



Wilderness Ireland



Essential Guide

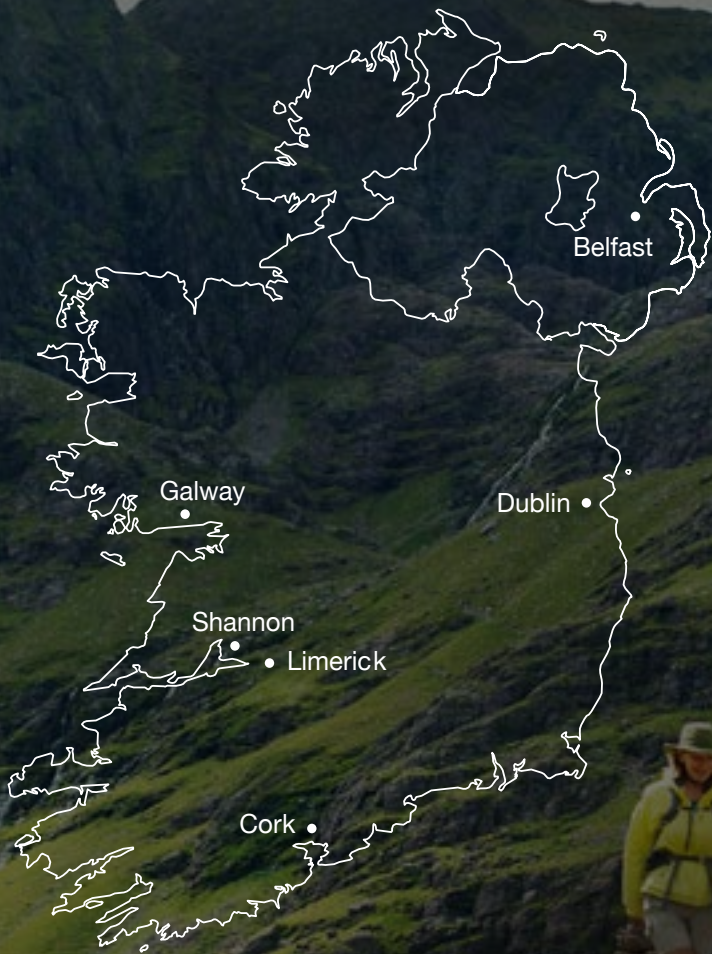
Hiking in Ireland

[Explore](#)

Hiking 101

Plan your next adventure with confidence. With our 101 guide to hiking.

Our Top 10 Hikes



Myths and Legends

Story-telling was a favourite art among Gaelic-speaking people. See how these ancient tales live on.

Ireland's Weather



Finding Your Way



Travel Essentials



Culture and Customs

Discover Ireland's rich heritage and traditions.



Hiking in Ireland

From coast to cliff, from mountain to forest, Ireland is perfect for hiking. Discover general information about hiking in Ireland.

What to Wear

Get kitted out for your day exploring Ireland's wild places.



Recommended Reads

Want to find out more about hiking in Ireland or hiking in general, then check our recommended list of further reading.

Stats & Facts



Benefits of Hiking

Get in Touch

Hiking 101

Get to grips with everything you need to know for a fantastic day hiking in the Irish wilderness. With a little research and some forward planning you can ensure you chosen the right hike for your experience level. This will go a long way towards making sure your hike. is one to remember for all the right reasons.



Know your Gear

When hiking it’s vital to plan ahead and make sure you’ve got everthing you need for a day out on the trails.

The right clothes and equipment can be the difference between an amazing day out and a new hobby for life or a nightmare that sees you never wanting to hike again.

For more information about choosing the right gear check out our [What to Wear](#) and [Finding Your Way](#) pages, to find out what you need to be prepared for your next hike.



Leave No Trace

Leave No Trace principles are a set of guidelines everyone should follow in the outdoors.

They’re designed to show you how to minimize your impact on your natural surroundings. They go beyond simply cleaning up after yourself – and teach how to leave your surroundings as if you were never there at all.

The Leave No Trace 7 Principles

- Plan Ahead and Prepare
- Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces
- Dispose of Waste Properly
- Leave What You Find
- Minimize Campfire Impacts
- Respect Wildlife
- Be Considerate of Other Visitors



Stay Hydrated

Always bring more water than you think you’ll need. This is easy enough on shorter hikes. However if you’re going out for longer and more difficult hikes, you should consider learning how to purify water from streams and lakes.

This way you can minimize the amount you’re carrying but still stay safely hydrated.



Share your Plans

No matter what, always tell friends or family about your hiking plans and what to do if they do not hear from you by a set time.

In case of a serious emergency, you’ll be thankful someone is looking out for you.



Hike Difficulty and Grading



At Wilderness Ireland we use a colour grading system of either green, blue or red for determining a hike’s difficulty, with green hikes being the most accessible and red hikes being the most difficult. Within each of the colour grades, there are numbered sub-grades with 1 being easiest and 9 being the most challenging.

Each of the grades is worked out based on a number of factors, with the level of physical challenge being the most significant. Technical skills and experience required are also important contributors when working out a hike’s grade.

Hiking in Ireland

The Emerald Isle is a land seemingly created for hiking. Rolling hills, wild bogs, majestic mountains, ancient megalithic tombs, sheep-dotted hills, rugged coasts, country lanes... all this and more awaits the intrepid hiker.

So dig out your sturdy hiking boots and waterproof jackets and head out to the wilds!



Where Can I Hike?

Unlike in Scotland and across Scandinavia, there are no “Rights to Roam” or “Every Man’s Right” that would allow hikers access to roam on any land public or private.

Instead, the majority of the waymarked or signposted trails in Ireland cross private land, and are only signposted for hikers with the agreement of the landowner(s).

Hiking on Public Land in Ireland

Ireland has 6 national parks maintained by the Irish government. National park trails are exceedingly well maintained, with clean facilities and an extensive visitor’s centre.

In addition, the National Waymarked Trails association maintain over 40 Irish trails around Ireland, including the Dingle Way, the Wicklow Way and the Kerry Way, as well as other shorter hikes. Forestry service agency Coillte maintains another 12 forest parks as well as 180 recreational sites throughout Ireland.

Hiking on Private Land in Ireland

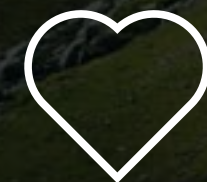
You need permission to hike on any trails that run through private land. These routes are often maintained by the landowner (usually a farmer) which means that the state of the paths can’t be guaranteed.

Some trails may be rough or boggy as well as traverse livestock pastures, so caution should be taken. In some cases, the way may be open to the public, but no trail is marked. In cases such as this, it is best to hike with a guide.

Benefits of Hiking

Hiking is an immersive way to get outdoors, slow down, breathe fresh air and become part of the natural world while exploring a new place.

- **You'll experience life slower.** Too often, we spend our days rushing from one thing to the next. By hiking in Ireland, you'll slow down, feel the wind in your face and the soft grass underfoot, taste the salt in the air and listen to the crash of the waves.
- **Your experiences will be more meaningful.** Walking may be tough, but the challenge of hiking through Ireland will increase your appreciation of Ireland - and if it had been too easy, you wouldn't feel such a sense of accomplishment!
- **You'll get to see places others may not know exist.** Leave the car behind and tackle trails only accessible by foot, exploring a whole world that car-dependant travellers will miss. Stumble across amazing views, deserted beaches, megalithic tombs, dramatic cliffs and more. And chances are, you'll have it all to yourself.
- **Feel connected to the island and the people who call it home.** As you walk across the rugged landscapes, follow in the footsteps of ancient ancestors. Arriving at each summit, enjoy the same view once appreciated by the people who built the local ruins, as you take a moment to try to understand what life was like for the Irish people living here over the centuries.
- **Experience Ireland the way it was meant to be.** Ireland has always been a rugged, magical place - more agricultural than urban. By walking in the wild, you'll be able to experience the true spirit of Ireland – its wild side

