hits – Powerscourt, Glendalough and the lakes and a stop at Avoca, then takes in Dun Laoghaire and Dalkey (includes admission to Glendalough visitor centre and Powerscourt, but not coffee).

Sleeping

Summerhill House Hotel (☎ 286 7928; www.summerhillhousehotel.com; s/d from €80/100; Ⓟ) A truly superb country mansion about 700m south of town just off the N11 is the best place around to lay your head, on soft cotton pillows surrounded by delicate antiques and pastoral views in oils. Everything about the place – including the top-notch breakfast – is memorable.

Coolakay House (☎ 286 2423; www.coolakayhouse.com; Waterfall Rd, Coolakay; s/d €45/80; Ⓟ) A modern

working farm about 3km south of Enniskerry (it is signposted along the road), this is a great option for walkers along the Wicklow Way. The four bedrooms are all very comfortable and have terrific views, but the real draw is the restaurant, which does a roaring trade in snacks and full meals (mains around €11).

The nearest youth hostel is in Glencree, 10km west of here.

Eating

Powerscourt Terrace Café (☎ 204 6070; Powerscourt House; mains €8-13; ☺ 10am-5pm) The folks at Avoca Handweavers (p161) have applied all their know-how and turned what could have easily been just another run-of-the-mill tourist-attraction café into something of a gourmet experience. A slice of quiche on the terrace, overlooking the gardens in the shadow of the Great Sugarloaf? Yes please.

Emilia's Ristorante (☎ 276 1834; the Square; mains €13-21; ☺ 5-10.45pm Mon-Sat, noon-9.30pm Sun) A lovely 1st-floor restaurant to satisfy even the most ardent craving for thin-crust pizzas. Emilia's does everything else just right too, from the organic soups to the perfect steaks down to the gorgeous meringue desserts.

Poppies Country Cooking (☎ 282 8869; the Square; mains around €9; ☺ 8.30am-6pm) If the service wasn't so slow and the organisation so frustratingly haphazard, this pokey little café on the main square would be one of the best spots in Wicklow. The food – when you finally get a chance to eat it – is sensational: wholesome salads, filling sandwiches on doorstep-cut bread and award-winning ice cream will leave you plenty satisfied.

Johnnie Fox (☎ 295 5647; Glencullen; Hungry Fisherman's seafood platter €31; ☺ noon-10pm) Busloads of tourists fill the place nightly throughout the summer, mostly for the knees-up, faux-Irish floorshow of music and dancing, but there's nothing contrived about the seafood, which is so damn good we'd happily sit through yet another chorus of *Danny Boy* and even consider joining in the jig. The pub is 3km northwest of Enniskerry in Glencullen.

Getting There & Away

Enniskerry is 18km south of Dublin, just 3km west of the M11 along the R117. **Dublin Bus** (☎ 872 0000, 873 4222) service 44 (€2.10, every 20 minutes) takes about 1¼ hours to get to Enniskerry from Hawkins St in Dublin. Alternatively, you can take the DART train to Bray

(€2.50) and catch bus 185 (€1.40, hourly) from the station, which takes an extra 40 minutes.

Getting to Powerscourt House under your own steam is not a problem (it's 500m from the town), but getting to the waterfall is tricky. **Alpine Coaches** (☎ 286 2547) runs a shuttle service between the DART station in Bray, the waterfall (€5.50 return) and the house (€4). Shuttles leave Bray at 11.05am (11.30am July and August), 12.30pm, 1.30pm (and 3.30pm September to June) Monday to Saturday, and 11am, noon and 1pm Sunday. The last departure from Powerscourt House is at 5.30pm.

GLENCREE

☎ 01

Just south of the County Dublin border and 10km west of Enniskerry is Glencree, a leafy hamlet set into the side of the valley of the same name, which opens east to give a magnificent view down to Great Sugarloaf Mountain and the sea.

The valley floor is home to the Glencree Oak Project, an ambitious plan to reforest part of Glencree with the native oak vegetation, mostly broadleaf trees, that once covered most of the country but now covers only 1% of Ireland's landmass.

The village, such as it is, has a tiny shop and a hostel but no pub. There's a poignant **German cemetery** dedicated to 134 servicemen who died in Ireland during WWI and WWII. Just south of the village, the former military barracks are now a retreat house and reconciliation centre for people of different religions from the Republic and the North.

There's a beautiful 18th-century farmhouse, **Knockree Hostel** (☎ 286 4036; www.anoige.ie; Knockree, Enniskerry), with wonderful views over Glencree. At the time of writing, it was being renovated and will hopefully reopen sometime in 2008 as a five-star hostel.

TOP FIVE EATS IN WICKLOW

- Roundwood Inn (opposite)
- Rathsalagh House (p158)
- Tinakilly Country House & Restaurant (p163)
- Grangecon Café (p158)
- Marc Michel (p162)

SALLY GAP

One of the two main east-west passes across the Wicklow Mountains, the Sally Gap is surrounded by some spectacular countryside. From the turn-off on the lower road (R755) between Roundwood and Kilmacanogue near Bray, the narrow road (R759) passes above the dark and dramatic Lough Tay, whose scree slopes slide into **Luggala** (Fancy Mountain). This almost fairy-tale estate is owned by one Garech de Brún, member of the Guinness family and founder of Claddagh Records, a leading producer of Irish traditional and folk music. The small River Cloghoge links Lough Tay with Lough Dan just to the south. It then heads up to the Sally Gap crossroads, where it cuts across the Military Rd and heads north-west for Kilbride and the N81, following the young River Liffey, still only a stream.

ROUNDWOOD

☎ 01 / pop 440

Reputed to be Ireland's highest village, Roundwood hardly towers above the world at 238m, but it is a handy and popular stop for walkers along the Wicklow Way, which runs past the town about 3km to the west. The long main street leads south to Glendalough and southern Wicklow. Turn-offs lead to Ashford to the east and the southern shore of Lough Dan to the west. Unfortunately, almost all Lough Dan's southern shoreline is private property and you can't get to the lake on this side.

The town has shops and a post office, but not a bank or an ATM. The nearest ATM is at the petrol station in Kilmacanogue, at the junction of the M11 and the R755.

Activities

Guided or self-guided tour options up to eight days in Wicklow (and plenty of other spots in Ireland) are available with **Footfalls Walking Holidays** (☎ 0404-45152; www.walkinghikingireland.com; Trooperstown, Roundwood). An eight-day trek through the Wicklow Mountains complete with bed and board will cost €999.

Sleeping & Eating

Roundwood Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 281 8163; www.dublinwicklowcamping.com; camp sites €8; ☺ Apr-Sep) Top-notch facilities, including a kitchen, dining area and TV lounge, make this one of the best camp sites in all of Wicklow. It is about 500m south of the village and is served by the

daily St Kevin's Bus service between Dublin and Glendalough.

Tochar House (☎ 281 8247; dm/s/d €22/41/80) In the middle of Main St, the house has newly renovated rooms where a liberal use of pine wood lends plenty of light. The dorm (which is extremely popular with walkers and cyclists) has a bathroom, shower, and tea and coffee facilities, but is not available to single travellers, only to groups of two or more. It is directly behind the pub, so there's plenty of noise at weekends.

Ballinacor House (☎ 281 8168; ballinacor@eircom.net; s/d €36/65; ☺ May-Sep) Highly recommended is this supercomfortable house about 2km south of town on the road to Laragh, which is popular with walkers and has some commanding views over the lovely countryside. The owners are friendly and have been known to give lifts into Laragh to guests.

Roundwood Inn (☎ 281 8107; Main St; mains €16-32, bar food €10-16; ☺ bar noon-9pm, restaurant 7.30-9.30pm Fri & Sat, 1-3pm Sun) This 17th-century German-owned house has a gorgeous bar with a snug and open fire, in front of which you can sample bar food with a difference: on the menu are dishes such as Hungarian goulash and Irish stew with a German twist. The more-formal restaurant is the best in town, and has earned deserved praise for its hearty, delicious cuisine. The menu favours meat dishes, including season game, Wicklow rack of lamb, and a particularly good roast suckling pig. Reservations are required.

