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Frommer's

IRELAND



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By Jack Jewers



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jack Jewers has written about Ireland for Frommer's since 2006. Born and raised in England, he loved listening to his great aunt's tales about life in Dublin during the civil war. Jack proposed to his Irish-American wife at a spa on the Ring of Kerry. It gets a great review in the book.

ABOUT THE FROMMER TRAVEL GUIDES

For most of the past 50 years, Frommer's has been the leading series of travel guides in North America, accounting for as many as 24% of all guidebooks sold. I think I know why.

Though we hope our books are entertaining, we nevertheless deal with travel in a serious fashion. Our guidebooks have never looked on such journeys as a mere recreation, but as a far more important human function, a time of learning and introspection, an essential part of civilized life. We stress the culture, lifestyle, history, and beliefs of the destinations we cover, and urge our readers to seek out people and new ideas as the chief rewards of travel.

We have never shied from controversy. We have, from the beginning, encouraged our authors to be intensely judgmental, critical—both pro and con—in their comments, and wholly independent. Our only clients are our readers, and we have triggered the ire of countless prominent sorts, from a tourist newspaper we called “practically worthless” (it unsuccessfully sued us) to the many rip-offs we've condemned.

And because we believe that travel should be available to everyone regardless of their incomes, we have always been cost-conscious at every level of expenditure. Though we have broadened our recommendations beyond the budget category, we insist that every lodging we include be sensibly priced. We use every form of media to assist our readers, and are particularly proud of our feisty daily website, the award-winning Frommers.com.

I have high hopes for the future of Frommer's. May these guidebooks, in all the years ahead, continue to reflect the joy of travel and the freedom that travel represents. May they always pursue a cost-conscious path, so that people of all incomes can enjoy the rewards of travel. And may they create, for both the traveler and the persons among whom we travel, a community of friends, where all human beings live in harmony and peace.



Arthur Frommer

1

THE BEST OF IRELAND

Blarney Castle.



Flagstaff Post near Warrenpoint Town in Northern Ireland.

