

Business Post

Magazine

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Starry, starry night

John Maguire picks
his Oscar winners

The beat goes on

Martha Wainwright
on a life in music

Kathleen MacMahon

Were we really so
different from our
parents?



Into the blue

From cliff walks to paddleboarding, your guide
to the top Irish coastal experiences to savour

Explore the coasts with the most this summer



Mizen Head in Cork is traditionally regarded as the island of Ireland's most southerly point



formations like Devil's Bridge. There are lots of seabirds in the area and the remains of an old signal station, and in summer the ground fills up with seapink flowers.

If you want to go further north, take a sailing day trip on the Amazing Grace yacht to Inishtrahull Island, 10km north of Malin Head (amazing-grace.ie, €100). The island has lots of space for walking, with the remains of a village, schoolhouse and a lighthouse, plus wildlife such as seabirds and seals.

Mizen Head

On a small rocky outcrop on a peninsula in the south west of Ireland, you'll find Mizen Head Signal Station (mizenhead.ie, €7.50), the home of Ireland's first radio beacon. You get to the station by going down 99 steps and then crossing a pedestrian bridge that spans 172 feet across a chasm with a 150-foot drop over a whirling sea.

Mizen Head in Co Cork is traditionally regarded as the island of Ireland's most southerly point (the actual point is nearby on Brow Head), and you can learn all about the role of the signal station, as well as the life of lightkeepers stationed here, plus the story of lighthouses like the Fastnet. This is at the Mizen Head Visitor Centre, which also has a shop and café.

Another thrilling crossing in these parts is to the tiny Dursey Island (durseyisland.ie), at the end of the nearby Beara Peninsula, for walks and nature. The island is reached by a cable car which runs across a sound from the end of the peninsula to the island, and which is sometimes used to transport animals.

Stroll cliff paths

The walks along the Cliffs of Moher in Co Clare rank among the most spectacular in Ireland. There is actually 20km of walking trail – the Cliffs of Moher Coastal Walk (cliffsofmoher.ie) – stretching from Hag's Head to the village of Doolin, and passing the Cliffs of Moher visitor centre, with a shuttle bus running between all three points in summer. The southern part of the coastal path to Doolin is currently closed, so check online before your visit.

For a more structured cliff tour, the Gobbins in Islandmagee, Co Antrim (thegobbinscliffpath.com, £20), takes you along a 5km path that was carved into the rock face for railway visitors in Edwardian times. You'll see bridges, caves and sheer drops along the way during the two or three-hour tour. Closer to Dublin, the Howth Cliff Path takes around two hours to walk on a loop from the village. You can take in the Baily Lighthouse, and the views stretch out to the Irish Sea and south across Dublin Bay to the Wicklow Mountains.

Kayak the high seas

On a sea-kayaking trip with the Irish Experience

on the Hook Peninsula in Wexford (theirishexperience.com, from €30), you'll launch from Baginbun beach and explore the waters along the scenic headland, while hearing stories and legends about the Normans, who first landed here in the 12th century.

On the 1.5-hour tour, you might encounter some local seals in the bay, who sometimes follow the kayakers out of curiosity, or get to explore a sea cave. All gear is provided, and there are double and triple kayaks for families. Thrill-seekers can choose a longer three-hour tour which includes kayaking right into a cave under the headland, or there is also a three-hour sunset kayaking experience.

Exploring sea caves by kayak is also on offer on an outing with Inish Adventures in Inishowen, Donegal (inishadventures.com, €50) which runs half-day kayaking trips to Fort Dunree near Buncrana on the Inishowen Peninsula. You'll see the fort and the cliffs from the sea, and enter into one of the sea caves, spotting lots of seabirds along the way. The tour includes a stop at a secluded beach for lunch.

Whale and dolphin-watching

Whales and dolphins are regularly spotted in Irish waters, and the south and north-west Atlantic coasts are among the best places to see them. Trips with experienced skippers from Whale Watch West Cork (whalewatchwestcork.com, €55) in summer leave Baltimore Harbour twice daily in summer, to search for fin, mink and humpback whales as well as dolphins and porpoises.

For a thrilling boat trip and the chance to spot dolphins and whales off the Dingle Peninsula, jump into a rib for a Dingle Sea Safari (dingleseasafari.com/ribexperience, €65), which will take you from Dingle Bay ▶



Whales and dolphins are regularly spotted in Irish waters

Fancy a jaunt around some of Ireland's legendarily beautiful and varied coastline? Then there's no better time to avail of the many tours and experiences available around the country, from cliff walks to surfing lessons to whale watching, writes **Yvonne Gordon**

Living on this island, we are lucky to have so many beautiful coasts, beaches and headlands to discover – we can walk cliffs and piers at sunset, explore bays, harbours and caves by water, escape to quiet islands, look for whales or tour famous old lighthouses.

Here, we've picked some of our favourite coastal tours and experiences, with everything from cliff walks and ferry rides to paddleboarding, sailing and surfing lessons (prices are based on one adult) – so, however you enjoy the coast this summer, you are sure to have some memorable experiences. As always, wrap up well, always bring the correct safety equipment and check forecasts before you set out.