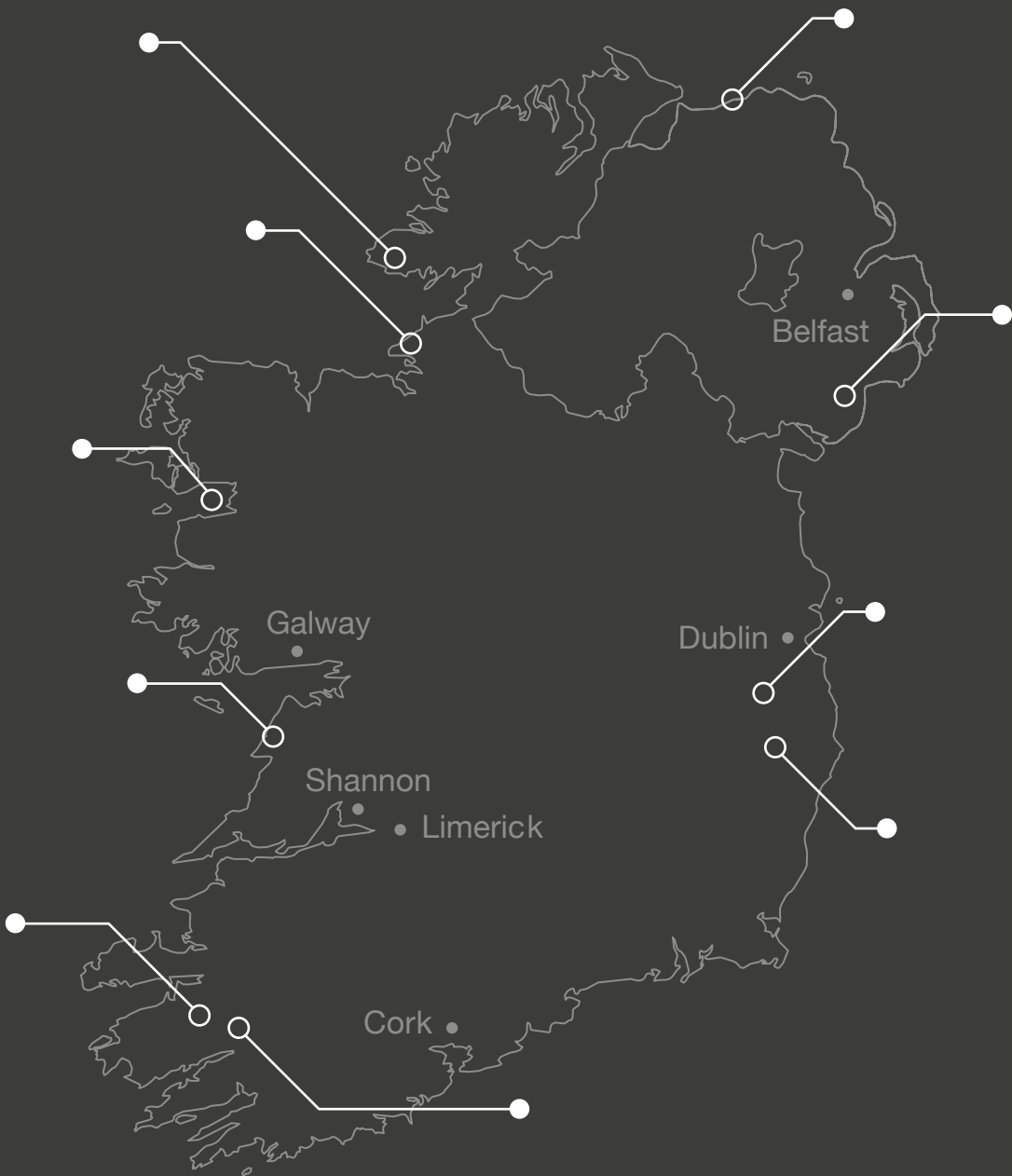


We make it easy for you to choose where to hike. Explore our interactive map for local recommendations of the best hikes in Ireland.



These routes are recommendations only and any hiking you decide to undertake is done so at your own risk.

Our Top 10 Hikes



Culture



Low Level with Mountain Views



Historic



High Points



Coastal Trails



Wildlife & Nature

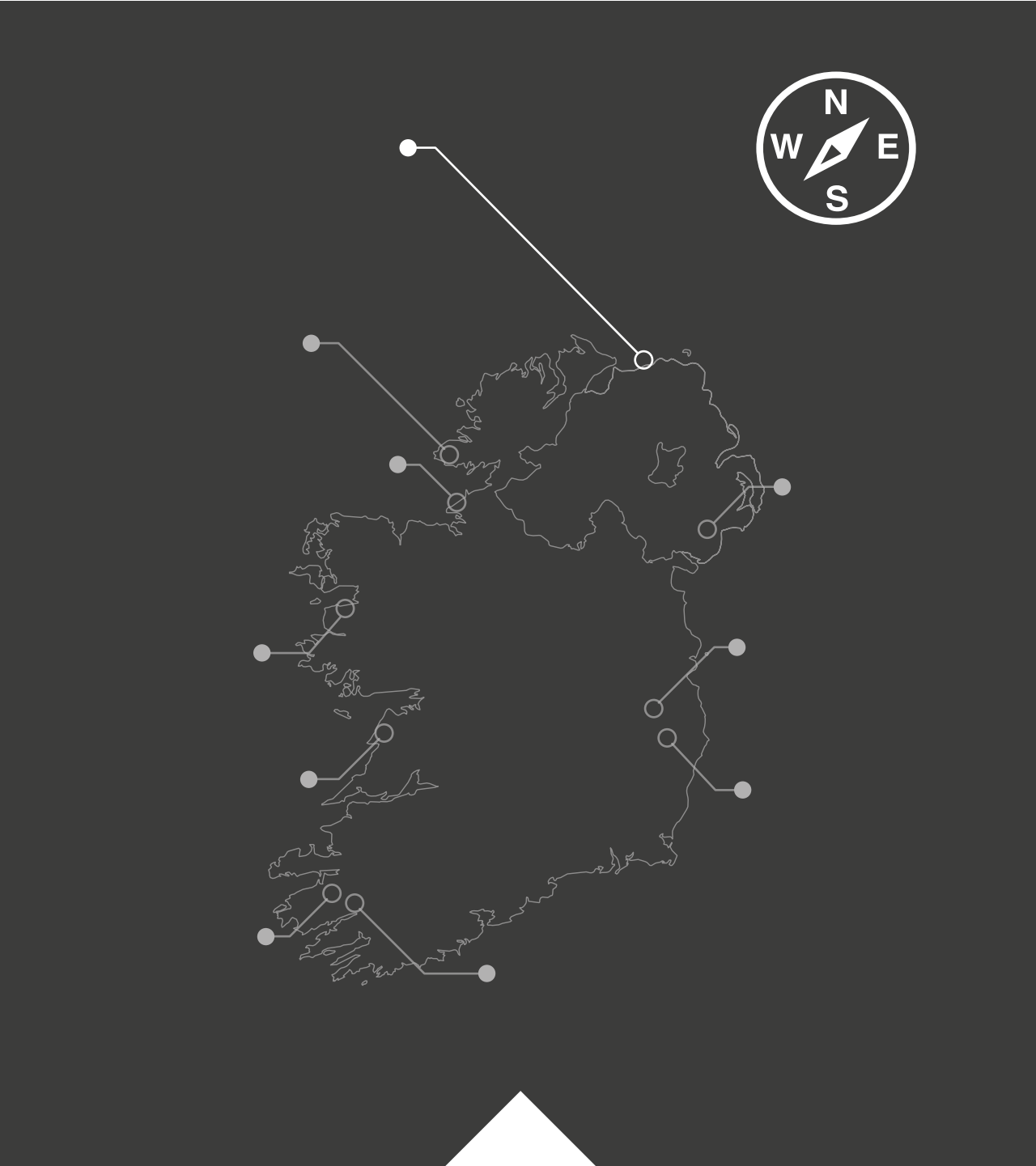
Causeway Coastal Way

Northern Ireland

Follow the wild Causeway Coast around the clifftop Dunluce Castle, through the lovely Ballintoy Harbour (better known as the Iron Isles from HBO’s Game of Thrones), past Old Bushmills Distillery, culminating at the iconic Giant’s Causeway. Visit the imagined seven kingdoms of Westeros (or at least their filming locations) and hike through the mystical countryside that inspired the Chronicles of Narnia.

Explore sections of the Causeway Coastal Way and other best hikes in Ireland on our exciting [Causeway Coastal Route & Donegal Hiking Trip](#).

[Find more info on this hike here](#)



Explore our interactive map

Distance	Duration	Start Point	Best For
33 miles/52 km	4 days	Portstewart, or Ballycastle if you do it backwards	Mystical landscapes that inspired Game of Thrones, the Chronicles of Narnia and Irish legends. Also, visit the Giant’s Causeway.

Where to Eat

At the beachside [Harry’s Shack](#), expect a menu of simple pleasures. In Bushmills, head to [Tartine at Distillers Arms](#), a charming melange of French and Irish cuisine.



Nearby Culture & Activities

Dunluce Castle, Bushmills Distillery, Ballintoy Harbour & Giant’s Causeway, Canoeing the Causeway Coast, the thrilling clifftside Gobbins Path.





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Wildlife & Nature

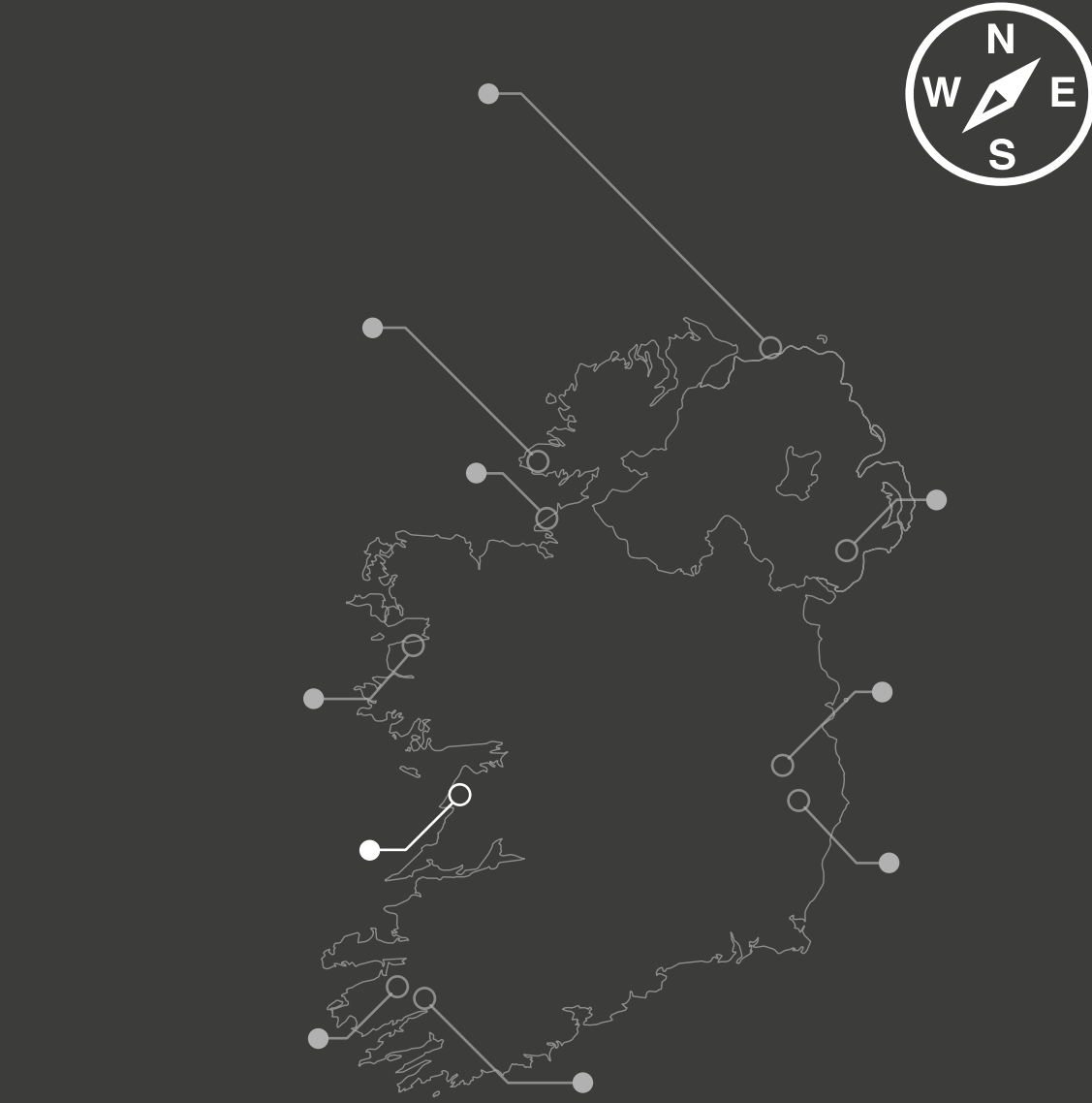
Doolin Cliff Walk

Whether you choose the shorter route finishing at the Cliffs of Moher or continue along the longer route to Liscannor, the Doolin Cliff Walk is a breathtaking hike along the sharp cliff’s edge. Hike along the narrow path to drink in dramatic views of the swirling Atlantic Ocean far below your feet. One of the best hikes in Ireland, the Doolin Cliff Walk is also called the ‘secret’ access to the famous Cliffs of Moher!