Getting There & Away

St Kevin's Bus (☎ 281 8119; www.glendaloughbus.com) passes through Roundwood on its twice-daily jaunt between Dublin and Glendalough (one way/return €8/12, 1¼ hours).

GLENMACNASS

Desolate and utterly deserted, the Glenmacnass Valley, a stretch of wild bogland between the Sally Gap crossroads and Laragh, is one of the most beautiful parts of the mountains, although the sense of isolation is quite dramatic.

The highest mountain to the west is Mt Mullaghcleevaun (848m), and River Glenmacnass flows south and tumbles over the edge of the mountain plateau in a great foaming cascade. There's a car park near the top of the waterfall. Be careful when walking on rocks near **Glenmacnass Waterfall** as a few people

have slipped to their deaths. There are fine walks up Mt Mullaghcleevaun or in the hills to the east of the car park.

WICKLOW GAP

Between Mt Tonelagee (816m) to the north and Table Mountain (700m) to the southwest, the Wicklow Gap is the second major pass over the mountains. The eastern end of the road begins just to the north of Glendalough and climbs through some lovely scenery northwestwards up along the Glendassan Valley. It passes the remains of some old lead and zinc workings before meeting a side road that leads south and up Turlough Hill, the location of Ireland's only pumped storage power station. You can walk up the hill for a look over the Upper Lake.

GLENDALOUGH

☎ 0404 / pop 280

If you're looking for the epitome of rugged and romantic Ireland, you won't do much better than Glendalough (Gleann dá Loch, 'Valley of the Two Lakes'), truly one of Ireland's most beautiful corners and a highlight of any trip along the eastern seaboard.

The substantial remains of this important monastic settlement are certainly impressive, but the real draw is the splendid setting, two dark and mysterious lakes tucked into a deep valley covered in forest. It is, despite its immense popularity, a deeply tranquil and spiritual place, and you will have little difficulty in understanding why those solitude-seeking monks came here in the first place.

History

In AD 498 a young monk named Kevin arrived in the valley and decided that it would be a good spot for a bit of silent meditation. He set up house in what had been a Bronze Age tomb on the southern side of the Upper Lake. For the next seven years he slept on stones, wore animal skins, maintained a near-starvation diet and – according to the legend – made friends with the birds and animals. Word eventually spread of Kevin's natural lifestyle, and he began attracting disciples who were seemingly unaware of the irony that they were flocking to hang out with a hermit who wanted to live as far away from other people as possible.

Kevin's preferred isolation notwithstanding, a settlement quickly grew and by the 9th

century Glendalough rivalled Clonmacnoise (p362) as Ireland's premier monastic city: thousands of students studied and lived in a thriving community that was spread over a considerable area. Inevitably, Glendalough's success made it a key target of Viking raiders, who sacked the monastery at least four times between 775 and 1071. The final blow came in 1398, when English forces from Dublin almost completely destroyed it. Efforts were made to rebuild and some life lingered on here as late as the 17th century, when, under renewed repression, the monastery finally died.

Orientation & Information

At the valley entrance, before the Glendalough Hotel, is **Glendalough Visitor Centre** (☎ 45325; adult/child & student €5.30/2.10; ☒ 9.30am–6pm mid-Mar–Oct, 9.30am–5pm Nov–mid-Mar). It has a high-quality 17-minute audiovisual presentation called *Ireland of the Monasteries*, which does exactly what it says on the tin.

Coming from Laragh you first see the visitor centre, then the Glendalough Hotel, which is beside the entrance to the main group of ruins and the round tower. The Lower Lake is a small dark lake to the west, while further west up the valley is the much bigger and more impressive Upper Lake, with a large car park and more ruins nearby. Be sure to visit the Upper Lake and take one of the surrounding walks.

A model in the visitor centre should help you fix where everything is in relation to everything else.

Sights

UPPER LAKE

The original site of St Kevin's settlement, **Teampall na Skellig** is at the base of the cliffs towering over the southern side of the Upper Lake and accessible only by boat; unfortunately, there's no boat service to the site and you'll have to settle for looking at it across the lake. The terraced shelf has the reconstructed ruins of a church and early graveyard. Rough wattle huts once stood on the raised ground nearby. Scattered around are some early grave slabs and simple stone crosses.

Just east of here and 10m above the lake waters is the 2m-deep artificial cave called **St Kevin's Bed**, said to be where Kevin lived. The earliest human habitation of the cave was long before St Kevin's era – there's evidence that people lived in the valley for thousands of

years before the monks arrived. In the green area just south of the car park is a large circular wall thought to be the remains of an early Christian *caher* (stone fort).

Follow the lakeshore path southwest of the car park until you come to the considerable remains of **Reefert Church** above the tiny River Poulannass. It's a small, plain, 11th-century Romanesque nave-and-chancel church with some reassembled arches and walls. Traditionally, Reefert (literally 'Royal Burial Place') was the burial site of the chiefs of the local O'Toole family. The surrounding graveyard contains a number of rough stone crosses and slabs, most made of shiny mica schist.

Climb the steps at the back of the churchyard and follow the path to the west and you'll find, at the top of a rise overlooking the lake, the scant remains of **St Kevin's Cell**, a small beehive hut.

LOWER LAKE

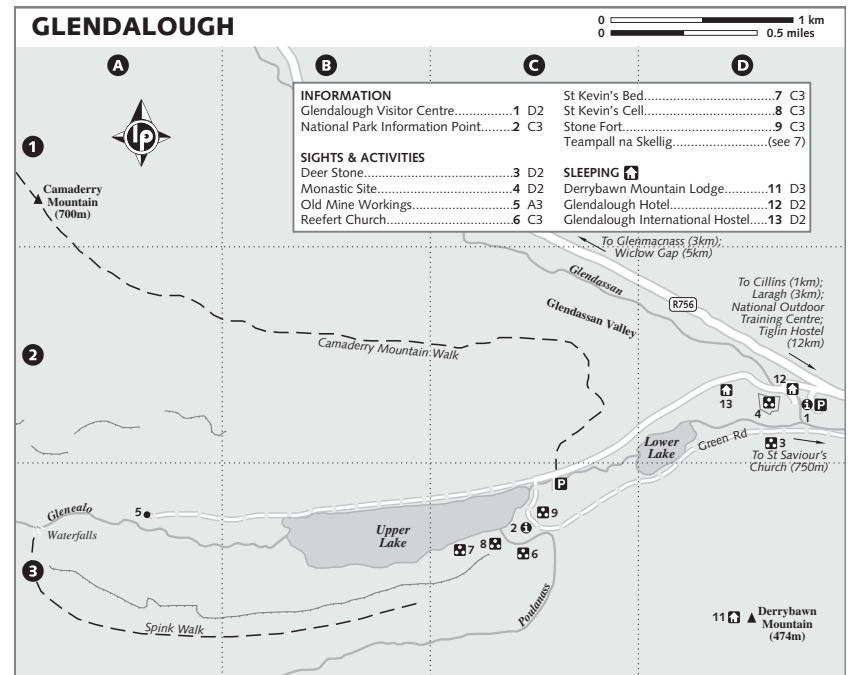
While the Upper Lake has the best scenery, the most fascinating buildings lie in the lower part of the valley east of the Lower Lake,

huddled together in the heart of the ancient monastic site.

Just round the bend from the Glendalough Hotel is the stone arch of the **monastery gatehouse**, the only surviving example of a monastic entranceway in the country. Just inside the entrance is a large slab with an incised cross.

Beyond that lies a **graveyard**, which is still in use. The 10th-century **round tower** is 33m tall and 16m in circumference at the base. The upper storeys and conical roof were reconstructed in 1876. Near the tower, to the southeast, is the **Cathedral of St Peter and St Paul** with a 10th-century nave. The chancel and sacristy date from the 12th century.

