

Ireland unlocks

If there's a county made for 'social distancing', it's Donegal, where adventures are as sociable or crowd-free as you wish. The 1,100km coast has 12 blue flag beaches, where you may not meet a soul. There are family forest trails or mountain paths just wide enough for one.

Leave a lively town like Ardara, and you can soon be on a remote mountain pass or in an isolated lighthouse. Join the gang for a surf lesson at Bundoran or Rossnowlagh, or have the waves to yourself at Dooney.

Donegal's water goes into craft beers and whiskeys, its seaweed goes into baths and bisques; its seas swirl around sea stacks and caves. It offers bays and cliffs, bleak bogs and ancient forests, sand dunes and manicured golf links.

You can't go far without seeing a friendly donkey or the stare of a sheep, but you can also find red deer, golden eagles, bears and boars. Crumbling ruins sit near stately castles and digital hubs. There's a local tweed that will keep you warm, Irish words from locals in Gaeltacht areas.

You could look for magic at Malin Head, where they filmed *Star Wars* and the Northern Lights sometimes dance, but there's so much magic in the landscape and people you'll meet, you don't need to look that far.

"Donegal is ready to welcome back warmly all of those who waited patiently during the lockdown period," says Barney Mc Laughlin, head of tourism at Donegal County Council. "The county is back and open for business so let your Wild Atlantic Way journey begin here."

DELICIOUS DONEGAL

In our new staycation series, travel writer **Yvonne Gordon** looks forward to spending more time in Donegal

GREAT OUTDOORS



Adrenaline buzz

Blow away the cobwebs after lockdown at the new Adventure Waterpark at Inish Adventures in Moville. There's a huge inflatable floating assault course with all sorts of slides, jungle bars and balance beams to test both adults and kids. Make it a family day out by adding in some kayaking, surfing, SUP, rafting, sailing or archery, and there's a brand new coffee

shop too for a pre-adventure kickstart. If you just fancy a stroll, try the lovely 3km shore path between Moville and Greencastle. inishadventures.com

Coastal secrets

If you got back onto two wheels during lockdown and would like to continue the habit, what about a one-day self-guided e-bike tour around South Donegal? Starting at Carrick, you'll take in the area's beautiful headlands, bays and beaches, stopping off at the cliffs at Slieve League and the village of Glencolmcille. Best of all, you can do the tour at your own pace and the e-bike will have you sailing up hills with ease. irelandbybike.com

Coastal secrets

A somewhat calmer way to take to the water with plenty of space is on a Paddle and Prosecco tour around Gola Bay with Gola Island Adventures. Gola is a 10-minute boat ride from Magheragallon Pier (around 7km from Gweedore) and on the tour, you'll learn some of the history of the island before paddling to one of its secluded beaches for a 'light refreshment' of Prosecco. Groups from 6 to 10 people (adults only). golaisland.com

+ Three amazing stays



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For post-lockdown pampering, five-star Lough Eske Castle reopens on June 29, with gym and spa to follow on July 20. It's a great base for exploring south Donegal and there are welcome-back offers. lougheskecastlehotel.com



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The Georgian Rathmullan House has been doing lots to get ready for reopening on July 3 - adding more outside dining, for instance, including in special treehouses and pods. rathmullanhouse.com



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Find bell tents and wooden glamping pods at Wild Atlantic Camp in Creeslough, where activities include pitch and putt, astroturf pitch and bike hire. wildatlanticcamp.ie

What to eat and drink

FRUITS OF THE SEA

With so much Atlantic coastline, it's no surprise that Donegal seafood is top notch. Drop into The Seafood Shack on Killybegs pier for freshly battered haddock and chips or cod goujons, or at sister restaurant The Boathouse (reopening on July 1), Ireland's Seafood Chowder Champion Garry Anderson serves tasty pan-seared scallops with boxty potato; Killybegs lobster or black sole on the bone. In Inishowen, past World Chowder Champ Kieran 'Duey' Doherty kept locals well fed with lockdown takeaways. He reopens Nancy's Barn in Ballyliffin on June 29. killybegsseafoodshack.com, nancysbarn.ie

SILKIE SMOOTH SPIRITS

Mythical silkie seals are said to come ashore and turn into dark-haired sea maidens. Legendary Dark Silkie Irish Whiskey is the latest from Sliabh Liag Distillers, a hint of peated whiskey capturing the smoky taste of old Donegal whiskeys. "It reminds me of my Granny's kitchen by the range and even a hint of Grandad's pipe," says founder James Doherty. Or try Kinnegar's new Donegal Lager DL. sliabhliaghostillers.com; kinnegarbrewing.ie

FUTURE'S BRIGHT →

You can meet Donegal's latest arrivals, six baby wild boars — known as boarlets — at Wild Ireland. Mum Tory, who moved to Donegal from a UK trust and is named after the Donegal island, gave birth during lockdown on April 25 (wild boars became extinct in Ireland around 800 years ago). The furry babies, three girls and three boys, will be named after Irish islands. Booking essential. wildireland.org

Did you know... Thousands of people around the world are signing up to do the Wild Atlantic 500km Virtual Challenge. The route starts in Muff in Inishowen and finishes in Bundoran and is divided into 11 stages, following the Wild Atlantic Way. Register online before July 1 for a race pack and instructions, to walk, jog or run the route, njuko.net/wild-atlantic-500k-virtual

NB: See govisitdonegal.com and discoverireland.ie for more. Opening dates, prices and offerings are all subject to public health guidelines and change.