By approaching on foot from the northern end of the cliffs, this is the best way to reach the Cliffs of Moher without the majority of the crowds.

Take the Doolin Cliff Walk to the Cliffs of Moher and more on the [Hiking the Burren, Aran Islands and Connemara trip](#).

[Find more info on this hike here](#)



Explore our interactive map

Distance	Duration	Start Point	Best For
4.5 miles/7 km Longer option: 11 miles/18km	3-6 hours	Doolin village	Secret’ access to the Cliffs of Moher

Where to Eat

Enjoy fresh fish n’ chips with locally-sourced fish and hand-cut chips at [The Ivy Cottage in Doolin](#).



Nearby Culture & Activities

Discover the Cliffs of Moher by boat, pop down to Lahinch Beach for surfing lessons, island hop over to the Aran Islands, or go kayaking in Galway Bay to travel the watery realm of the Pirate Queen.





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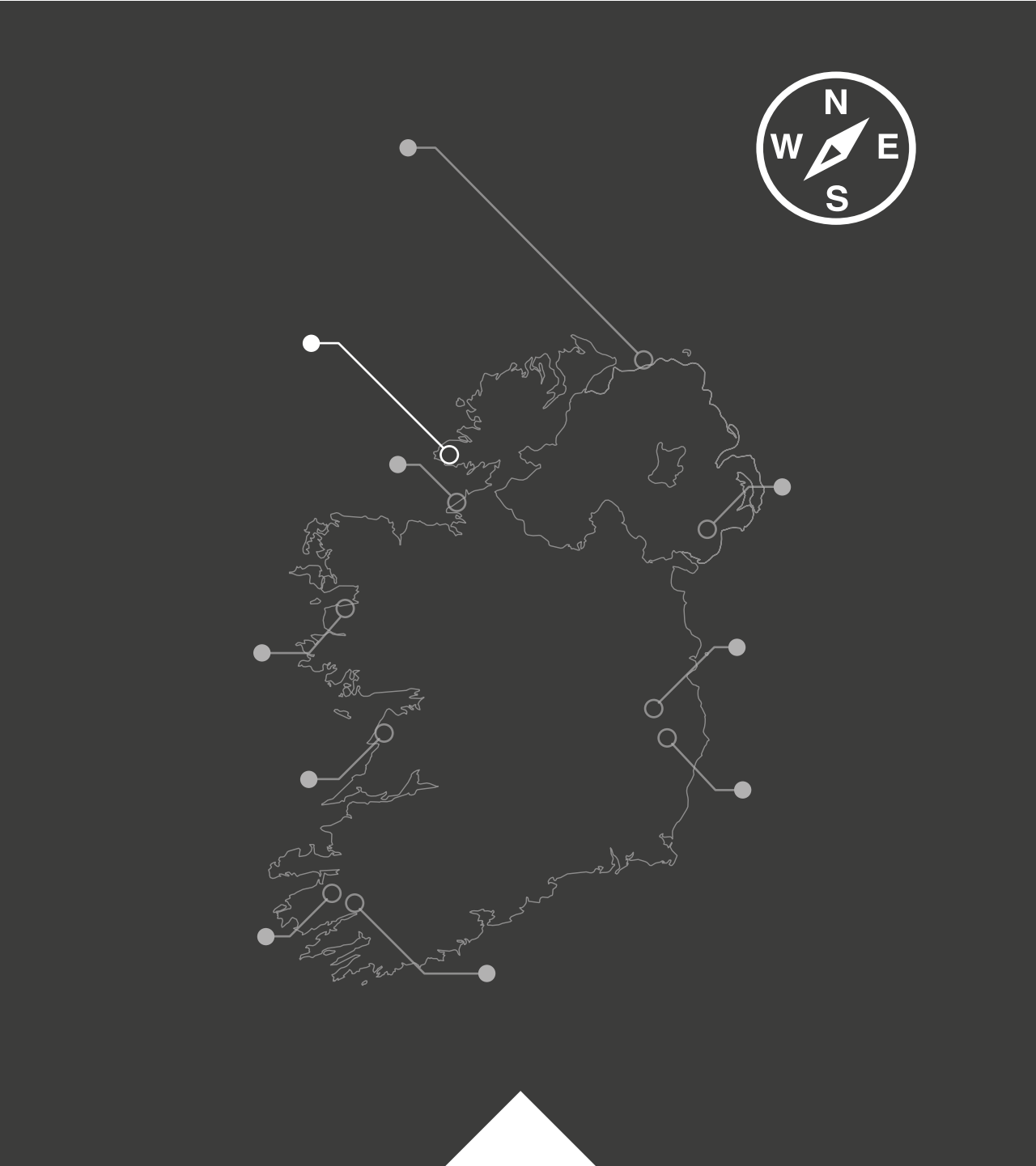
Wildlife & Nature

The Pilgrim’s Path at Slieve League

At nearly 2,000 feet, Donegal’s Slieve League cliffs are three times taller than the Cliffs of Moher - though far less visited. Follow the well-worn Pilgrim’s Path past old oratory ruins to the walk along the narrow cliffside path, Old Man’s Track. From the cliff’s edge, enjoy expansive views of the thundering Atlantic. Then, drive back to the Bunglass Viewpoint for the classic Slieve League panorama.

Join our [Causeway Coastal Route & Donegal Hiking trip](#) to hike the incredible Slieve League cliffs.

[Find more info on this hike here](#)



Explore our interactive map

Distance	Duration	Start Point	Best For
3.5 miles/5.5 km out and back	2.5 hours	Car park above Teelin village	Walk along the edge of some of Europe’s highest cliffs

Where to Eat

In Donegal town, try the contemporary [Quay West](#), an award-winning restaurant with stunning views of Donegal Bay. If you’re staying at the local [Castle Murray House](#), be sure to try the deliciously creative seafood menu!



Nearby Culture & Activities

Ardara village for handwoven Donegal tweed, Donegal town and castle and gorgeous sea views on St John’s Point.





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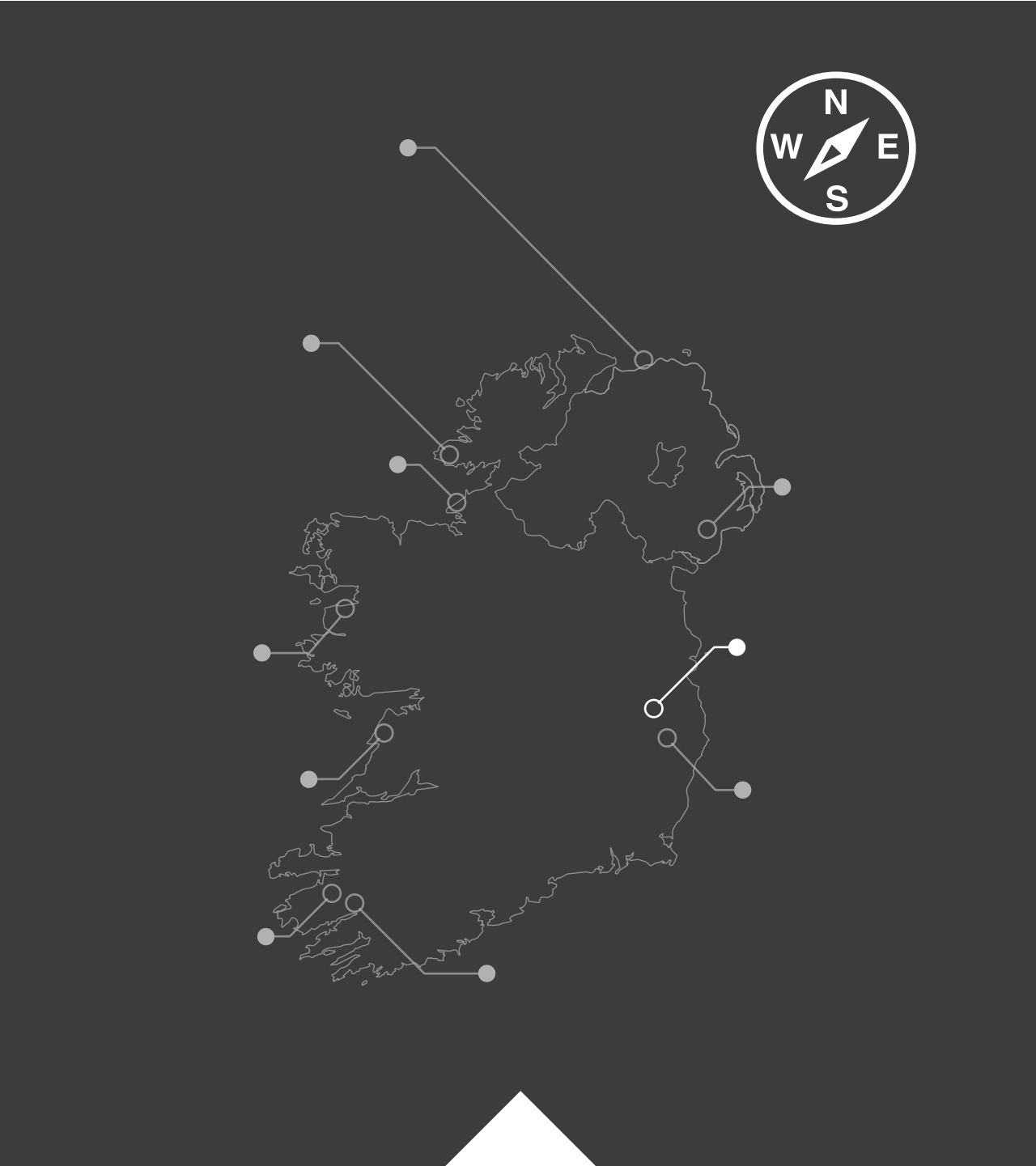
Wildlife & Nature

St Kevin’s Way - The Pilgrim Path

Based on an ancient pilgrimage route, St Kevin’s Way has been walked by pilgrims since medieval times. A hermit who lived deep in the silent mountains of Glendalough, St Kevin’s hermitage inspired the creation of a monastic city in the 11th and 12th centuries, once one of the greatest centres of learning in Ireland. Today, Glendalough is nestled deep in a glacial valley in the Wicklow Mountains, nicknamed the ‘Garden of Ireland’, and a popular escape from the din of Dublin. Enjoy awe-inspiring views of the lakes snuggled into the valley as you explore the ancient region.