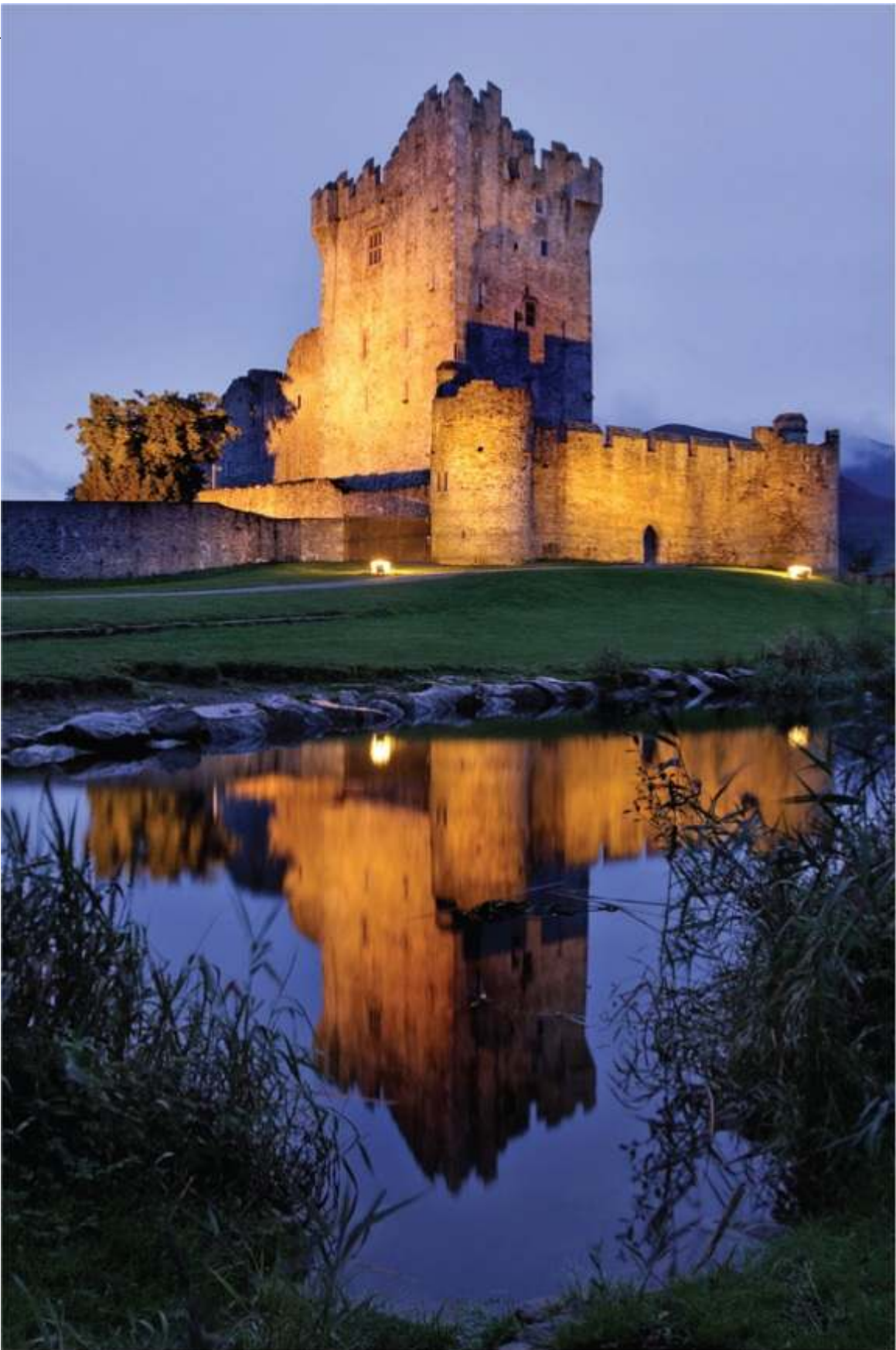
Tiny, and with ever-changing scenery, Ireland is an addictive place to explore. Within a few miles you can travel from plunging cliffs and fields of pastureland to towering mountains and gloomy peat bogs. You can spend the night in ancient castles or state-of-the-art spa hotels, dine on fine Irish cuisine or snack on crispy fish and chips served in a paper bag. The sheer number of sights, little villages, charming pubs, and adorable restaurants and shops is overwhelming—you always feel that you might be missing something. So it's nice to have somebody to help you focus, and that's why we've put together this list of some of our favorite places and things to do in Ireland. We hope that while you're exploring this magical country, you'll find a few of your own.

THE **best** AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

- **Seeing a traditional music session at a proper Irish pub:** It's not hard to track down live music in Irish pubs, and while plenty of shows are for the tourist crowd, nothing beats the energy, atmosphere, and authenticity of a genuine small-town traditional music session. We've listed some of the best places in this book, including pubs such as the Long Valley in Cork or Gus O'Connor's and McGann's in little Doolin, County Clare. The instructions for getting the most out of a session are simple: Buy a pint, grab a seat (preferably one near a smoldering peat fire), and wait for the action.

to begin. See [p. 237](#) and [p. 330](#).