At the centre of the graveyard to the south of the round tower is the **Priest's House**. This odd building dates from 1170 but has been heavily reconstructed. It may have been the location of shrines of St Kevin. Later, during penal times, it became a burial site for local priests – hence the name. The 10th-century **St Mary's Church**, 140m southwest of the round tower, probably originally stood outside the walls of the monastery and belonged to local nuns. It has a lovely western doorway. A little



to the east are the scant remains of **St Kieran's Church**, the smallest at Glendalough.

Glendalough's trademark is **St Kevin's Kitchen** or Church at the southern edge of the enclosure. This church, with a miniature round towerlike belfry, protruding sacristy and steep stone roof, is a masterpiece. How it came to be known as a kitchen is a mystery as there's no indication that it was anything other than a church. The oldest parts of the building date from the 11th century – the structure has been remodelled since but it's still a classic early Irish church.

At the junction with Green Rd as you cross the river just south of these two churches is the **Deer Stone** in the middle of a group of rocks. Legend claims that when St Kevin needed milk for two orphaned babies, a doe stood here waiting to be milked. The stone is actually a *bullauin* (a stone used as a mortar for grinding medicines or food). Many such stones are thought to be prehistoric, and they were widely regarded as having supernatural properties: women who bathed their faces with water from the hollow were supposed to keep their looks forever. The early churchmen brought the stones into their monasteries, perhaps hoping to inherit some of their powers.

The road east leads to **St Saviour's Church**, with its detailed Romanesque carvings. To the west, a nice woodland trail leads up the valley past the Lower Lake to the Upper Lake.

Activities

The Glendalough Valley is all about walking and clambering. There are nine marked ways in the valley, the longest of which is about 10km, or about four hours walking. Before you set off, drop by the **National Park Information Point** (☎ 45425; 🕒 10am–6pm daily May–Sep, 10am–dusk Sat & Sun Oct–Apr) and pick up the relevant leaflet and trail map (all around €0.50) or, if you're solo, arrange for walking partners. It also has a number of excellent guides for sale – you won't go far wrong with David Herman's *Hillwalker's Wicklow* (€6) or Joss Lynam's *Easy Walks Near Dublin* (€10). A word of warning: don't be fooled by the relative gentleness of the surrounding countryside or the fact that the Wicklow Mountains are really no taller than big hills. The weather can be merciless, so make sure to take the usual precautions, have the right equipment and tell someone where you're

going and when you should be back. For Mountain Rescue call ☎ 999.

The easiest and most popular walk is the gentle hike along the northern shore of the Upper Lake to the lead and zinc **mine workings**, which date from 1800. The better route is along the lakeshore rather than on the road (which runs 30m in from the shore), a distance of about 2.5km, one way, from the Glendalough Visitor Centre. Continue on up the head of the valley if you wish.

Alternatively, you can walk up the **Spink** (from the Irish for 'pointed hill'; 380m), the steep ridge with vertical cliffs running along the southern flanks of the Upper Lake. You can go part of the way and turn back, or complete a circuit of the Upper Lake by following the top of the cliff, eventually coming down by the mine workings and going back along the northern shore. The circuit is about 6km long and takes about three hours – if you feel like going on, check out the boxed text, opposite.

The third option is a hike up **Camaderry Mountain** (700m), hidden behind the hills that flank the northern side of the valley. The walk starts on the road just 50m back towards Glendalough from the entrance to the Upper Lake car park. Head straight up the steep hill to the north and you come out on open mountains with sweeping views in all directions. You can then continue up Camaderry to the northwest or just follow the ridge west looking over the Upper Lake. To the top of Camaderry and back is about 7.5km and takes about four hours.

Tours

If you don't fancy discovering Glendalough under your own steam, there are a couple of tours that will make it fairly effortless. They both depart from Dublin.

Bus Éireann (☎ 01-836 6111; www.buseireann.ie; Busáras; adult/child/student €28.80/18/25.20; 🕒 departs 10am mid-Mar–Oct) Includes admission to the visitor centre and a visit to Powerscourt Estate in this whole-day tour which returns to Dublin at about 5.45pm. The guides are good but impersonal.

Wild Wicklow Tour (☎ 01-280 1899; www.discoverdublin.ie; adult/student & child €28/25; 🕒 departs 9.10am year-round) Award-winning tours of Glendalough, Avoca and the Sally Gap that never fail to generate rave reviews for atmosphere and all-round fun, but so much craic has made a casualty of informative depth. The first pick-up is at the Dublin Tourism office, but there are a variety of pick-up points throughout Dublin; check the

point nearest you when booking. The tour returns to Dublin about 5.30pm.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Glendalough International Hostel (☎ 45342; www.anoige.ie; the Lodge; dm Jun–Oct €23, Nov–May €19) Conveniently, this modern hostel is

near the round tower, set amid the deeply wooded glacial area that makes up the Glendalough Valley.

MIDRANGE

Most B&Bs are in or around Laragh, a village 3km east of Glendalough, or on the way there from Glendalough.

WALK: THE WICKLOW WAY – GLENALOUGH TO AUGHRIM

The Wicklow Way is one of Ireland's most popular long-distance walks because of its remarkable scenery and its relatively fluid and accessible starting and finishing points – there are plenty of half- and full-day options along the way.

This section is 40km long and takes you through some of the more remote parts of the Wicklow Mountains and down into the southeastern foothills. There's relatively little road walking but the greater part of the day is through conifer plantations. The walk should take between 7½ and eight hours, with an ascent of 1035m.

From the **National Park Information Point** on the southern side of the Upper Lake, turn left and ascend beside Lugduff Brook and **Pollanass Waterfall**. Veer left when you meet a forest track, then left again at a junction and cross two bridges. The Way leads northeast for about 600m then, from a tight right bend, heads almost directly southwards (via a series of clearly marked junctions), up through the conifer plantations, across Lugduff Brook again and beside a tributary, to open ground on the saddle between **Mullacor** (657m) and **Lugduff** (1¾ hours from Glendalough). From here on a good day, massive Lugnaquilla sprawls across the view to the southwest; in the opposite direction is Camaderry's long ridge above Glendalough, framed against the bulk of Tonelagee. Follow the raised boardwalk down, contour above a plantation and drop into it where a steep muddy and rocky path descends to a forest road; turn left.

If you're planning to stay at Glenmalure Youth Hostel (see p157), rather than go all the way down to the crossroads in Glenmalure, follow the Way from the left turn for about 1km southwards. At an oblique junction where the Way turns southeast, bear left in a westerly direction and descend steeply to the road in Glenmalure. The hostel is about 2km northwest.

To continue straight on along the Way from the left turn, follow forest roads south then southeast for 1.6km to a wide zigzag above open ground, then contour the steep slope, swing northeast and drop down to a minor road beside two bridges. Continue down to an intersection and Glenmalure; it's about ¼ hours from the saddle.

The Way presses straight on (south) through the crossroads for 500m, across the Avonbeg River and past silent **Drumgoff Barracks**, built in 1803 but long-since derelict, then right along a forest track. Keep left past a ruined cottage and start to gain height in two fairly long reaches; go through two left turns then it's down and across a stream. About 800m further on, turn right along a path to start the long ascent almost to the top of **Slieve Maan** (550m) via four track junctions, maintaining a southwesterly to south-southwesterly direction. Back on a forest track, the Way turns left (southeast) close to unforested ground to the west. With a few more convoluted turns, you're out of the trees and on a path between the plantation and the road (mapped as the Military Rd). The Way eventually meets the latter beside a small tributary of the Aghavannagh River (two hours from Glenmalure).

Walk down the road for about 250m, then turn off left along a forest track, shortly bearing left to gain height steadily on a wide path over **Carrickashane Mountain** (508m). Descend steeply to a wide forest road and continue down for about 1km. Bear right to reach a minor road and turn right. Leave the road 500m further on and drop down to another road – Iron Bridge is just to the right (an hour from Military Rd).

Walk 150m up to a road and turn left; follow this road down the valley of the Ow River for 7.5km to a junction – Aughrim is to the left, another 500m. Buses along the Dublin to Wexford line stop here.