Hike Glendalough and more of the best hikes in Ireland on our [Ancient East Self Drive](#).

[Find more info on this hike here](#)



Explore our interactive map

Distance	Duration	Start Point	Best For
18 miles/30 km	1 day	Hollywood or Vallymount	Walk through the ‘Garden of Ireland’ and a famous monastic site

Where to Eat

A stone’s throw from Glendalough, [The Wicklow Heather](#) provides hearty meals in a stately atmosphere.
Or try the chic, modern restaurant [Bryne & Woods](#) for upscale cuisine.



Nearby Culture & Activities

Glendalough Monastic Settlement, Upper & Lower lakes, Russborough House and Wicklow Gaol.





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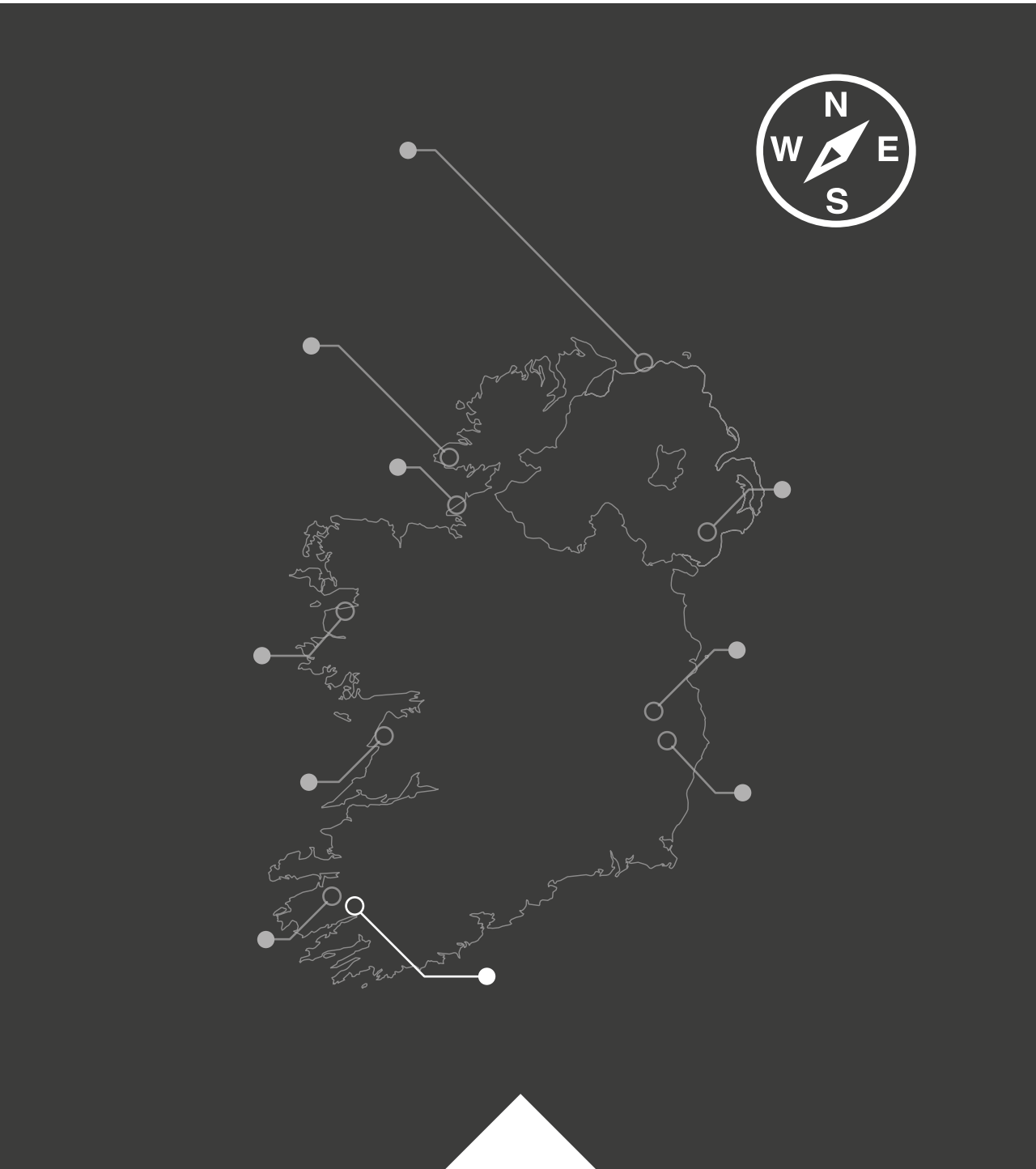
Wildlife & Nature

Gap of Dunloe

Kerry’s Gap of Dunloe is world-famous for good reason. A narrow glacial mountain pass between the Macgillycuddy’s Reeks and Purple Mountain, the Gap of Dunloe sweeps you alongside five dazzling lakes, as well as the much-loved ‘Wishing Bridge’ (wishes made on the bridge are said to come true!). Popular with jaunting carts, the route then eventually descends into the Black Valley - one of the last places in Ireland to get electricity.

While not currently on any of our scheduled trips, [request a tailor made trip to hike one of the best hikes in Ireland, the Gap of Dunloe.](#)

[Find more info on this hike here](#)



Explore our interactive map

Distance	Duration	Start Point	Best For
6.8 miles/11 km	4 hours	Kate Kearney’s Cottage	Make a wish at the famous Wishing Bridge while exploring the famous Kerry valley

Where to Eat

Head to [Moriarty’s Heather](#) for fresh, simple meals using ingredients from kitchen gardens and organic Atlantic seafood.



Nearby Culture & Activities

Try seaweed foraging in Kerry, visit the Gap of Dunloe by jaunting car and enjoy a cheese tasting?





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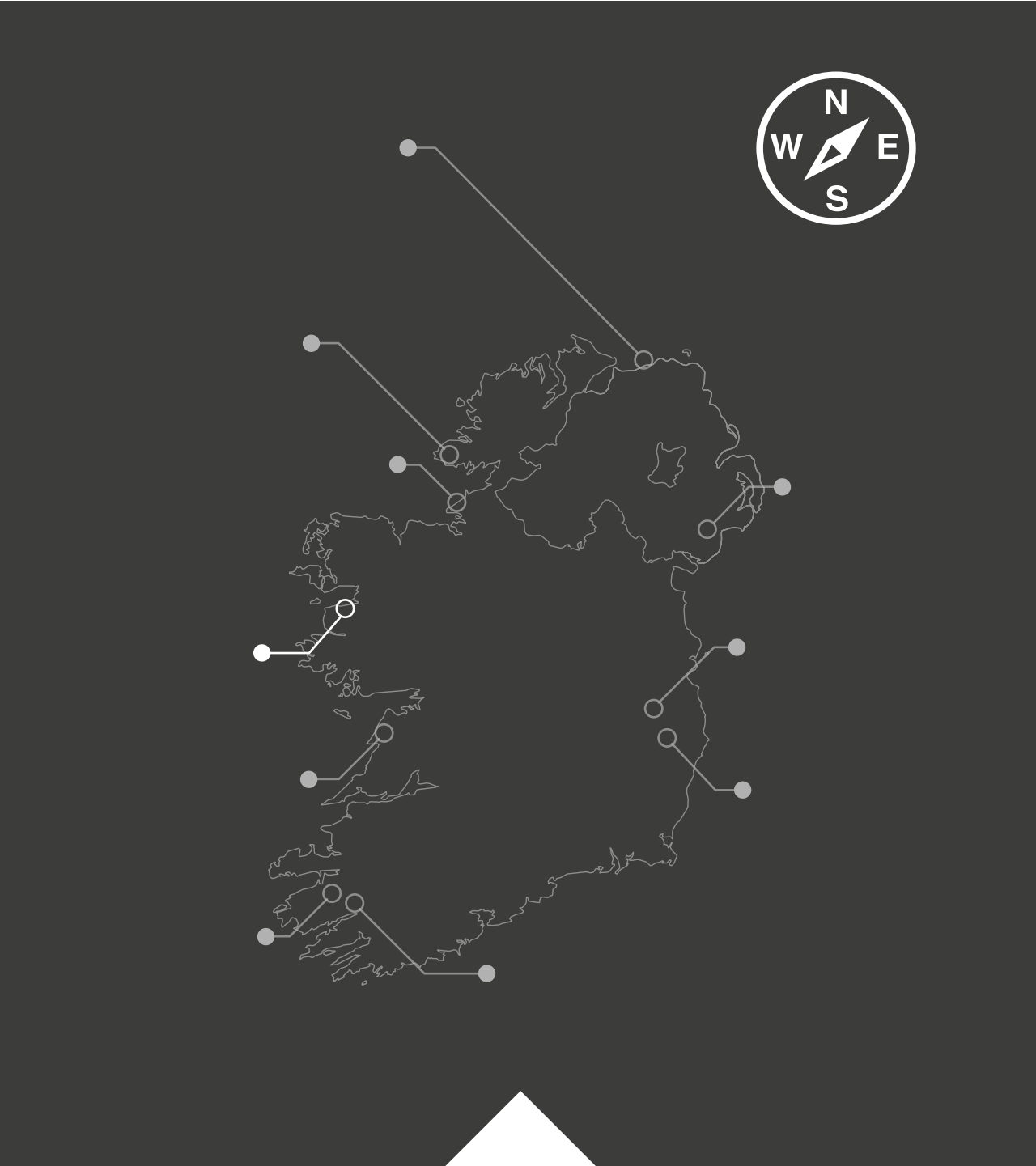
Wildlife & Nature

Croagh Patrick

Overlooking the town of Westport, Clew Bay and its archipelago, Croagh Patrick mountain has been a pilgrimage route since ancient times. Famous for its saintly connection, St Patrick is said to have fasted on its summit for 40 days, where there’s now a shrine dedicated to him. Considered Ireland’s Holy Mountain, it is still climbed by thousands of pilgrims - some of whom walk up the mountain barefoot!