- **Getting lost down the back roads of County Kerry:** This is Ireland's most visited county by far, and it's impossible to escape the tourist throng in the summer, especially if you stick to the beaten path. When it all gets too much, you can just veer off onto the winding back roads and allow yourself to get gloriously, hopelessly lost. Forget the clock and embrace a sense of fatalism. New discoveries are always waiting down its breathtaking byways. See [chapter 9](#).
- **Touching the bullet holes in the walls of the General Post Office (Dublin, County Dublin):** It's hard to overstate what a potent national symbol this humble mail hub is. Patrick Pearse read his independence proclamation from its front steps in 1916, and the original document is now displayed inside. The post office was also the scene of fierce fighting during the civil war of 1922, which left the bullet scars that pock the facade. See [p. 111](#).
- **Poking around the shops in Temple Bar (Dublin, County Dublin):** Modern Dublin is a cosmopolitan place, and nowhere is this more so than its trendiest neighborhood, Temple Bar. The name actually has a rather obscure, 17th-century origin, although it's curiously appropriate today given the preponderance of hip watering holes full of beautiful, style-worshipping young things. Daytime offers its own brand of discovery, as seemingly around every corner is another trendy boutique, funky store, or art gallery. See [p. 108](#).
- **Walking down the long stone passage at Newgrange (County Meath):** Sacred to the ancients, this passage tomb is more than 5,000 years old—that's older than the Egyptian pyramids or Stonehenge. Walking down the long, atmospheric central tunnel, trying to visualize just how many generations have passed since it was built is mind-blowing. A bit of perspective: the dawn of the Roman Empire is closer in time to us today than the building of Newgrange was to the dawn of the Roman Empire. See [p. 180](#).



Ross Castle in Killarney National Park.



- **Checking out what's new in Kinsale's restaurant scene (County Cork):** Kinsale has gone from sleepy fishing port to the food capital of Ireland. On every return trip there's almost inevitably a hot new must-try place to sample. They don't all last forever, but those that do are in themselves worth the trip to County Cork. See [chapter 8](#).
- **Driving through the Burren (County Clare):** Ireland is full of memorable landscapes, but none of them quite as unique as this one. The countryside has a haunting, alien feel, although it's strikingly beautiful too, especially as the sun goes down and the craggy limestone planes turn an evening shade of red. See [chapter 10](#).
- **Taking afternoon tea at The Shelbourne (Dublin, County Dublin):** It's easy to feel like an overgrown kid in the fanciest candy store at The Shelbourne, as you sink into huge leather armchairs while demolishing a tower of cakes and daintily cut sandwiches. If you're in the mood for a history f

afterward, sneak upstairs to find room no. 112. This is where the Irish Constitution was written in 1922. If nobody's staying there—and the concierge is in a good mood—you might even get to look inside. See [p. 133](#).

- **Photographing the murals in Belfast and Derry** (County Antrim/County Derry, Northern Ireland): Half a generation has grown up in Northern Ireland without knowing full-on sectarian bloodshed firsthand. Yet the long, ugly “peace wall” dividing Catholic neighborhoods from near-identical Protestant streets in Belfast is still covered in political street art, much of it preaching nonviolence. Likewise, the so-called “People’s Gallery” in Derry will guarantee some of the most striking photos of your trip. See [chapter 15](#).
- **Walking the path down to the Giant’s Causeway** (County Antrim): It’s like hiking through a fantastical landscape to take the half-mile walk down to this extraordinary natural wonder—37,000 columns of basalt sitting at the base of cliffs along the Antrim Coast. Geologists claim these mystical rocks were formed millions of years ago by cooling volcanoes. But don’t you prefer to believe they were really made by giants, as the ancient belief would hold? See [p. 482](#).