Glendale (☎ 45410; www.glendale-glenmalough.com; Laragh East; s/d €36/60, cottage per week €250-600; (P)) This is an immaculately modern and tidy B&B with large, comfortable rooms. Also available are five modern self-catering cottages that sleep six. Every cottage has all the mod cons, from TV and video to a fully equipped kitchen complete with microwave, dishwasher and washer-dryer. The owners will also drop you off in Glendalough if you don't fancy the walk.

our pick **Glendalough Cillins** (☎ 45140, for bookings 45777; St Kevin's Parish Church, Glendalough; r €45) In an effort to recreate something of the contemplative spirit of Kevin's early years in the valley, St Kevin's Parish Church rents out six *cillins* (hermitages), for folks looking to take time out from the bustle of daily life and reflect on more spiritual matters. In keeping with more modern needs, however, there are a few more facilities than were present in Kevin's cave. Each hermitage is a bungalow consisting of a bedroom, a bathroom, a small kitchen area and an open fire supplemented by a storage heating facility. The whole venture is managed by the local parish, and while there is a strong spiritual emphasis here, it is not necessarily a Catholic one. Visitors of all denominations and creeds are welcome, so long as their intentions are reflective and meditative; backpackers looking for a cheap place to bed down are not. The hermitages are in a field next to St Kevin's Parish Church, about 1km east of Glendalough on the R756 to Laragh.

Laragh Mountain View Lodge (☎ 45282; fax 45204; Glenmacnass; s/d €50/80; (P)) It praises itself as 'heaven on earth', which it isn't, but it does have great views. The house itself is a modern bungalow with comfortable, tidy rooms, but what makes this place worth checking out is the location: the middle of gorgeous nowhere. It's about 3km north of Laragh, on the R115 to Glenmacnass.

Derrybawn Mountain Lodge (☎ 45644; derrybawnlodge@eircom.net; Derrybawn, Laragh; s/d €50/90; (P)) Beautifully positioned on Derrybawn Mountain (474m) is this handsome lodge with eight comfortable rooms and some pretty spectacular views of the surrounding countryside. The owners are both members of the local Mountain Rescue, so there are plenty of insider tips to be had on where and how to hike. It's about 4km south of Laragh.

Glendalough River House (☎ 45577; www.glenaloughriverhouse.com; Laragh; s/d €58/82; (P)) This 200-

year-old restored farmhouse, on the river at the beginning of the Green Rd pedestrian path to Glendalough from Laragh, is an absolute delight. The bedrooms are large and well-appointed, while the breakfast will load you up with all the energy you'll need for a hike in the surrounding hills. You can also have the farmhouse all to yourself by taking it on a self-catering basis.

TOP END

Glendalough Hotel (☎ 45135; www.glenaloughhotel.com; s/d €120/190; (P)) There's no mistaking Glendalough's best hotel, conveniently located next door to the visitor centre. There is no shortage of takers for its 44 fairly luxurious bedrooms.

Eating

Laragh's the place for a bit of grub, as there's only one sit-down spot in Glendalough.

During summer, villagers put out signs and serve tea and scones on the village green.

Wicklow Heather Restaurant (☎ 45157; Main St, Laragh; mains €12-18; ☎ noon-8.30pm) This is the best place for anything substantial. The trout (farmed locally) is excellent.

Glendalough Hotel (☎ 45135; 3-course lunch €19, bar mains around €10; ☎ noon-6pm) The hotel's enormous restaurant serves a very good lunch of unsurprising dishes, usually involving some chicken, beef and fish. The bar menu – burgers, sandwiches, sausages and the like – is also quite filling.

Getting There & Away

St Kevin's Bus (☎ 281 8119; www.glenaloughbus.com) departs from outside the Mansion House on Dawson St in Dublin at 11.30am and 6pm Monday to Saturday, and 11.30am and 7pm Sunday (one way/return €11/18, 1½ hours). It also stops at the Town Hall in Bray. Departures from Glendalough are at 7.15am and 4.30pm Monday to Saturday. During the week in July and August the later bus runs at 5.30pm, and there is an additional service at 9.45am.

GLENMALURE

As you go deeper into the mountains southwest of Glendalough near the southern end of the Military Rd, everything gets a bit wilder and more remote. Beneath the western slopes of Wicklow's highest peak, Lugnaquilla, is Glenmalure, a dark and sombre blind valley flanked by scree slopes of loose boulders.

After coming over the mountains into Glenmalure you turn northwest at the Drumgoff bridge. From there it's about 6km up the road beside the River Avonbeg to a car park where trails lead off in various directions.

Glenmalure figures prominently in the national tale of resistance against the British. The valley was a clan stronghold, and in 1580 the redoubtable chieftain Fiach Mac Hugh O'Byrne (1544–97) and his band of merry men actually managed to defeat an army of 1000 English soldiers; the battle cost the lives of 800 men and drove Queen Elizabeth into an apoplectic rage. In 1597 the English avenged the disaster when they captured O'Byrne and impaled his head on the gates of Dublin Castle.

Sights & Activities

Near Drumgoff is Dwyer's or **Cullen's Rock**, which commemorates both the Glenmalure battle and Michael Dwyer, a 1798 Rising rebel who holed up here. Men were hanged from the rock during the Rising.

You can walk up Lugnaquilla Mountain or head up the blind Fraughan Rock Glen east of the car park. Alternatively, you can go straight up Glenmalure Valley passing the small, seasonal An Óige Glenmalure Hostel, after which the trail divides – heading northeast, the trail takes you over the hills to Glendalough, while going northwest brings you into the Glen of Imaal (p159).

The head of Glenmalure and parts of the neighbouring Glen of Imaal are off-limits. It's military land, well posted with warning signs.

Sleeping

Glenmalure Hostel (☎ 01-830 4555; www.anoige.ie; Greenane; dm €15; ☎ Jun-Aug, Fri & Sat only Sep-May) No phone, no electricity (lighting is by gas), just a rustic two-storey cottage with 19 beds and running water. This place has a couple of heavyweight literary links: it was once owned by WB Yeats' femme fatale, Maud Gonne, and was also the setting for JM Synge's play, *Shadow of a Gunman*. It's an isolated place, but it is beautifully situated beneath Lugnaquilla.

Glenmalure Log Cabin (☎ 01-269 6979; www.glenmalure.com; 11 Glenmalure Pines, Greenane; 2 nights €220-290, 3 nights €350-500) In the heart of Glenmalure, this modern, Scandinavian-style lodge has two en-suite rooms, a fully

equipped kitchen, a living room kitted out with all kinds of electronic amusements, including your very own DVD library. Hopefully, though, you'll spend much of your time here enjoying the panorama from the sun deck. There's a two-night minimum stay, except for July and August when it's seven days.

Birchdale House (☎ 0404 46061; tmoylan@wicklowcoco.ie; Greenane; s/d €38/65) and **Woodside** (☎ 0404 43605; www.woodsideglenmalure.com; Greenane; s/d €40/70) are two comfortable, modern homes in Greenane, towards the southern end of the valley.

WESTERN WICKLOW

As you go west through the county, the landscape gets less rugged and more rural, especially towards the borders of Kildare and Carlow. The wild terrain gives way to rich pastures: east of Blessington the countryside is dotted with private stud farms where some of the world's most expensive horses are trained in jealously guarded secrecy.

The main attraction in this part of Wicklow is the magnificent Palladian pile at Russborough House, just outside Blessington, but if it's more wild scenery you're after, you'll find it around Kilbride and the upper reaches of the River Liffey, as well as further south in the Glen of Imaal.

BLESSINGTON

☎ 045 / pop 3147

There's little to see in Blessington; it's basically made up of a long row of pubs, shops and 17th- and 18th-century town houses. It's the main town in the area, and as such makes a decent exploring base. Just outside Blessington is the Poulaphouca Reservoir, created in 1940 to drive the turbines of the local power station to the east of town and to supply Dublin with water.

The **tourist office** (☎ 865 850; Blessington Craft Centre, Main St; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) is across the road from the Downshire House Hotel.

