

## ANCIENT EAST WEEKEND GETAWAYS

travel special



### GUILTY PLEASURE

Afternoon tea is always a treat, but when it's on a country estate — Mount Juliet ([mount-juliet.ie](http://mount-juliet.ie)) — and designed by chef Ken Harker of that estate's Michelin-starred restaurant, it's definitely a guilty pleasure. Tuck into lemon and pepper macarons, mixed berry panna cotta, pistachio fancies, scones and savouries which use fresh ingredients from the garden. My favourite is the tasty macaron 'burger' with 'cheese' (made from custard), 'tomato' (raspberry jelly), 'lettuce' (basil) and 'meat' (chocolate mousse). Afternoon tea costs €22pp, and you can enjoy it beside the fire in the drawing rooms of a house dating from 1752. Staying over? Double rooms in the Manor House start from €179.



### CHEAP KICK

Foodies will love the sandwich of the day at The Little Green Grocer (€6, [thelittlegreengrocer.ie](http://thelittlegreengrocer.ie)) — sweet potato hummus with sauerkraut, toasted sunflower seeds and rocket with Knockdrinna farmhouse cheese, for example. The shop is packed with treats from local producers. Afterwards, drop over to Slice Of Heaven for cupcakes ranging from lemon to salted caramel (€2.40, [asliceofheaven.ie](http://asliceofheaven.ie)). You can learn how to make them at the adjoining Kilkenny Cookery School (€30, [kilkennycookeryschool.com](http://kilkennycookeryschool.com)), too.

# Cool Kilkenny

*The Marble City is a brilliant mix of the medieval and modern, writes*  
**YVONNE GORDON**

### SET THE MOOD

It's known as Ireland's Medieval Capital, but I also love Kilkenny — both city and county — because it's such a cosmopolitan hub of creativity. There is Kilkenny Castle, the Black Abbey and a new Medieval Mile Museum set to open later this year, but there are also arts, crafts, excellent local food producers and two Michelin-starred restaurants. In the city, start at the National Craft Gallery for contemporary craft and designs and the shop and foodhall at Kilkenny Design Centre ([nationalcraftgallery.ie](http://nationalcraftgallery.ie); [kilkennydesign.com](http://kilkennydesign.com)), before dropping into Folkster's basement for vintage clothes by the kilo (€20 per kilo, 7 Patrick Street, [folkster.com](http://folkster.com)). Refreshment choices range from cocktails at the stylish Left Bank (The Parade, [leftbank.ie](http://leftbank.ie)) to pints at the Hole In The Wall — if you can find it (17 High Street, [holeinthewall.ie](http://holeinthewall.ie)).



### TOP TIP

Drop into Foodworks ([foodworks.ie](http://foodworks.ie)) on the Medieval Mile for a bright, contemporary dining space where dishes range from slow-braised beef to a feta panna cotta salad of chargrilled vegetables. Veg, salads, herbs and pigs are from the family farm.



### INSIDER INTEL

There's very little that tour guide Frank Kavanagh doesn't know about Kilkenny and its surrounds. He'll tell you stories of the castle (*left*), where he worked for 40 years, including tales of kings, queens, mischievous celebrities and the Magna Carta, plus the secrets of the city's laneways, ghosts and witches' taverns. A tour includes tea in the castle kitchen (three-hour tour, €60; [franksmidievaltours.com](http://franksmidievaltours.com)).

**GLITCHES:** Kilkenny has lots of festivals — including the Roots Festival and Kilkenny Cat Laughs in summer, so accommodation can book up quickly. During high season, attractions like the castle get busy with groups — go early to avoid queues.

### GET ME THERE

Kilkenny is a 1.5-hour drive from Dublin on the M7/M9, and just under two hours from Cork on the M8. Trains are on the Dublin Heuston to Waterford route, with fares from €18.49 (single) and day returns from €27.70 ([irishrail.ie](http://irishrail.ie)). There are rail connections to the west and south from Kildare, and the city is also well served by bus routes. The nearest train station to Mount Juliet is Thomastown; the hotel has a collection service for the 10-minute journey. See also [visitkilkenny.ie](http://visitkilkenny.ie).