THE best HOTELS

- **Monart Spa** (Enniscorthy, County Wexford): A sumptuous countryside retreat, this pampering paradise is consistently rated among the top spas in Ireland. It’s a serene, adults-only zone in a beautiful setting. See [p. 214](#).
- **Lawcus Farm Guesthouse** (Stonyford, County Kilkenny): You can help out with feeding the animals at this idyllic B&B in Kilkenny, before relaxing in the beautifully converted farmhouse. See [p. 221](#).
- **Wicklow Way Lodge** (Oldbridge, County Wicklow): It’s hard to fault this lovely B&B with spectacular views of the Wicklow Mountains. So we won’t. It’s just gorgeous. See [p. 175](#).
- **Aghadoe Heights** (Killarney, County Kerry): Another of Ireland’s top spas, this one overlooks the Lakes of Killarney from a high vantage point just north of the town. See [p. 281](#).
- **Powerscourt Hotel** (Enniskerry, County Wicklow): One of the truly grand places to stay in the Dublin penumbra, this opulent hotel is on the grounds of the impressive Powerscourt House. See [p. 176](#).
- **Ashford Castle** (Cong, County Mayo): Live like royalty for a night at this fairytale castle in County Mayo. The great and the good have been coming here for decades to see what the fuss is about. The fuss, it turns out, is justified. See [p. 397](#).
- **Temple House** (Ballymote, County Sligo): Proving that not all the best overnight stays are to be found in luxury hotels, Temple House is an historic countryside B&B that feels like it’s in a world of its own. See [p. 409](#).
- **The Bervie** (Keel, County Mayo): Overlooking the Atlantic Ocean on an island off the Mayo coast, the Bervie is a haven of magnificent views and gourmet food. See [p. 397](#).
- **Two Rooms in Dublin** (County Dublin): This exceptionally welcoming townhouse B&B in Dublin has just two rooms, but try as hard as you can to get one. You’ll feel better taken care of here than in many of the capital’s most upscale hotels. See [p. 132](#).
- **Dolphin Beach House** (Clifden, County Galway): This incredibly special B&B on the Galway coast is a converted, early-20th-century homestead. It adds up to amazing views, gorgeous food, and gregarious hosts. See [p. 365](#).
- **Gregan’s Castle Hotel** (Ballyvaughn, County Clare): J. R. R. Tolkien took inspiration for *The Lord of the Rings* while staying at this elegant country house surrounded by the lunar landscape of Burren.

See [p. 334](#).

- **Rathmullan House** (Rathmullan, County Donegal): Remote and windswept, County Donegal attracts a fraction of the visitors of Dublin or Kerry. That's good news for those that make the journey to enjoy a night at this incredible 18th-century mansion. See [p. 430](#).
- **Dunnanelly Country House** (Downpatrick, County Down, Northern Ireland): A Regency mansion surrounded by 80 rolling acres of countryside, Dunnanelly is a captivating hideaway just 29km (18 miles) from Belfast. See [p. 458](#).
- **Wineport Lodge** (Athlone, County Westmeath): Calling this place a getaway isn't mere hyperbole; overlooking Lough Rea, Wineport Lodge is a retreat to relax the body and soul. See [p. 380](#).
- **The Merchant Hotel** (Belfast, Northern Ireland): Once a Victorian bank, this trendy hotel in Belfast has been utterly transformed into one of Ireland's most handsome city retreats. See [p. 460](#).

THE BEST RESTAURANTS

- **Chapter One** (Dublin, County Dublin): In the vaulted basement of the Dublin Writers Museum, this is one of the capital's very best restaurants. It's quite a splurge, but come at lunchtime to experience the same wonderful food at almost half the price. See [p. 143](#).
- **Sabor Brazil** (Dublin, County Dublin): We've deliberately kept the restaurant choices for this book focused on unique, local Irish experiences. But this tiny place in Dublin makes the cut, because where else would you find such an extraordinary fusion of Brazilian and Irish flavors? See [p. 145](#).
- **Fishy Fishy Café** (Kinsale, County Cork): Kinsale is Ireland's unofficial gourmet capital, and the delightful Fishy Fishy is among its best restaurants. The seafood is so local that the menu tells you who caught it—and we're talking dish by dish, name by name. See [p. 247](#).
- **Crackpots** (Kinsale, County Cork): Another Kinsale favorite, Crackpots is a charming combination of designer pottery shop and outstandingly good restaurant. It's one of the very best places to eat in a town where the competition is stiff. See [p. 246](#).
- **The Strawberry Tree** (Macreddin Village, County Wicklow): Ireland's first fully organic certified restaurant is still at the top of its game for delicious, innovative cooking, prepared from avowedly local ingredients. See [p. 177](#).
- **The Posh Nosh Club at Durhamstown Castle** (Navan, County Meath): A wonderful meal is made even more special by unique surroundings, and dinner here feels like you're at a super-fun dinner party thrown by true *bon viveurs*. See [p. 186](#).
- **Aniar** (Galway, County Galway): Galway City's most sought-after table has a tiny but impeccable, award-judged menu of innovative, modern Irish cuisine. Aniar is one of just a handful of Michelin-starred restaurants in Ireland. See [p. 352](#).