Hike Ireland’s holy mountain on our [Hiking the Mountains of Connemara & Mayo](#).

[Find more info on this hike here](#)



Explore our interactive map

Distance	Duration	Start Point	Best For
9 miles/14.3 km	7 hours	Car park of Keem Strand	Stand at the edge of the Atlantic on Ireland’s highest sea cliffs

Where to Eat

At the foot of the holy mountain, find the varied menu of [Tavern Bar & Restaurant](#). Try the local specialty: Clew Bay seafood.



Nearby Culture & Activities

Explore Westport town, bike the Great Western Greenway, take the ferry to Clare Island to visit Pirate Queen’s castle & try SUP.





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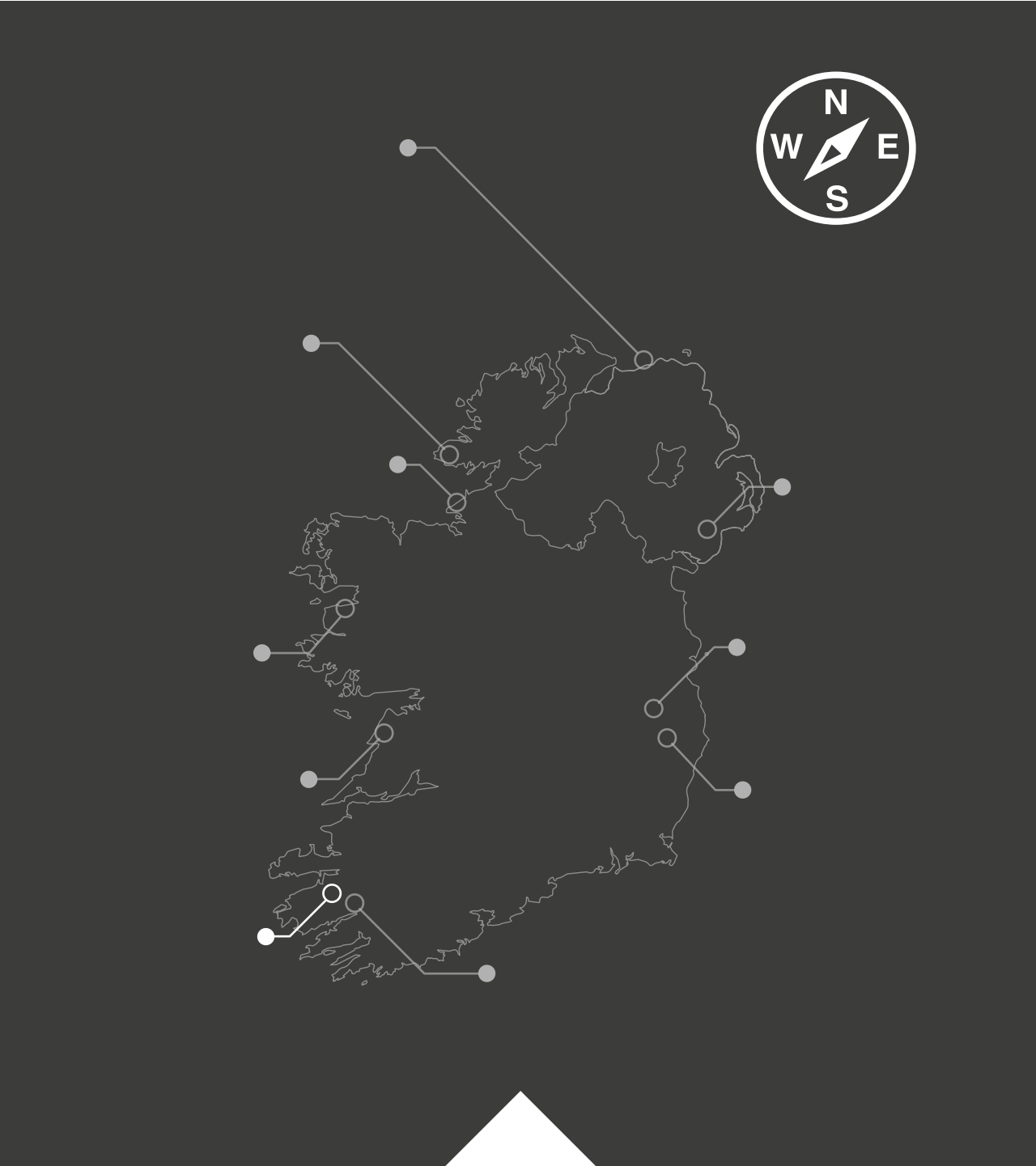
Wildlife & Nature

Carrauntoohil

The highest peak in Ireland, Carrauntouhil is a challenge of a hike, but well worth it. The views from the summit are some of the best in Ireland, and the trail around the mountain itself will rival the Alps or the Pyrenees in beauty. Depending on the weather conditions, there are a few paths to the summit: Devil’s Ladder, O’Shea’s Gully, or the Caher Route.

Hike Carrauntouhil and more of the best of Kerry’s mountains on our [Hiking the Ring of Kerry Mountains trip](#).

[Find more info on this hike here](#)



Explore our interactive map

Distance	Duration	Start Point	Best For
8.7 miles/14 km	7 hours	Lisleibane or Cronin’s Yard	Stand at the summit of Ireland’s tallest mountain

Where to Eat

A chic eatery in a historic building, [The Lime Tree](#), here you’ll enjoy farm-fresh meat and just-caught fish. For a different option, try [The Horseshoe](#) for a delicious blend of tasty cuisine and comfortable refinement.



Nearby Culture & Activities

Hike through the Gap of Dunloe, admire the lakes of Killarney by boat & jaunting cart, visit the historic Ross Castle and walk through the serene forests of Killarney National Park.





Culture



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Coastal Trails



Wildlife & Nature

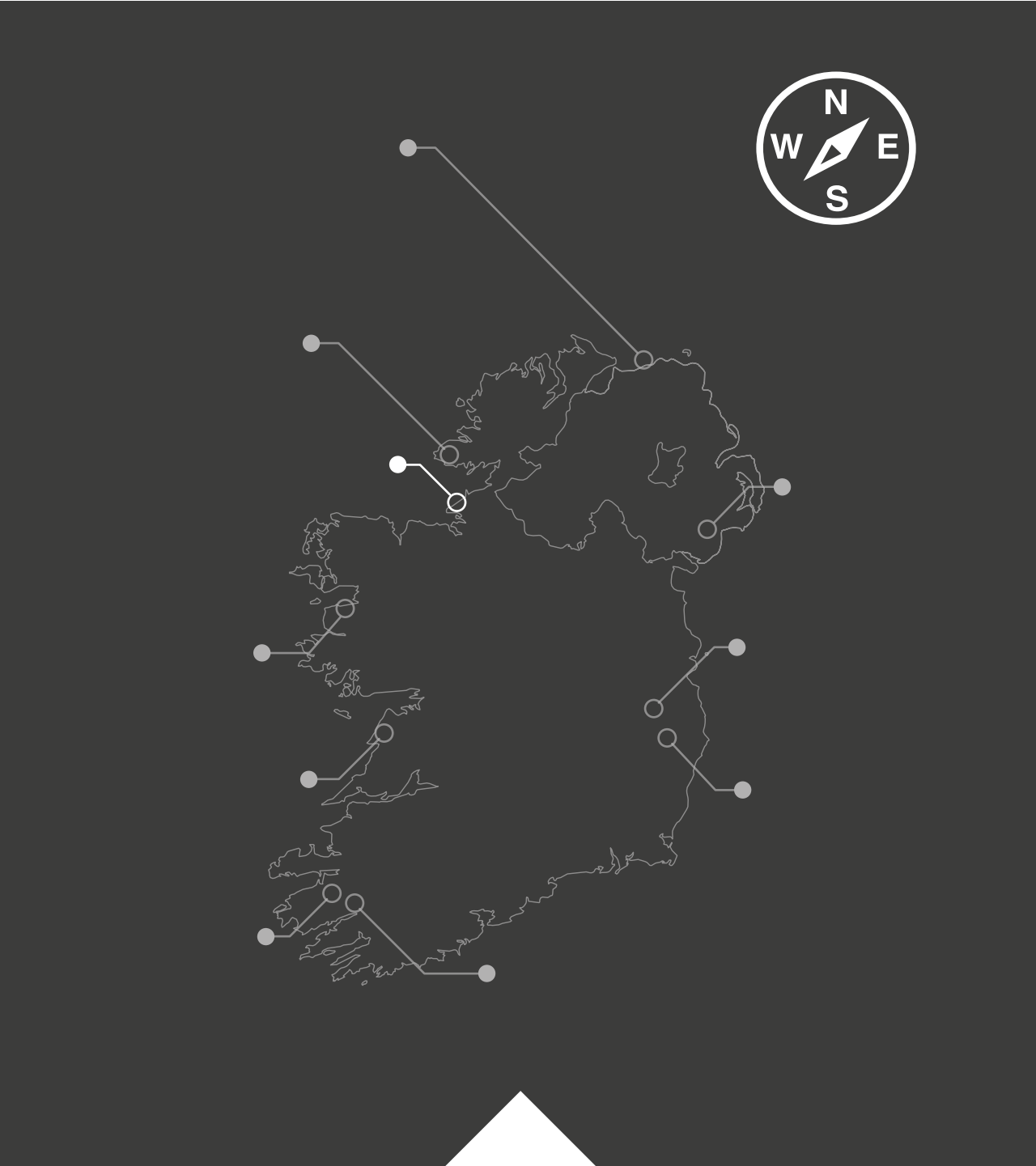
The Peaks of Sligo

Towering over Sligo town, Ben Bulbin and its sister peaks are visible from all over Sligo. This iconic ‘table mountain’ is deep within Sligo’s ‘Yeats Country,’ so-called as the landscape inspired the Irish poet, WB Yeats. This challenging walk takes in the three peaks of Ben Bulbin, Ben Wiskin & King’s Mountain, which are bathed in mythological richness.