Sights

Magnificent Russborough House (☎ 865 239; Blessington; adult/child/student €6.50/3.50/5; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat May-Sep, 10.30am-5.30pm Sun & bank holidays Apr & Oct, closed rest of year) is one of Ireland's finest stately homes, a Palladian pleasure palace built for

Joseph Leeson (1705–83), later the first Earl of Milltown and, later still, Lord Russborough. It was built between 1741 and 1751 to the design of Richard Cassels, who was at the height of his fame as an architect. Poor old Richard didn't live to see it finished, but the job was well executed by Francis Bindon. Now, let's get down to the juicy bits.

The house has always attracted unwelcome attention, beginning in 1798 when Irish forces took hold of the place during the Rising; they were soon turfed out by the British army who got so used to the comforts of the place that they didn't leave until 1801, and then only after a raging Lord Russborough challenged their commander, Lord Tyrwley, to a duel 'with blunderbusses and slugs in a sawpit'. Miaow.

The house remained in the Leeson family until 1931. In 1952 it was sold to Sir Alfred Beit, the eponymous nephew of the co-founder of the de Beers diamond-mining company. Uncle Alfred was an obsessive art collector, and when he died his impressive haul – which includes works by Velázquez, Vermeer, Goya and Rubens – was passed on to his nephew, who brought it to Russborough House. The collection was to attract the interest of more than just art-lovers.

In 1974 the IRA decided to get into the art business by robbing 16 of the paintings. They were eventually all recovered, but 10 years later the notorious Dublin criminal Martin Cahill (aka the General) masterminded another robbery, this time for Loyalist paramilitaries. On this occasion, however, only some of the works were recovered and of those several were damaged beyond repair – a good thief does not a gentle curator make. In 1988 Beit got the picture and decided to hand over the most valuable of the paintings to the National Gallery; in return for the gift, the gallery agreed to lend other paintings to the collection as temporary exhibits. The sorry story didn't conclude there. In 2001 two thieves took the direct approach and drove a jeep through the front doors, making off with two paintings worth nearly €4 million, including a Gainsborough that had been stolen, and recovered, twice before. And then, to add abuse to the insult already added to injury, the house was broken into again in 2002, with the thieves taking five more paintings, including two by Rubens. Incredibly, however, both hauls were quickly recovered.

The admission price includes a 45-minute tour of the house and all the important paintings, which, given the history, is a monumental exercise in staying positive. Whatever you do, make no sudden moves. You can take an additional 30-minute **tour** (adult/child €4/free; 🕒 2.15pm Mon-Sat, hourly on Sun) of the bedrooms upstairs, which contain more silver and furniture.

Activities

Rathsallagh Golf Club (📞 403 316; green fees hotel guest/visitor €65/80) is known – somewhat optimistically – as 'Augusta without the Azelias', but it is still one of the best parkland courses in Ireland, stretching over 6.5km amid mature trees, small lakes and shallow streams.

Sleeping & Eating

Haylands House (📞 865 183; haylands@eircom.net; Dublin Rd; s/d €45/70; 📍) We highly recommend this comfortable B&B for its lovely rooms (all with en suite), warm welcome and excellent breakfast. It's only 500m out of town on the main Dublin road. As it's popular, book early if you can.

ourpick **Rathsallagh House & Country Club** (📞 403 112; www.rathsallaghhousehotel.com; Dunlavin; s/d from €135/185) About 20km south of Blessington, this fabulous country manor, converted from Queen Anne stables in 1798, is more than just a fancy hotel. Luxury is par for the course here, from the splendidly appointed rooms to the exquisite country-house dining (the food here is some of the best you'll eat anywhere in Ireland; five-course meals are €65) and the marvellous golf course that surrounds the estate. Even the breakfast is extraordinary: it has won the National Breakfast Award three times. (Is there anything Irish tourism doesn't have an award for?)

Grangecon Café (📞 857 892; Tullow Rd; mains €9-16; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat) Salads, home-baked dishes and a full menu of Irish cheeses are the staples at this tiny, terrific café in a converted schoolhouse. Everything here – from the pasta to the delicious apple juice – has a wholesome flavour and many of the ingredients are organic. A short but solid menu will leave you satisfied and encouraged about the future of Irish dining.

Getting There & Away

Blessington is 35km southwest of Dublin on the N81. There are regular daily services by

Dublin Bus (📞 01-872 0000, 873 4222); catch bus 65 from Eden Quay in Dublin (€3.60, 1½ hours, every 1½ hours). **Bus Éireann** (📞 01-836 6111) operates express bus 005 to and from Waterford, with stops in Blessington two or three times daily; from Dublin it's pick-up only, and from Waterford drop-off only.

GLEN OF IMAAL

About 7km southeast of Donard, the lovely Glen of Imaal is about the only scenery of consequence on the western flanks of the Wicklow Mountains. It's named after Mal, brother of the 2nd-century king of Ireland, Cathal Mór. Unfortunately, the glen's north-eastern slopes are mostly cordoned off as an army firing range and for manoeuvres. Look out for red danger signs.

The area's most famous son was Michael Dwyer, who led rebel forces during the 1798 Rising and held out for five years in the local hills and glens. On the southeastern side of the glen at Derrynamuck is a small white-washed, thatched cottage where Dwyer and three friends were surrounded by 100 English soldiers. One of Dwyer's companions, Samuel McAllister, ran out the front, drawing fire and meeting his death, while Dwyer escaped into the night. He was eventually deported in 1803 and jailed on Norfolk Island, off the eastern coast of Australia. He became chief constable of Liverpool, near Sydney, before he died in 1825. The cottage is now a small **folk museum** (📞 0404-45325; Derrynamuck; admission free; 🕒 2-6pm mid-Jun–Sep) located on the Knockanarrigan–Rathdangan road.

THE COAST

Mountains and other inland marvels dominate Wicklow's impressive scenery, but the coastline has some very pretty spots between the largely unassuming towns and small coastal resorts. Most attractive of all are the fine beaches of Brittas Bay, a wide lazy arc of coastline between Wicklow and Arklow. Running alongside it is the N11 (M11) from Dublin to Wexford, a busy road that cuts through a great glacial rift, the **Glen of the Downs**, carved out of an Ice Age lake by floodwaters. There's a forest walk up to a ruined teahouse on top of the ridge to the east. If you're looking for quieter and more scenic coastal byways, we recommend the

coastal route through Greystones, Kilcoole and then along country lanes to Rathnew.

BRAY

📞 01 / pop 26,200

You'd be hard pressed to find traces of the glorious seaside resort once described as the 'Irish Brighton', but the sleepy dormitory town of Bray is a fairly pleasant spot, and you could do far worse than spend an afternoon strolling up and down the promenade or messing about on the beach. Its proximity to Dublin on the DART line means that there's no reason to overnight here, but you'll have to resist the late-night temptations of one of our favourite bars in Ireland. There's also a great scenic walk from here south to Greystones.

Information

The **tourist office** (📞 286 7128, 286 6796; 🕒 9.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, 2-4.30pm Oct-May) is in the courthouse (built in 1841) beside the Royal Hotel at the bottom of Main St.

Sights

Top of the pretty small heap is the **heritage centre** (📞 286 7128; Old Courthouse; adult/student €4/2; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) above the tourist office, where you can explore Bray's 1000-year history and examine the lengths to which engineer William Dargan (1799–1867) went to bring the railroad to Bray. Your kids will hate you for it.

You can make it up to them at the **National Sealife Centre** (📞 286 6939; www.sealifeeurope.com; Strand Rd; adult/child €10.50/7; 🕒 11am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun). The British-run aquarium has a fairly big selection of tanks stocked with 70 different sea and freshwater species.

About 3km south of Bray on the Greystones road are **Killruddery House & Gardens** (📞 286 3405; www.killruddery.com; Killruddery; house & gardens adult/child €10/3, gardens only €6/2; 🕒 1-5pm May, Jun & Sep). A stunning mansion in the Elizabethan Revival style, Killruddery has been home to the Brabazon family (earls of Meath) since 1618 and has one of the oldest gardens in Ireland. The house, designed by trendy 19th-century architects Richard Morrisson and his son William in 1820, was *reduced* to its present-day huge proportions by the 14th earl in 1953; he was obviously looking for something a little more bijou. The house is impressive, but the prize-winner here is the magnificent orangery, built in 1852 and chock-full of statuary and

plant life. If you like fancy glasshouses, this is the one for you.