The pours are as perfect as the seafood in County Galway.

- **Wilde's at Lisloughrey Lodge** (Cong, County Mayo): On the grounds of Ashford Castle, Wilde's is a joyous restaurant run by a real star in the making. The dining room has an amazing view of Lough Corrib. See [p. 399](#).
- **Richmond House** (Cappoquin, County Waterford): One of the real destination restaurants of the

southeast, the Richmond House is a converted 18th-century mansion. They serve exquisite seasonal meals, and many of the ingredients come from their own garden. See [p. 206](#).

- **The Wild Geese** (Adare, County Limerick): Adare is one of the prettiest villages in Ireland, and at its heart is one of the region's best restaurants. The Wild Geese has won legions of fans for its modern Irish cooking. See [p. 316](#).
- **The Lime Tree** (Kenmare, County Kerry): This has long been one of the most respected restaurants in County Kerry, and with good reason—the sophisticated modern Irish menu, full of local flavors, is impressive but still surprisingly affordable. See [p. 271](#).
- **Thyme** (Athlone, County Westmeath): Upscale, innovative cooking in a completely relaxed environment, this delightful bistro is one of the very best places to eat in the Midlands. See [p. 382](#).
- **Doyle's Seafood Bar** (Dingle, County Kerry): Dingle isn't short of places offering super-fresh, local seafood, and it's hard to pick between them, but this is probably the best. What you find on the menu will depend on the catch of the day, and it's all impeccably done. See [p. 301](#).
- **Gallagher's Boxy House** (Dublin, County Dublin): Think again if you assume that the best meals always require the deepest pockets. A local man who wanted to preserve the culinary traditions of his childhood started this hugely popular restaurant in Dublin's Temple Bar. The result is simply captivating. See [p. 139](#).
- **Deane's Seafood Bar** (Belfast, County Antrim, Northern Ireland): The flagship restaurant in Belfast is chef Michael Deane's eponymous mini-chain, Deane's, serves outstanding Irish-French cuisine. The attached seafood bar is just as good—and much cheaper. See [p. 463](#).

THE **best** PICTURE-POSTCARD TOWNS

- **Adare** (County Limerick): This really is a picture-postcard town, its image having been reproduced alongside a hundred thousand "Wish You Were Heres." Unfortunately the secret is very much out, but if you manage to visit when the roads aren't clogged with tour buses, you'll leave with a memory card full of photos. See [p. 310](#).
- **Athlone** (County Westmeath): Sitting at the edge of the River Shannon, its streets curving around a sturdy, fortress-like castle, Athlone is a charmer. Houses are painted in bright hues, and with its small, funky boutiques and spirit of fun, it has the feel of a busy university town. Good restaurants and lively pubs add to its charms. See [chapter 12](#).
- **Dalkey** (County Dublin): The cutest of a number of upscale seaside towns unfurling south from Dublin like a string of pearls. Dalkey is both a short drive and a million miles away from the busy city. With a castle, a mountaintop folly, lovely beaches, and some fine restaurants, this is a town that tempts you to settle into its comfortable affluence. See [p. 119](#).
- **Kinsale** (County Cork): Kinsale's narrow streets all lead to the sea, dropping steeply from the hills around the harbor. The walk from Kinsale through Scilly to Charles Fort and Frower Point is breathtaking. Kinsale has the added benefit of being a foodie town with no shortage of good restaurants. See [p. 238](#).
- **Kenmare** (County Kerry): It's easy to fall in love with Kenmare, with its stone cottages, colorful gardens, and flowers overflowing from window boxes. It's also home to several elegant hotels, so it makes an enchanting base when exploring the Ring of Kerry. See [p. 268](#).
- **Dingle** (*An Daingean*) (County Kerry): Dingle is a charming hilltop medieval town. Stone buildings ramble up and down hills, and the small population is relaxed about visitors. It has lots of little

diners and picturesque pubs, plus a lovely, historic church. See [p. 296](#).