One legend tells of a magical ‘Fairy Door’ on Ben Bulbin, which brings good weather when opened. Another legend tells of the birth of Oisín, the son of the famed giant Finn McCool born and raised on the wild slopes of Ben Bulbin before being turned into a deer!

Hike Ben Bulbin, sister mountain Knocknarea and other peaks of Sligo on our [Intro to Hiking & Sea Kayaking Adventure in Sligo](#).

[Find more info on this hike here](#)



Explore our interactive map

Distance	Duration	Start Point	Best For
11 miles/18 km	7 hours	Luke’s Bridge near Mullaghnaneane	Great views overlooking ‘Yeats Country’ from Ireland’s iconic ‘table mountain’

Where to Eat

For breakfast or brunch, take a detour to the village of Strandhill for [Shell’s Cafe](#), a local treasure. For dinner, go to [Hargadon Bros](#) in downtown Sligo – on the surface, a cosy Irish pub with live music - but underneath, a gastro pub with some of the best fine dining Sligo has to offer!



Nearby Culture & Activities

Strandhill for surfing lessons, a guided visit to Carrowmore tombs, a visit to the past in Parkes Castle and hiking along WB Yeats’ picturesque Lough Gill.





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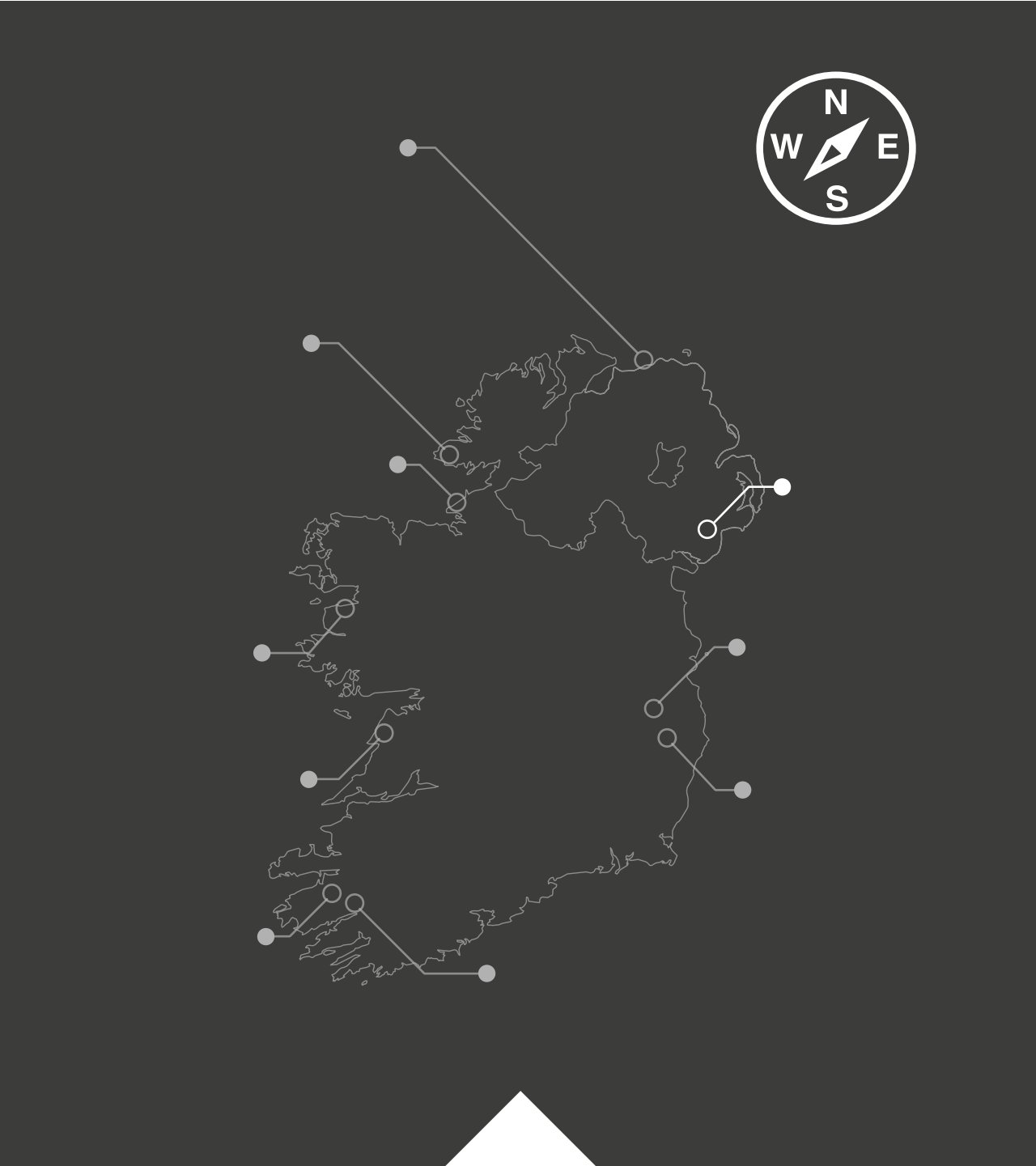


Wildlife & Nature

Slieve Donard in the Mourne Mountains

From the summit of Slieve Donard, you can see most of Ulster and even Scotland on a clear day! Cutting through the hauntingly beautiful Mourne Mountains is the 35km-long Mourne Wall, an enormous fence around the Silent Valley Reservoir, though it does little more than enclose the remote summits and vast valleys of the Mourne Mountains.

[Find more info on this hike here](#)



Explore our interactive map

Distance	Duration	Start Point	Best For
5.5 miles/9 km	5 hours	Car park in Donard Park	Explore remote mountain summits, bogs, and the forlorn 35 km-long Mourne Wall

Where to Eat

For simple, local mountain cuisine, try the [Maghera Inn](#).
For something more urban, try the chic menu of Newcastle's [Vanilla Restaurant](#).



Nearby Culture & Activities

Lonely Planet's Top 2018 Destination of Belfast and Down Cathedral to visit St Patrick's tomb.





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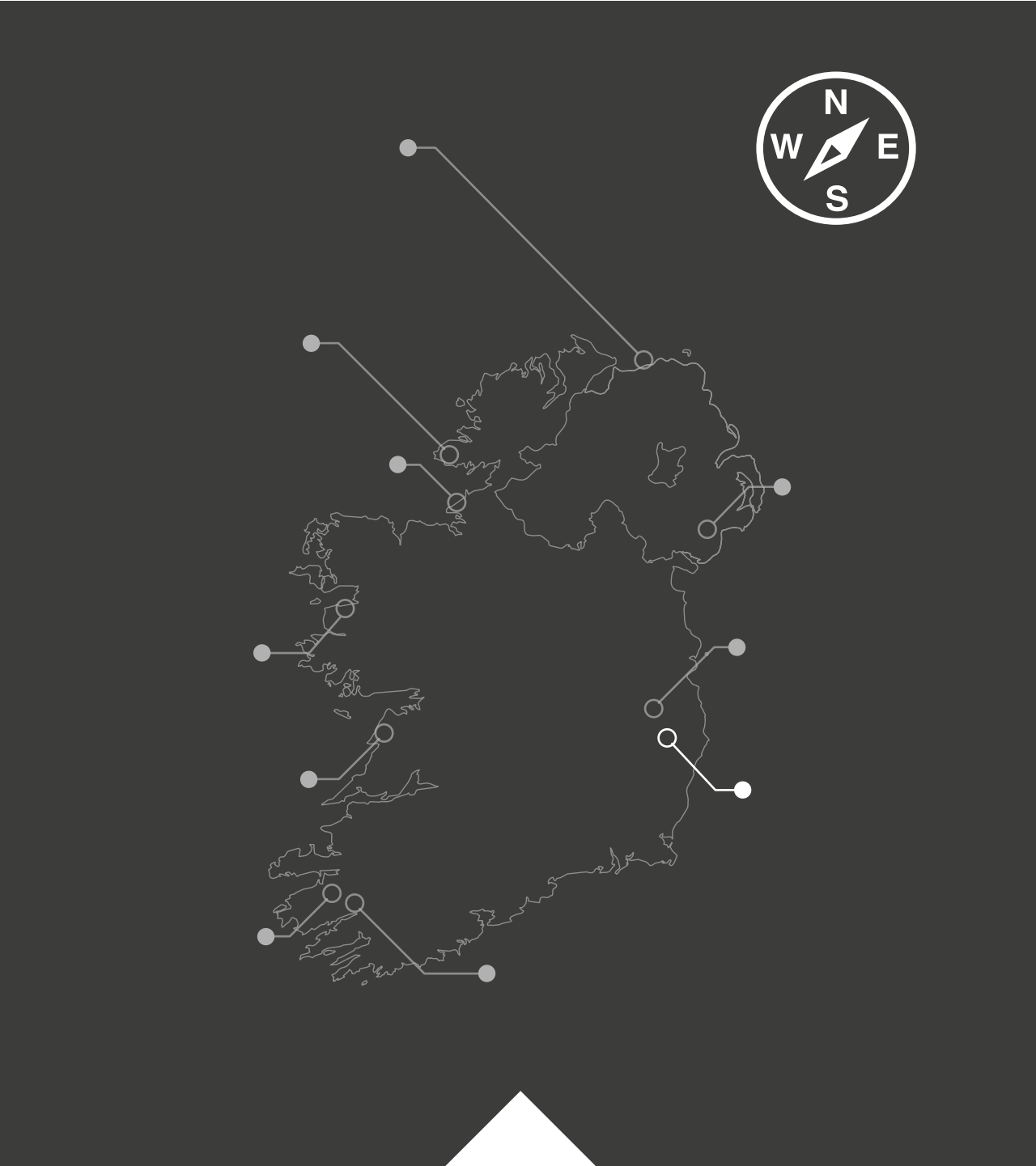
Wildlife & Nature

Lugnaquilla - Wicklow’s Highest Mountain

The highest point in Wicklow, Lugnaquilla, nicknamed ‘Lug’, is sometimes called an ‘Irish Munro,’ and is certainly one of the best hikes in Ireland. Partially wooded, partially heathland and partially bog, the changeable landscape of Lugnaquilla is as beautiful as it is desolate. Home to many species of birds, as well as deer, fox and hares, Lugnaquilla is not a hike for the faint-hearted as it is exposed to the elements. But the sweeping, expansive views from the summit on a clear day will take your breath away.