Activities

One of the most beautiful **coastal walks** in Wicklow stretches from the southern end of Bray's promenade over Bray Head and down to the tiny commuter town of Greystones, 7km further south. The path is pretty smooth and easy to follow, but you can make a detour and clamber up **Bray Head** (240m) through the pine trees all the way to the large cross, erected in 1950. The head is full of old smuggling caves and railway tunnels, including one that's 1.5km long. From the top, there are fine views of the Great Sugarloaf Mountain. Back on the coastal path, you approach Greystones via a narrow footbridge over the railway, after which the path narrows until you hit the lovely harbour in Greystones. Here you should relax in **Byrne's** (Greystones Pier), better known as Dan's, which serves a gorgeous pint.

Festivals

The **Bray Jazz Festival** (www.brayjazz.com) brings some pretty decent players to the seaside town over the May Bank Holiday – the first weekend of the month.

Eating

There are a couple of half-decent spots for a bite of lunch in Bray; one in particular has a lovely seafront setting.

Betelnut Café (☎ 272 4030; Mermaid Art Centre, Main St; snacks €3-7; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun, late on show nights) A decent café in an arts centre? Rather than reflect on Bray's lack of choice, head to this really good spot for a lunchtime nibble or a pre-theatre bite; sandwiches and salads are freshly prepared and the coffee is done just right.

Barracuda (☎ 276 5686; Strand Rd; mains €16-25; ☎ noon-9pm) When you've had your fill of live sea creatures in the National Sealife Centre, head upstairs to this minimalist, metal-and-mirrors restaurant and see what happens to Nemo when a really good chef gets his hands on him...or not. For your newly found love of the sea and all its inhabitants, there's always a good steak.

Drinking & Entertainment

Harbour Bar (☎ 286 2274; Seapoint Rd) A strong contender for Ireland's best pub, here you can enjoy an excellent pint of Guinness in a quiet

atmosphere of conviviality. There is a separate lounge with velvet curtains, assorted paintings and cosy couches. Sundays see the gay and lesbian community chill to some terrific DJs.

Clancy's Bar (☎ 286 3191; Quinnsboro Rd) A real spit-and-sawdust kind of place with a clientele as old as the wood in the bar; it's perfect for a quiet pint and a chat.

Porter House (☎ 286 0668; Strand Rd) The Bray branch of one of Temple Bar's most popular pubs, this equally popular watering hole does a roaring trade in beers from around the world as well as its own selection of intoxicating brews. It's all a little too cheesy for our tastes.

Mermaid Art Centre (☎ 272 4030; Main St; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) An art gallery, theatre and cinema. The theatre puts on excellent gigs and modern, experimental-style plays, while the cinema shows art-house movies almost exclusively. Call to check prices. The art gallery has constantly changing exhibitions featuring the latest Irish and European works.

Getting There & Away

BUS

With the **Dublin Bus** (☎ 872 0000) service, buses 45 (from Hawkins St) and 84 (from Burgh Quay) serve Bray (one way €2.30, one hour).

St Kevin's Bus (☎ 281 8119; www.glendaloughbus.com) to Dublin departs from Bray Town Hall (€2.50, 50 minutes) at 8am and 5pm Monday to Friday, 10.30am and 5pm Saturday, 10.30am and 6.30pm Sunday. From Dublin, buses depart from in front of the Mansion House on Dawson St.

TRAIN

Bray train station (☎ 236 3333) is 500m east of Main St just before the seafront. The DART (one way €3, 30 minutes) runs into Dublin and further north to Howth every five minutes at peak times and every 20 or 30 minutes at quiet times.

The station is also on the main line from Dublin to Wexford and Rosslare Harbour, with up to five trains daily in each direction Monday to Saturday, and four on Sunday.

KILMACANOUGE & THE GREAT SUGARLOAF

☎ 01 / pop 850

At 503m, it's not even Wicklow's highest mountain, but the Great Sugarloaf is one of the most distinctive peaks in Ireland, its conical tip visible for many miles around.

The mountain towers over the small village of Kilmacanogue, on the N11 about 4km south of Bray, which would barely merit a passing nod were it not for the presence of the mother of all Irish craft shops just across the road from the village.

Avoca Handweavers (☎ 286 7466; www.avoca.ie; Main St) is one hell of an operation, with seven branches nationwide and an even more widespread reputation for adding elegance and style to traditional rural handicrafts. Operational HQ is in a 19th-century arboretum, and its showroom will leave you in no doubt as to the company's incredible success.

Shopping for pashminas and placemats can put a fierce hunger on you, and there's no better place to satisfy it than at the shop's splendid **restaurant** (mains €11-16; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm), which puts a premium on sourcing the very best ingredients for its dishes. It is best known for its beef-and-Guinness casserole, but vegetarians are very well catered for as well. Many of the recipes are available in the two volumes of the *Avoca Cookbook*, both on sale for €25.

Bus Éireann (☎ 836 6111) operates bus 133 from Dublin to Wicklow town and Arklow, with stops in Kilmacanogue (one way/return €3.20/5.10, 30 minutes, 10 daily).

GREYSTONES TO WICKLOW

The resort of Greystones, 8km south of Bray, was once a charming fishing village, and the seafront around the little harbour is idyllic. In summer, the bay is dotted with dinghies and windsurfers. Sadly, the surrounding countryside is vanishing beneath housing developments.

WALK: THE GREAT SUGARLOAF

Before you attack the 7km, moderately difficult walk to the summit, we recommend that you get the *Wicklow Trail Sheet No 4* (€1.50) from the tourist office in Bray.

Start your walk by taking the small road opposite **St Mochonog's Church** (named after the missionary who administered the last rites to St Kevin). Ignore the left turn and continue round the bend until you get to a small bridge on your right. To your right, you'll see the expanse of the **Rocky Valley** below, a defile eroded by water escaping from a glacial lake that developed during the last Ice Age about 10,000 years ago. Continue on the path until you reach a fork: the lower road to the right continues round the mountain, while the left turn will take you up to the summit. As you reach the top, the track starts to drop; turn left and scramble up the rocky gully to the top. Return by the same path and continue southwards until you reach a large grassy area. Cross it, keeping to your left until you reach a gate. With the fence on your right, go downhill until you reach a path of grass and stones. This path takes you around the southern side of the mountain, where you will eventually pass a small wood on your right. Immediately afterwards you will see, on your left, a sports pitch known as the Quill. Beyond it is Kilmacanogue.

Sights

Horticulturalists from around the world can be found salivating and muttering in approval as they walk around the 8-hectare **Mt Usher Gardens** (☎ 0404-40116; www.mountushergardens.ie; adult/child/student €7/3/6; ☎ 10.30am-6pm mid-Apr-Oct), just outside the unremarkable town of Ashford, about 10km south of Greystones on the N11. OK, not really, but the gardens are pretty special, with trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants from around the world laid out in Rob-insonian style – ie according to the naturalist principles of famous Irish gardener William Robinson (1838-1935) – rather than the formalist style of preceding gardens.

Sleeping

Hunter's Hotel (☎ 40106; www.hunters.ie; Newrath Bridge, Rathnew; s/d from €100/170; ☎ P) This exquisite property just outside Rathnew on the R761 is an absolute find, with 16 stunning rooms, each decorated with unerringly good taste. The house, one of Ireland's oldest coaching inns, is surrounded by an award-winning garden that is part of the Wicklow Gardens Festival (see the boxed text, p163).