- **Ardara** (County Donegal): On the southwest coast of County Donegal, the tiny town of Ardara looks as if it were carved out of a solid block of granite. Its streets undulate up and down the rocky hills and are lined with little boutiques and charming arts shops, many selling clothes made of the famed Donegal wool. You can wander its entirety in a few minutes. It's a bite-sized place. See [p. 425](#).

THE BEST NATURAL WONDERS

- **Giant's Causeway** (County Antrim): At the foot of a cliff by the sea, this mysterious mass of tightly packed, naturally occurring hexagonal basalt columns are nothing short of astonishing. This volcanic wonder, formed 60 million years ago, looks marvelous from above, and even better when you've negotiated (cautiously) on foot. See [p. 482](#).
- **The Burren** (County Clare): We can guarantee this: The Burren is one of the strangest landscapes you're likely to see anywhere in the world. Its vast limestone grassland is spread with a quilt of wildflowers from as far afield as the Alps, all softening the stark stones jutting out of the ground. Its inhabitants include nearly every species of butterfly found in Ireland. See [chapter 10](#).
- **Cliffs of Moher** (County Clare): Rising from Hag's Head to the south, these magnificent sea cliffs reach their full height of 214m (702 ft.) just north of O'Brien's Tower. The views of the open sea and of the Aran Islands, and of the Twelve Bens mountains of Connemara (see below) are spectacular. A walk south along the cliff edge at sunset makes a perfect end to any day. See [p. 329](#).
- **The Twelve Bens** (County Galway): Amid Connemara's central mountains, bogs, and lakes, the rugged Twelve Bens range crowns a spectacular landscape. Some of the peaks are bare and rocky, others clothed in peat. The loftiest, Benbaun in Connemara National Park, reaches a height of 729m (2,392 ft.). See [p. 361](#).
- **Slieve League** (County Donegal): The Slieve League peninsula stretches for 48km (30 miles) into the Atlantic. Its pigmented bluffs rise to startlingly high sea cliffs. They can also be walked along, if you dare. See [p. 421](#).



Giant's Causeway



Hikers on the Slieve League coastal walk in County Donegal.

- **MacGillycuddy's Reeks** (County Kerry): A mountain range on the Iveragh Peninsula, MacGillycuddy's Reeks not only has the best name of any mountain range in Ireland, it also has the highest mountain on the island, Carruntuohill (1,041m/3,414 ft.). The Reeks are among Ireland's greatest

spectacles. See [p. 275](#).

THE best CASTLES

- **Kilkenny Castle** (County Kilkenny): Although parts of the castle date from the 13th century, the existing structure has the feel of an 18th-century palace. There have been many modifications since medieval times, including the addition of colorful landscaping, and the old stables now house numerous art galleries and shops. See [p. 216](#).
- **Blarney Castle** (County Cork): Despite the mobs of tourists who besiege it daily, this majestic tower house is worth a visit. While you're there, check out the Badger Cave and dungeons at the tower's base, as well as the serpentine paths that wind through the castle gardens. Need we mention the Blarney Stone? You sidle in under the upper wall with your head hanging over a 10-story drop. You kiss it. It's a thing people do. See [p. 228](#).
- **Bunratty Castle & Folk Park** (County Clare): This grand old castle has been well restored and filled with a curious assortment of medieval furnishings, offering a glimpse into the life of its past inhabitants. This is the first stop for many arrivals from Shannon, so expect crowds. See [p. 328](#).
- **Charleville Castle** (County Offaly): Sometimes the castles that leave the biggest impressions aren't those in the most impressive states of repair. Not only is Charleville one of the most atmospheric castles in Ireland, it is also reputed to be among its most haunted. See [p. 372](#).
- **Carrickfergus Castle** (County Antrim): This well-preserved Norman fortress on the bank of Belfast Lough is huge and impressive, complete with an imposing tower house and a high wall punctuated by corner towers. See [p. 456](#).
- **Dunluce Castle** (County Antrim): These castle ruins surmount a razor-sharp promontory jutting into the sea. This was a highly defensible setting, and the castle wasn't abandoned until a large section collapsed and fell into the breakers. See [p. 482](#).