While not currently on any of our scheduled trips, [request a tailor made trip to hike Lugnaquilla and the Wicklow Mountains](#).

[Find more info on this hike here](#)



Explore our interactive map

Distance	Duration	Start Point	Best For
10 miles/16 km	7 hours	Fenton’s Pub in the Glen of Imaal or Baravore car park in Glenmalure	Summit an ‘Irish munro’

Where to Eat

Enjoy a cosy pub atmosphere by an open fire at [The Glenmalure Inn](#) while admiring the views of the valley outdoors. Or, start your day of hiking off right with a hearty pre-adventure Irish breakfast!



Nearby Culture & Activities

Powerscourt estate house and gardens, Avoca Wollen Mills.





Culture



Low Level with Mountain Views



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Coastal Trails



Wildlife & Nature

What to Wear

The key when planning what to wear when hiking in Ireland is to plan for a little bit of everything.

What do you need?

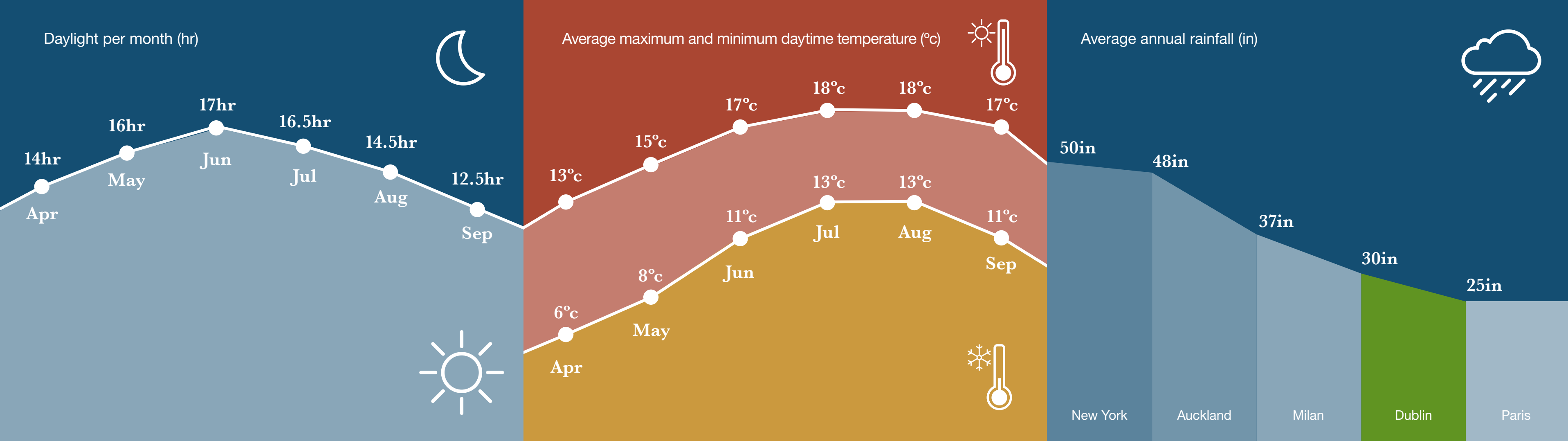
- 1 **Good boots** – A pair of hiking boots are the most important! Irish trails are uneven and boggy, and the undergrowth can be thick. When choosing boots, be sure to find a pair that are solid, keep your feet dry, and are broken in before your adventure. Best to avoid running shoes/ tennis shoes as they don't provide the ankle support nor keep your feet dry when walking through bogs.
- 2 **Layers** – Irish weather is very changeable - we sometimes have four seasons in one day! It's best to have several quick-drying upper-body layers of various weights to allow you to adapt to various conditions. It's always best to avoid cotton as it doesn't wick away the moisture properly.
- 3 **Waterproofs** – A fully waterproof, breathable jacket and over-trousers/ rain pants are essential. Breathability is also important when choosing a jacket. Over-trousers with side zips that allow you to get them on and off over boots are a great option.
- 4 **Day pack** – A 25-35 litres pack is perfect, ideally with both waist and shoulder straps. Pair your backpack with dry-bags or a waterproof cover to keep your belongings dry in the rain.
- 5 **Reusable water bottle** – go green and try to avoid one-use plastic bottles by investing in a reusable bottle!



Ireland's Weather

Average temperatures from April to September generally range from 12°C (54°F) and 18°C (64.5°F). It isn't called the 'Emerald Isle' for nothing! Ireland's rain is usually light (think mist and drizzle) and doesn't last long with the sun breaking through before too long – cue amazing rainbows and fantastic light.

In general you can expect a bit of everything weather wise – sunshine, rain, warm and cool temperatures when hiking in Ireland. So it's best to prepare for all eventualities when thinking about what to wear when hiking here.



Spring

Spring sees nature kick into gear. As the trees bud and the flowers blossom the 'Emerald Isle' really comes in to it own as the whole landscape turns to lush shades of green.



Summer

The warmest months, July and August, get about 17 hours of daylight with it only really getting dark after 11pm. Hence the well-worn phrase in Ireland; "sure there's a grand stretch in the evenings".



Autumn

In autumn, highest temperatures hit between 11 and 17°C, with September generally being pretty mild month.

Enjoy walks wild landscapes as the greens turn to golds and fiery reds.



Winter

While the coldest months are January and February. The temperature rarely drops below freezing, and apart from the odd cold snap, snow is pretty uncommon.

A walk on a clear, crisp winter's day can mean seeing nature at its most impressive.



Stats & Facts

Before your hiking adventure in Ireland, take a minute to familiarise yourself with a few facts about the Emerald Isle.



Highest Peak
Carrauntoohil: 3,406 feet (1,038m)

Longest River
The River Shannon: 240 miles (386km)

No Snakes

Legend has it, St. Patrick rid Ireland of all it's snakes by driving them into the sea back in the fifth century A.D. He did a fantastic job, because to this day Ireland is free of native snakes.



Shamrock

The shamrock, found in abundance throughout Ireland, is today a symbol of the Emerald Isle. Not to be confused with a four leaf clover (also called the “white clover”), the shamrock has only three leaves.



The shamrock’s claim to fame is due to Ireland’s patron saint, Saint Patrick. As legend has it, St Patrick used the shamrock to communicate the Holy Trinity to the pagan (and illiterate) Irish. It is still a powerful symbol to this day and is often used to represent Ireland.

The four leaf clover is an aberration of the shamrock, and because it is far more rare, it is considered lucky by some.



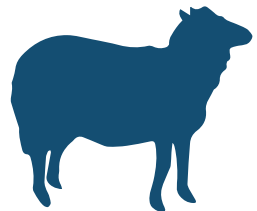
Leprechaun’s Gold
1000
one ounce
pure gold coins
per pot
valued at
\$1,314,000

Population

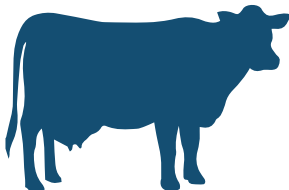
1.8 million people
in Northern Ireland
4.7 million people
in the Republic of Ireland



5.2 million sheep



6.6 million cattle



Guinness



Finding Your Way

- 1 **Experienced Guide** – Let an expert show you the way and bring the landscape to life.
- 2 **GPS** – Plan your route and stay on track.
- 3 **Marked Trails** – Follow established trails around the “Emerald Isle”.
- 4 **Driving** – Remember we drive on the left.
- 5 **Map and Compass** – These are the 2 most important items for anyone going hiking in the hills.

1 Experienced Guide

If you don't want to worry about driving, maps, navigation or any other logistics, you may want to consider the services of an experienced guide.

Though Ireland has several waymarked paths in national and regional parks, much of its hiking paths are on private land, and are less well marked.

Trails can be rough and boggy, and sometimes hard to follow. An experienced guide will help you to avoid any logistical issues – consider a fully guided trip if you wish all logistics to be taken care of, or simply a day guide for a specific hike.

2 GPS

A handheld GPS receiver is a valuable tool for hikers. It can give you vital information about where you are, and where you want to go.

This technology is now more accessible than ever with a number of quality GPS route planning apps available for smartphone.

Although GPS is a powerful tool, remember to always carry a map and compass, so if you run out of batteries you'll still be able to find your way home.

3 Marked Trails

In Ireland the national park trails are exceedingly well maintained, with clean facilities and an extensive visitor's centre.

In addition, the National Waymarked Trails association maintain over 40 Irish trails around Ireland, including the Dingle Way, the Wicklow Way and the Kerry Way, as well as other shorter hikes.

4 Driving

In Ireland, we drive on the left. Most roads frequently change speed limits as they pass through towns and villages, and include plenty of roundabouts. Ireland has a few motorways (highways) which have a maximum speed limit of 120 km/hour, and are marked in blue.

Most Irish roads are national roads, with a maximum speed limit of 80 km/hour and marked in green. These roads can be dual carriageways or one lane roads, and generally pass through towns and villages along the route.

To get to the countryside for wilderness hikes, you'll also have to take local roads (marked in white, with a maximum speed limit of 60 km/hour). These roads can be narrow, bumpy and winding, so exercise caution!

5 Map and Compass

In Ireland, we use Ordnance Survey Ireland maps, informally called OSi maps. There are 89 maps that collectively cover the entire island of Ireland and its coastal islands. With a scale of 1:50,000, each individual map should provide you with enough detail to navigate Ireland's wilds on foot including differences in terrain and contour lines showing elevation.

Both man-made constructions like towns and roads as well as natural elements such as bodies of water and mountains are marked. Also noted on the maps are standing stones, castles, holy wells, mass rocks, churches, megalithic sites, fulacht fia and more.

Learning how to use a compass is a vital skill to master for anyone serious about taking up hiking as a hobby.

When you combine good map reading skills with ability to take compass bearings, you should be able to navigate yourself safely off the hill, even if the weather turns for the worse.



Culture and Customs

One of the best things about Ireland is the richness of the culture and heritage – for a compact island, it packs a bundle! Much of the island’s traditions and culture come from its rural nature, agricultural heritage and country life.