Eating

Hungry Monk (☎ 287 5759; Church Rd; mains €13-23; ☎ 7-11pm Wed-Sat, 12.30-9pm Sun) An excellent 1st-floor restaurant on Greystones' main street. The blackboard specials are the real treat, with dishes like suckling pig with prune and apricot stuffing to complement the fixed menu's classic choices – fresh seafood, Wicklow rack of lamb, bangers 'n' mash and so forth. This is one of the better

WICKLOW GARDENS FESTIVAL

More than 40 private and public gardens participate in the yearly **Wicklow Gardens Festival** (☎ 20070; www.wicklow.ie), which runs from the beginning of May roughly through to the middle of August. The obvious advantage for green thumbs and other garden enthusiasts is access to beautiful gardens that would ordinarily be closed to the public. Some of the larger gardens are open throughout the festival, while other smaller ones only open at specific times; call or check the website for details of entrants, openings and special events, including all manner of horticultural courses.

places to get a bite along the whole of the Wicklow coast.

ourpick Organic Life/Marc Michel (☎ 201 1882; Tinna Parc, Kilpedder; mains around €16; ☎ 10am-5pm, restaurant noon-4pm) Our favourite spot in all of Wicklow is this superb organic restaurant attached to the Organic Life shop in the town of Kilpedder, about 2km south of the Greystones turnoff on the N11. All of the vegetables are grown in the fields surrounding you, while the beef served in the superb burger is bought from a local cattle rancher. The only pity is that it's only open for lunch.

Getting There & Away

Bus Éireann (☎ 836 6111) operates bus 133 from Dublin to Wicklow Town and Arklow with stops outside Ashford House (one way/return €5.50/7.90, one hour, 10 daily).

WICKLOW TOWN

☎ 0404 / pop 7031

Bustling Wicklow town has a fine harbour and a commanding position on the crescent curve of the wide bay, which stretches north for about 12km and includes a long pebble beach that makes for a fine walk. Besides one top-notch attraction, there's not much to keep the visitor but it is a decent exploring base. The **tourist office** (☎ 69117; www.wicklow.ie; Fitzwilliam Sq; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Jun-Sep, 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Oct-May, closed Sun) is in the heart of town.

Sights

WICKLOW'S HISTORIC GAOL

Wicklow's infamous **gaol** (☎ 61599; www.wicklows-historicgaol.com; Kilmantin Hill; adult/child/student incl

tour €6.80/3.95/4.90; ☎ 10am-6pm, last admission 5pm), opened in 1702 to deal with prisoners sentenced under the repressive Penal Laws, was renowned throughout Ireland for the brutality of its keepers and the harsh conditions suffered by its inmates. The smells, vicious beatings, shocking food and disease-ridden air have long since gone, but adults and children alike can experience a sanitised version of what the prison was like – and stimulate the secret sadist buried deep within – in the highly entertaining tour of the prison, now one of Wicklow's most popular tourist attractions. Actors play the roles of the various gaolers and prisoners, adding to the sense of drama already heightened by the various exhibits on show, including a life-size treadmill that prisoners would have to turn for hours on end as punishment, and the gruesome dungeon.

On the 2nd floor is a model of the HMS *Hercules*, a convict ship that was used to transport convicts to New South Wales under the captaincy of the psychotic Luckyn Betts: six months under his iron rule and most began to see death as a form of mercy. The top floor is devoted to the stories of the prisoners once they arrived in Australia. Tours are every 10 minutes except between 1pm and 2pm.

OTHER SIGHTS

The few remaining fragments of the **Black Castle** are on the shore at the southern end of town, with pleasant views up and down the coast. The castle was built in 1169 by the Fitzgeralds from Wales after they were granted land in the area by the Anglo-Norman conqueror, Strongbow. It used to be linked to the mainland by a drawbridge, and rumour has it that an escape tunnel ran from the sea cave underneath up into the town. At low tide you can swim or snorkel into the cave.

The walk south of town along the cliffs to **Wicklow Head** offers great views of the Wicklow Mountains. A string of **beaches** – Silver Strand, Brittas Bay and Maheramore – start 16km south of Wicklow. With high dunes, safe bathing and powdery sand, the beaches attract droves of Dubliners in good weather.

Festivals

The long-established **Wicklow Regatta Festival** (☎ 68354) is held every year for 10 days between July and August. The extensive programme of events and activities includes swimming,

rowing, sailing and raft races, singing competitions, concerts and the Festival Queen Ball.

Sleeping & Eating

Town lodgings aren't anything unusual, but there are a couple of places within a few kilometres of Wicklow that are pretty special. If you're looking for something central for a night's stay, there's a clutch of B&Bs in and around Dunbur Hill and a few more uphill along St Patrick's Rd.

Grand Hotel (☎ 67337; www.grandhotel.ie; Abbey St; s/d from €85/125; ☎) Wicklow town's best accommodation is this mock-Tudor hotel that is quite a bit short of 'grand', but it's a handsome, comfortable place nonetheless. The rooms are immaculate, and the smallish size of the place assures a personalised, friendly service.

Wicklow Bay Hostel (☎ 69213, 61174; www.wicklow-bayhostel.com; Marine House; dm €15; ☎) This large, bright-yellow hostel overlooking the harbour is a long-standing favourite with backpackers, who appreciate the spotless dorms, friendly buzz and two enormous kitchens.

Bakery Restaurant (☎ 66770; Church St; mains €18-32; ☎ 6-10pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-3.30pm & 6-10pm Sun) A mouth-watering menu that changes monthly offers all kinds of good dishes – from rich game meats to interesting vegetarian options. This is perhaps the best restaurant in town.

Getting There & Around

Bus Éireann (☎ 01-836 6111) runs bus 133, serving Wicklow town from Dublin (€7, 1½ hours, 10 daily); Wicklow town is also served by express bus 2 running between Dublin (one hour, 12 daily) and Rosslare Harbour.

Iarnród Éireann (Irish Rail; ☎ 01-836 6222) serves Wicklow town from Dublin on the main Dublin to Rosslare Harbour line (one way/return €12.50/15.50, one hour, five daily). The station is a 10-minute walk north of the town centre.

DETOUR: TINAKILLY COUNTRY HOUSE & RESTAURANT

Wicklow has no shortage of fine country homes converted into luxury manor hotels, but **Tinakilly Country House & Restaurant** (☎ 69274; www.tinakilly.ie; Rathnew; s/d from €169/334), a magnificent Victorian Italianate house just outside Rathnew (about 5km west of Wicklow town) stands out for sheer elegance. The guest rooms are divided between the period rooms in the west wing, decked out in original antiques, four-poster and half-tester canopy beds; and the shockingly sumptuous suites in the east wing, which have gorgeous views of either the richly colourful garden or the Irish Sea, albeit somewhere in the distance. And then there's the restaurant, which takes country-house cuisine to a whole new level of sophistication. A five-course dinner costs €55.

Wicklow Cabs (☎ 66888; Main St) usually sends a few cabs to meet the evening trains from Dublin. The fare to anywhere in town should be no more than €5.

SOUTHERN WICKLOW

RATHDRUM

☎ 0404 / pop 2123

The quiet village of Rathdrum at the foot of the Vale of Clara comprises little more than a few old houses and shops, but in the late 19th century it had a healthy flannel industry and a poorhouse. It's not what's in the town that's of interest to visitors, however, but what's just outside it.

The small **tourist office** (☎ 46262; 29 Main St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) has leaflets and information on the town and surrounding area, including the Wicklow Way.

Sights

Woe be to the man by whom the scandal cometh...It would be better for him that a millstone were tied about his neck and that he were cast into the depth of the sea rather than he should scandalise one of these, my least little ones.

James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

Joyce's fictional dinner-table argument wasn't about a murderer or any such criminal, but about Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–91), the 'uncrowned king of Ireland' and unquestionably one of the key figures in the Irish independence movement. **Avondale House**, a marvellous 209-hectare estate, dominated by a fine Palladian **mansion** (☎ 46111; adult/student & child €5/4.50; ☎ 11am-6pm May-Aug, Tue-Sun only Mar, Apr,

Sep & Oct, by appointment only rest of year), designed by James Wyatt in 1779, was his birthplace and Irish headquarters. Of the house's many highlights, the most impressive are the stunning vermilion-coloured library (Parnell's favourite room) and beautiful dining room.