THE best PREHISTORIC SITES

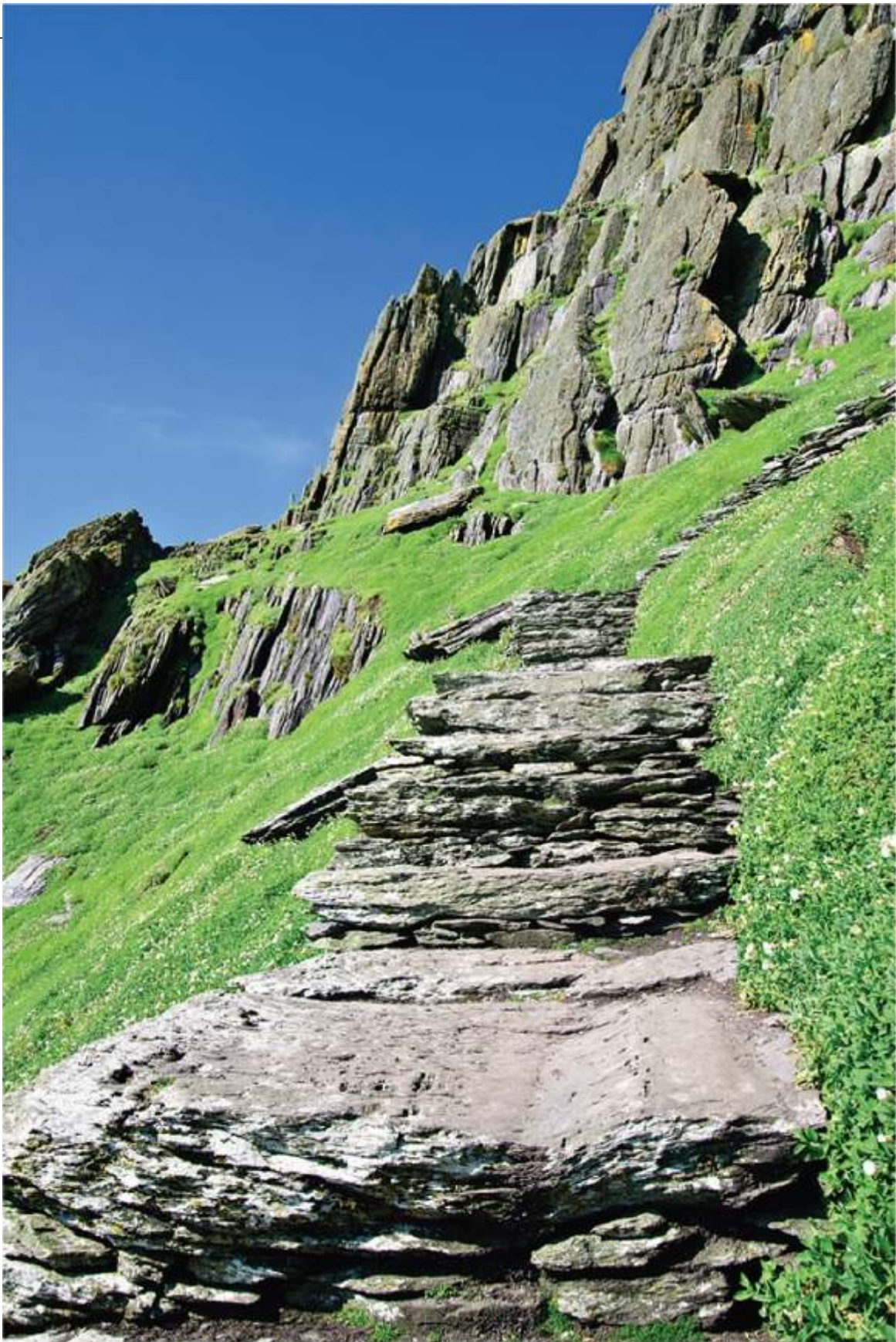
- **Hill of Tara** (County Meath): Of ritual significance from the Stone Age to the early Christian period, Tara has seen it all and kept it a secret. This was the traditional center and seat of Ireland's high kings. Although the hill is only 154m (512 ft.) above sea level, from here you can see each of Ireland's four Celtic provinces on a clear day. The site is mostly unexcavated and tells its story in whispers. It's a place to be walked slowly. See [p. 178](#).
- **Newgrange** (County Meath): One of the archaeological wonders of Western Europe, Newgrange is the centerpiece of a megalithic cemetery dating back 5,000 years. Its massive mound and passage tomb are amazing feats of engineering. But the question remains: What was it all for? See [p. 180](#).
- **Knowth** (County Meath): Another great passage tomb, Knowth's awesome presence is matched only by its inscrutability. Hundreds of prehistoric carvings were discovered here when the site was first excavated in the 1960s. And yet, nobody seems to quite understand it to this day. See [p. 179](#).
- **Dún Aengus** (County Galway): No one knows who built this massive stone fort or what year it was constructed. The eminent archaeologist George Petrie called Dún Aengus "the most magnificent barbaric monument in Europe." Facing the sea, where its three stone rings meet steep 90m (295-ft) cliffs, Dún Aengus still stands guard today over the southern coast of the island of Inishmore, the largest of the Aran Islands. See [p. 343](#).
- **Carrowmore & Carrowkeel** (County Sligo): These two megalithic cities of the dead (Europe's largest