Read on for a peek into the kinds of culture and customs you can expect on your next hiking trip to Ireland.

Music

Music has a power over us, transcending borders and languages. Music introduces you to the culture, traditions and dreams of the local people as well as to pop culture trends, and is often tied to landscape as well – with regions or places becoming immortalised in song.

Traditional Irish music sessions (often simply called ‘sessions’) are very popular across Ireland. The best places to hear a local session is in a cheery pub with a Guinness in hand, and a warm fire by your feet.

Expect to hear universal instruments such as **harps** and **fiddles** as well as traditional instruments like the **bodhran** (a type of drum), the **tin whistle** (a small wind instrument), a bouzouki (imagine a guitar meets banjo) or the **uilleann pipes** (Ireland’s response to the Scottish bagpipes).

You’re sure to tap your foot while listening to the ensemble of these instruments! Musical hotspots include Doolin, Sligo, Dingle, Galway, and Kilkenny.

Food and Drink

When most people hear Ireland and food, they think of potatoes. But a lot has changed in the last few decades. Ireland is quickly becoming an up-and-coming foodie destination with places like Belfast and the Causeway Coast, County Kerry, Dublin and Sligo leading the way.

There is an enormous focus on sustainable and local foods, such as the farm-to-work movement and wilderness foraging cuisine.

This Irish culinary scene is imprinted in Ireland’s jaw-dropping landscapes. Not only will you find amazing local culinary producers all over the country, but you’ll also find amazing foodie experiences – such as seaweed foraging, gin distilling, cheese tasting, oyster harvesting, culinary hikes, and more.

The concept of gastro pubs has taken hold as well – combining fine dining with traditional Irish pub atmosphere for the best of both worlds!

Gaelic Language

In Ireland, you may hear someone say, “What’s the craic?” Pronounced just like “crack,” this expression is a mix of English and Irish Gaelic meaning “What’s up?”

Though the language nearly died out, it has seen a revival in recent times. A compulsory subject in school, the numbers of Irish speakers has dramatically increased, though English is still the predominant language.

Today, there are still pockets of Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking) communities peppered throughout rural areas such as Donegal, Connemara, the Aran Islands, North Mayo, the Dingle Peninsula and parts of Kerry.

All public information like road signs, government documents, airports etc. is communicated in both languages, so it might be worth your while to learn a phrase or two in Gaelic!



Myths and Legends

The ancient island of Ireland is well known for rich folklore made up of myths, legends and stories passed down through the ages from parent to child. Though there are hundreds of stories and characters, we've chosen a few prominent folk tales to share with you!

Leprechauns

These little tricksters decked out in green often come to mind when one thinks about Ireland. But there's more to these little creatures than meets the eye.

Leprechauns are actually a type of fairy appearing throughout Irish folklore - possibly descending from the Tuatha Dé Danann, Ireland's pantheon of supernatural gods. Solitary shoemakers who love to make mischief, leprechauns are also said to hide pots of gold at the end of rainbows (of which there are many in Ireland!).

However, the iconic image of the little red bearded man wearing a green coat and hat was born out of largely derogatory drawings of Irishmen in the 1800s. Previously, they wore red and were far more gnome-like.

If you're intrigued by leprechauns, then you'll be fascinated to know that the EU has granted a leprechaun protective zone in County Louth thanks to the efforts of local citizens who've insisted their hills are home to roughly 236 leprechauns. You can head to PJ O'Hare's pub afterwards to see leprechaun artifacts and learn more about the creatures.

Finn McCool and the Giant's Causeway

Once upon a time, in the land known as Ireland, a giant named Finn McCool (Fionn mac Cumhaill) got himself into a dispute with the Scottish giant Benandonner. In order to provoke Benandonner, Finn threw large boulders into the sea, creating a Causeway from the Antrim Coastline all the way to Scotland. Benandonner took up this challenge and began to journey across to confront Finn.

Finn soon realised he has underestimated his rival once he caught a glimpse of him – he was huge!

Realising that brute force wouldn't work Finn enlisted the smarts of his wife Oonagh who disguised Finn as a baby and invited Benandonner into the house upon his arrival. Benandonner finds Oonagh tending her enormous husband/baby and she advised him that Finn was out hunting and will return soon to greet him.

It dawned on the Scottish giant that if his enemies baby was this big then Finn must be ginormous! As quickly as he had arrived, Benandonner took off back across the Causeway, tearing it up as he went. Thus, the Giant's Causeway myth was born.



St Patrick

Born a Welsh slave, St Patrick rose to eventually become Ireland's patron saint. He is credited with bringing and spreading Christianity throughout Ireland.

He is associated with holy sites such as Croagh Patrick mountain and the valley of Mam Ean in County Mayo, as legend claims he fasted here for 40 days and nights.

He is credited with the mythic banishing of snakes from Ireland, teaching the pillars of Christianity using the Shamrock, as well as performing countless miracles as he converted the ancient peoples of Ireland.



Pirate Queen

Daughter of the owner of a massive shipping and trading company, Grace O'Malley grew up to be a formidable 16th century pirate queen who ruled the shipping lines to Galway Bay and Clew Bay.

This legendary Pirate Queen attacked and plundered ships and coastal areas along the Wild Atlantic Way for more than three decades, built and even stole castles, and even double-crossed Queen Elizabeth.

Though a real person, Grace O'Malley's exploits are a legend that lives on along Ireland's west coasts.

Cú Chulainn, The Hound of Ulster

Cú Chulainn, meaning the 'Hound of Ulster', is the ultimate patriarchal figure in Irish Mythology and is most well-known for his might in battle - where he often displayed his famous 'Battle Fury'.

Born as Setanta, he adopted the name Cú Chulainn upon killing the hound of Culainn in self-defence. Upon learning of the annoyance he'd caused by fatally wounding the hound, he offered his services as the new Hound of Culainn to make up for the loss - thus, earning himself the title Cú Chulainn.

He is renowned also for his legendary conflict with Queen Maeve of Connacht and her armies in the Táin bó Cuailnge (The Cattle Raid of Cooley). The battle for the ownership of the Brown Bull of Cooley ends in victory for Cú Chulainn - though the victory itself is bittersweet as he dies, tied to a standing stone in order to perish facing his enemies upright, sword in hand. Even when mortally wounded, he was still feared - it wasn't until a Raven (Goddess, The Morrígan) landed on his shoulder to pick at his eyes his enemies knew he was dead.

Recommended Reads

To find out more about hiking in Ireland, check out our list of further reading.

Hiking

- www.walkni.com
- www.rei.com/learn/c/hiking
- www.gore-tex.com/blog/hiking-tips

Ireland

- www.discoverireland.ie
- www.ireland.com
- www.wildernessireland.com/blog

Weather

- www.met.ie
- www.accuweather.com/en/ie/ireland-weather
- www.yr.no/place/Ireland
- www.bbc.co.uk/weather



Travel Essentials

Travelling to a foreign country means adjusting to a new way of doing things, new customs, new politics. We've assembled some frequently asked questions to help answer a few of those.



Emergencies

In Ireland, the police are called the Garda, or the Gardai. In the event of an emergency, call the emergency services at 999.

You may also dial 112, which is an European Union wide emergency service. If you require assistance from the Garda but cannot talk, you are asked to simply tap the screen – any number will do – when prompted by the emergency responder.

If you need help at any point while in Ireland, you may go to a Garda Station – open 24/7.



Vaccinations

No vaccinations are required to travel to Ireland. Make sure you consult your doctor with your itinerary 6 to 8 weeks before you depart.



Major Cities

Generally, you don't come to Ireland for the cities, but rather the wilderness and the villages. That said, we do have a few cities worth noting!

The capital and largest city is Dublin. A lively city with a vibrant downtown, it is full of restaurants, pubs and markets. For off the beaten path Dublin adventures, consider the Literary Pub Crawl, EPIC Irish Emigration Museum, or City Kayaking.

Ireland's other capital is Belfast. The capital of Northern Ireland, Belfast has a troubled past but its massive transformation means Belfast and the Causeway Coast are Lonely Planet's Top 2018 Destinations. Known as an up-and-coming foodie destination, you'll find plenty of good places to eat!

Other cities include Galway, Cork and Limerick. Galway, a compact city full of colourful shop fronts, has a long heritage. It is here that Claddagh rings were first forged, and Galway Bay was once under the rule of the formidable Pirate Queen. Cork is a massive port city - it was from nearby Cobh (pronounce 'cove') that was the RMS Titanic's final port of call, and you can still visit the original White Star Line office. Limerick is an industrial city, but this place founded by Vikings still has plenty to offer, like King John's Castle!

Electricity

In Ireland, we use the British socket – in technical terms the BS 1363 – which is essentially a two or three pronged plug. If travelling from outside the UK or Ireland, you'll need an adapter. Any adapter that fits British plugs will work, but sometimes the easiest option is to have a universal adapter.

Top Tip:

Travel with an extension lead from your own country. That way you'll only need one adapter and you'll have many sockets to charge from.



Currency

In the Republic of Ireland – where you'll find places like Dublin, Kerry, and Clare, we're a part of the Eurozone meaning that we use the Euro (EUR). However, Northern Ireland – where you'll find Belfast, Derry and the Giant's Causeway – is part of the UK. This means that here you need to use pounds sterling (GBP).

If you're planning to visit both the north and the south, it's a good idea to have both currencies with you.

Credit and debit cards are accepted throughout the entire island, though it's always a good idea to have some cash as there could be some village shops that don't yet accept cards.



Visas

We cannot advise on visa information from every country - we recommend you contact your local embassy for more information.

However, at this time visitors from the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia, the EU and New Zealand do not need a visa for any stays in Ireland up to 90 day (your "tourist visa").



Transport

If travelling from the USA, you'll most likely arrive in Dublin Airport, Shannon Airport, near Limerick, or Belfast International (there is also a local airport).

Visitors from the UK or mainland Europe also have the possibility of arriving via local airports: Cork, Kerry, or Derry.

To get from one urban centre to another, there are a network of trains run by Irish Rail. To get to smaller places, there are series of bus companies, including Bus Eireann. In Ireland, we have the helpful site GetThere.ie which will show you all the best options on a particular day.



Get in Touch

To start planning your Irish hiking adventure,
get in touch with our local experts today.

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