From 1880 to 1890, Avondale was synonymous with the fight for Home Rule, which was brilliantly led by Parnell until 1890 when a member of his own Irish Parliamentary Party, Captain William O'Shea, sued his wife Kitty for divorce and named Parnell as co-respondent. Parnell's affair with Kitty scandalised this 'priest-ridden' nation, and the ultraconservative clergy declared that Parnell was 'unfit to lead' – despite the fact that as soon as the divorce was granted the two lovers were quickly married. Parnell resigned as leader of the party and withdrew in despair to Avondale, where he died the following year.

Surrounding the house are 200 hectares of forest and parkland, where the first silvicultural experiments by the Irish Forestry Service (Coillte) were conceived, after the purchase of the house by the state in 1904. These plots, about half a hectare in size, are still visible today, flanking what many consider to be the best of Avondale's many walking trails, the Great Ride. You can visit the park during daylight hours year-round.

Sleeping

Old Presbytery Hostel (☎ 46930; www.hostels-ireland.com; the Fairgreen, Rathdrum; dm/d €15/40; (P)) A modern, centrally located IHH hostel that looks more like campus accommodation. There is a mix of large, comfy dorms and well-appointed en-suite doubles as well as family rooms. A laundry and a TV room round off the facilities. You can also camp in the grounds.

our pick **Brook Lodge & Wells Spa** (☎ 0402-36444; www.brooklodge.com; Macreddin; r/ste from €260/330; (P)) The favourite chill-out spot for Dublin's high-flyers is this luxurious country house about 3km west of Rathdrum in the village of Macreddin. The 39 standard rooms set a pretty high tone, with four-poster and sleigh beds dressed in crisp Frette linen, but the suites sing an altogether more harmonious tune, each a minimalist marvel that wouldn't seem out of place in a New York boutique hotel – massive beds, flat-screen plasma TVs, top-of-the-range sound system and every other style sundry. The accommodation is pure luxury, but it's the outstanding spa that keeps guests

coming back for more. Mud and flotation chambers, Finnish and aroma baths, Hammam massages and a full-range of Decléor and Carita treatments make this one of the top spas in the country. Your credit card will never have nestled in softer hands.

Getting There & Away

Bus Éireann (☎ 8366111) service 133 goes to Rathdrum from Dublin (one way/return €8/10.20, 1¾ hours, 10 daily) on its way to Arklow.

Iarnród Éireann (☎ 01-836 6222) serves Rathdrum from Dublin on the main Dublin to Rosslare Harbour line (one way/return €13.50/16.50, 1¼ hours, five daily).

VALE OF AVOCA

In summer, tour buses and other interested parties clog the road through the scenic Vale of Avoca on their way to the renowned mills in the eponymous village. En route, tourists ooh and aah at the gorgeous scenery of the darkly wooded valley which begins where the Rivers Avonbeg and Avonmore come together to form the River Avoca. This is a lovely spot suitably named the **Meeting of the Waters**, made famous by Thomas Moore's 1808 poem of the same name.

The Meeting of the Waters is marked by a pub called the **Meetings** (☎ 0402-35226; www.themeetingsavoca.com; s/d €40/65; ☎ noon-9pm), which serves food (mains €10 to €19) and has music on weekends year-round. There are *céilidhs* (traditional music and dancing sessions) between 4pm and 6pm Sunday, April to October. There's also a guesthouse attached (known as Robin's Nest) with decent, clean rooms. Buses to Avoca from Dublin stop at the Meetings, or you can walk from Avoca, 3km south of here.

Avoca

☎ 0402 / pop 570

The tiny village of Avoca (Abhóca) still trades on its setting for the now-defunct BBC TV series *Ballykissangel*, but the main reason to visit is to amble about – and hopefully spend loads of money in – the superstar of all Irish cottage industries, **Avoca Handweavers** (☎ 35105; www.avoca.ie; Old Mill, Main St; ☎ 9.30am-6pm), housed in Ireland's oldest working mill.

It's been turning out linens, wools and other fabrics since 1723, and all of Avoca's much-admired line is produced here. You are free to wander in and out of the weaving sheds.

Just in case you might want some local info, the **tourist office** (☎ 35022; Old Courthouse; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat) is in the library.

SLEEPING

River Valley Park (☎ 41647; fax 41677; camp sites €14) This well-equipped camp site is about 1km south of the village of Redcross, 7km north-east of Avoca on the R754 country road.

Koliba (☎ /fax 32737; www.koliba.com; Beech Rd; s/d €48.50/69; ☎ Apr-Oct) A thoroughly modern bungalow with comfortable, well-appointed rooms (all with en suite). LKoliba is 3km out of Avoca on the Arklow road.

Sheepwalk House & Cottages (☎ 35189; www.sheepwalk.com; Arklow Rd; s/d €55/90, cottages per week €275-659) Built in 1727 for the Earl of Wicklow, this is our favourite place to stay in Avoca (although it's 2km out of town). The main house is splendid, with beautifully appointed rooms, while the converted outbuildings – complete with beamed ceilings, fireplaces and flagstone floors – are a wonderful option for groups of four or six.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus Éireann (☎ 8366111) operates bus 133 from Dublin, which serves Avoca via Bray, Wicklow and Rathdrum on its way to Arklow (one way/return €8.80/12.20, two hours, 10 daily).

ARKLOW

☎ 0402 / pop 9955

Wicklow's biggest and busiest town is a thriving commercial centre built around what was once an important local port. Although this may not inspire you to change route and come here, chances are if you're in this part of the county you'll probably end up here anyway. There's a local belief that the town is included in Ptolemy's 2nd-century map of Europe, but what is absolutely verifiable is that Sir Francis Chichester's prize-winning transatlantic yacht *Gypsy Moth III* (now in Greenwich, England) was built here.

The town's seafaring past is explored in the small **maritime museum** (☎ 32868; St Mary's Rd; admission €3.50; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat May-Sep), which features a model of the *Titanic*, some salvaged items from the *Lusitania* and

an extraordinary model of a ship made from 10,000 matchsticks.

For all other info, there's the **tourist office** (☎ 32484; www.arklow.ie; ☎ 9.30am-1pm Mon-Sat Jun-Sep) in the Coach House.

There is a white, sandy beach, but it lies between the docks and a gravel plant; you're better off heading 10km north to **Brittas Bay** or 7km south to the more sheltered **Clogga Beach**.

Sleeping & Eating

Plattenstown House (☎ /fax 37822; Coolgreany Rd; s/d €40/65; (P)) This gorgeous traditional farmhouse set in 50 acres of land about 5km south of town. Family antiques throughout this elegant 19th-century home, great views of the lovingly tended gardens and comfortable, well-appointed rooms make this place a terrific choice in the area.

Otherwise, there's a fairly broad range of decent B&Bs, each offering comfortable rooms and a well-cooked breakfast. Try **Valentia House** (☎ 39200; www.geocities.com/valentiahouse; Coolgreany Rd; s/d €45/90; (P)) or **Pinebrook** (☎ 31527; www.pinebrook.net; Ticknock Close, Briggs La; s/d €42/78; (P)).

Kitty's of Arklow (☎ 31669; Main St; lunch €9-17, dinner €23-26; ☎ noon-5pm & 6-10.30pm) An Arklow institution, Kitty's serves a great version of the usual bar food choices during the day – from beef burgers to fillets of plaice – while the evening menu tackles some exciting seafood dishes and an impressive range of meat dishes. It's not new cuisine, but it's a fine take on the classics.

Getting There & Away

Bus Éireann (☎ 8366111) operates bus 133 from Dublin, which serves Avoca via Bray, Wicklow and Rathdrum on its way to Arklow (one way/return €10/12.50, 2¼ hours, 10 daily); Arklow is also served by express bus 2 between Dublin and Rosslare Harbour (1½ hours, 12 daily). All buses stop outside the Chocolate Shop.

Iarnród Éireann (☎ 01-836 6222) serves Arklow from Dublin (one way/return €13.20/16.50, 1¼ hours, five daily) on the Arrow suburban line as well as by Intercity train to Rosslare Harbour – the price is the same no matter which train you take.

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