may have once contained more than 200 passage tombs. The two together—one in the valley and the other atop a nearby mountain—convey an unequaled sense of the scale and wonder of the ancient peoples' reverence for the dead. Carrowmore is well presented and interpreted, while Carrowkeel is left to itself for those who seek it out. See [p. 399](#).

- **Corlea Trackway** (County Longford): This place doesn't impress for its grandeur or inscrutability; rather, the amazing thing about this simple wooden trackway in a remote bog is just how unbelievably old it is—people were walking its well-preserved planks well over 2,000 years ago. See [p. 373](#).

THE **best** EARLY CHRISTIAN RUINS

- **Glendalough** (County Wicklow): Nestled in “the glen of the two lakes,” this atmospheric monastic settlement was founded in the 6th century by St. Kevin, who was looking for seclusion and certainly found it here. The setting is endlessly scenic with lakes and forests surrounding the site. Although quite remote, Glendalough suffered assaults from the Vikings and English forces and eventually faded away. Today its stone ruins collude with the countryside to create one of the loveliest spots in Ireland. See [p. 168](#).



Stone stairway of Skellig Michael, County Kerry.

- **The Rock of Cashel (County Tipperary):** In name and appearance, “the Rock” suggests a citadel, a place designed more for power than prayer. In fact, Cashel (or *Caiseal*) means “fortress.” The rock is a huge outcropping—or an *upcropping*—of limestone topped with spectacularly beautiful ruins, including what was formerly the country’s finest Romanesque chapel. This was the seat of clerics and kings, a power center to rival Tara. Now, however, the two sites vie only for the attention of

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