Malin Head

At the tip of the Inishowen Peninsula in Donegal, Malin Head (govisitdonegal.com) is the most northerly point on the island of Ireland. You can walk on the coast here, admiring the sea views from Banba's Crown, peering down into Hell's Hole and seeing unusual rock



The walks along the Cliffs of Moher in Co Clare rank among the most spectacular in Ireland

Left: open-sea kayaking often includes exploring sea caves or sightings of seals

to the Blasket Islands. Each boat fits 12 people and the tour lasts either two and a half or three hours, starting in Dingle Harbour. You'll see the coast's most interesting rock formations, sea caves and the Great Blasket Islands, plus the many resident seals along the way.

Take a scenic ferry

Ireland has some scenic ferry crossings, but it's always a bonus when there's a chance to see dolphins. As there's a pod of bottlenose dolphins living in the Shannon Estuary, there's a good chance of sighting some on the Shannon Ferry, which runs from Killimer to Tarbert (shannonferries.com, €5.40 per adult or €19.80 for a car). The scenic crossing takes around 20 minutes and is a handy way to get from Co Kerry to Co Clare with your car, saving a long drive right round the Shannon Estuary itself.

Another lovely crossing, and one which saves driving time, is the Lough Swilly ferry in Donegal from the Fanad Peninsula across the sea inlet to the Inishowen Peninsula (swillyferry.com, €5 or €17 per car). You'll start (or end) at the beach town of Rathmullan and cross to Buncrana. The journey takes around 25 minutes, and there are superb views of both peninsulas and down into the Lough Swilly inlet.

Surf the rollers

You can surf on nearly all of Ireland's coasts, but the best surfing conditions are along western Atlantic coasts, with everything from gentle beach breaks to reefs and big wave spots on offer. A good place for beginners is Lahinch in Co Clare, where a lesson with Ben's Surf Clinic (benssurfclinic.com, €40) will get you kitted out with a wetsuit and armed with some of the secrets of how to get into the best position to catch waves and stand up on the board.

Strandhill in Co Sligo is another popular spot for beginners. To perfect your breathing technique and get the blood flowing to the correct muscles before your surfing session, try a beach yoga and surf session with Your Wellbeing Warrior (yourwellbeingwarrior.com, €50) which will get you into the surfing frame of mind, to release tension and build up the necessary energy for surfing, before the surf lesson itself.

Escape to an island

Scattery Island is located at the mouth of the Shannon Estuary, Co Clare. It is uninhabited, and a visit there includes a tour of some fascinating heritage sites with a round tower and the remains of five churches and a cathedral. There's also an old military battery, a lighthouse and the ruins of a village.

A trip with Scattery Island Tours (scatteryislandtours.com, €25) includes a one-hour guided tour of the monastic sites. The tour starts from Kilrush Marina, and the crossing takes around 30 minutes. After



Stand Up Paddleboarding – SUP for short – is becoming one of Ireland's most popular water sports



The best surfing conditions are along Ireland's western Atlantic coasts

the tour, there's time to explore the island, either with a walk to the battery and lighthouse at the other end, or the chance for a picnic or a swim from the beach.

The Blasket Islands off the Dingle Peninsula in Co Kerry are also full of history, and a Blasket Island Adventure tour with Dingle Dolphin Boat Tours (dingledolphin.com, €55) will take you along the scenic coast of Slea Head and over to the Great Blasket Islands – perhaps spotting dolphins, whales or seals on the way.

Kayak under the stars

A night kayaking trip with Atlantic Sea Kayaking (atlanticseakayaking.com, €75) in west Cork starts out at dusk, and as you float along in the fading light, your other senses come alive, taking in all the sounds and smells of the air. You can choose a trip in either Castlehaven Bay or Lough Hyne, and you'll hear the sounds of wildlife at night. You might also visit an old graveyard for boats.

Some of these trips take place under a sky full of stars or a full moon, and if you're lucky, you'll also experience the magical phenomena of bioluminescence in the water, set off by a chemical reaction which causes tiny organisms in the water to light up like tiny sparkles. Atlantic Sea Kayaking also arranges urban and sunset kayaking trips in Cork city and seaweed safaris from Castlehaven Bay.

Tour inside a lighthouse

The world's oldest working lighthouse is on Hook Head in Co Wexford, and a 45-minute tour of Hook Lighthouse (hookheritage.ie, €10) will explain how the first monks lit beacons here to stop shipwrecks, as well as the history and occupants of the tower since it was built 800 years ago. The tour ends on one of the best parts of visiting a lighthouse – admiring the sea views from the balcony at the top level, where the light itself is located.

If you want to experience the peace and quiet of life under a beam, some of Ireland's lighthouses have old lighthouse keepers' cottages that you can rent. The buildings themselves are usually sheltered from the sea (so don't expect glass walls), but the remote locations are unrivalled. St John's Point (greatlighthouses.com, sleeps four, two nights from €450) is at the end of a long narrow peninsula that stretches out into Donegal Bay, and a night or two in the lighthouse here gives you a feeling of being very close to the sea and nature, with beautiful views of the bay, as well as sunsets and sunrises.

Stand up on a paddleboard

Stand Up Paddleboarding – SUP for short – is becoming one of Ireland's

most popular water sports. It's especially suited to calm waters and sheltered areas, and can be a fun outing on the water. The boards are like large, stable surfboards and you move them by using a small paddle. Experienced paddlers can rent their own board, but the best way to start is to take a lesson or two, or a group paddle tour.

Sligo Bay Sup (sligobaysup.ie, €40) run paddles in lots of Co Sligo's most scenic spots, including Mullaghmore, Rosses Point and Lough Gill, or take to the waters of Connemara with Real Adventures (realadventures.ie, €50), for a relaxing trip around Mannin Bay. Paddles usually last two hours, and all gear such as wetsuits is provided.

Soak in some seaweed

Seaweed is full of minerals which have many benefits for the skin and body, helping to smooth, moisturise and detox the skin, improve circulation and relax aching muscles. A seaweed bath at a traditional bathhouse like Kilcullen's Bath House in Enniscrone, Co Sligo (kilcullenseaweedbaths.net, €25) starts with a few minutes in a steam cabinet to open the pores.

The bathhouse dates back to 1912, and still has many original features and it is a favourite among locals. In Bundoran, Co Donegal, Bundoran Seaweed Baths (waterworldbundoran.com/seaweedbaths, €25) include seaweed face masks and serums, and there are dual bathing

rooms if you want to chat to a friend.

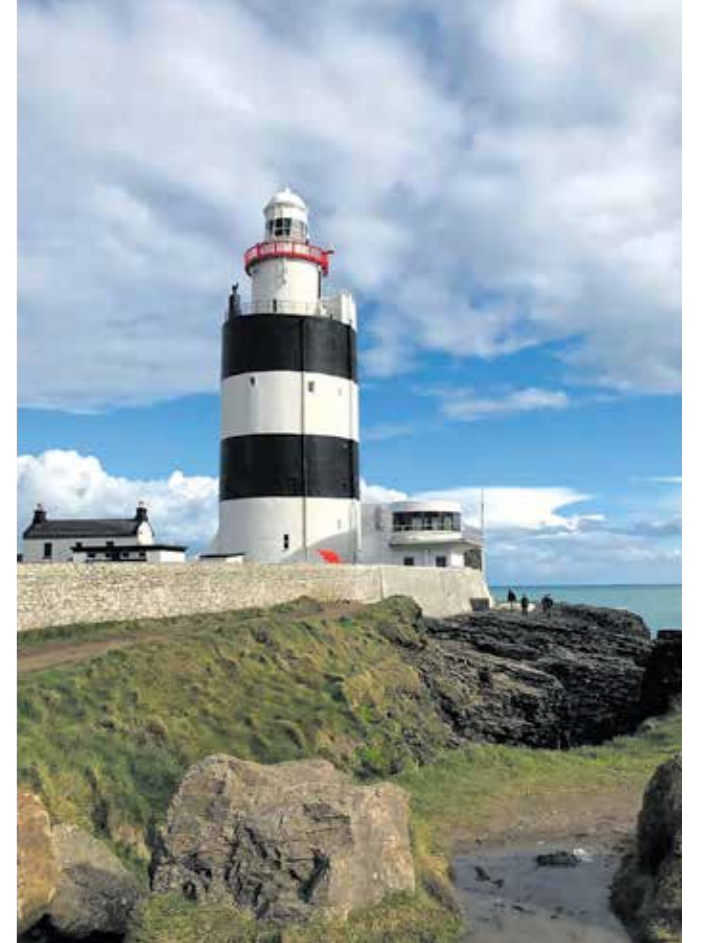
Gallop along the beach

Cantering a horse along the beach is another unforgettable coastal experience, and Ireland has some good choices for guided treks for all levels. A beach ride and lesson with Carrowholly Stables and Trekking Centre in Co Mayo (carrowholly-stables.com, €35) will take you along the scenic shores of Clew Bay, under Croagh Patrick, with rides set up for all levels of experience from beginner to advanced.

At Island View Riding Stables in Co Sligo (islandviewridingstables.com, from €28 to €170), beach rides range from a one-hour easy ride on Trawalua Strand to a gallop along Streedagh Beach to a five-hour trip on horseback across an Atlantic channel and onto O'Connor's Island for a picnic.



A beach riding lesson with Carrowholly Stables and Trekking Centre in Co Mayo



Hook Head Lighthouse in Co Wexford is one of the oldest lighthouses in the world

Take a coastal tour

Finding out where seabirds breed, where the fossils are in rocks, where the secret caves are and how to get away from crowded paths make coastal tours a great way to understand more about our landscape. You'll find out all this and more on a tour with expert Cormac McGinley of Cormac's Coast in the Burren, Co Clare (cormacscoast.com, €75).

The cliff path in Howth, Co Dublin can get busy, especially on a sunny weekend day in high season, but thankfully the guides at Shane's Howth Adventures, including Shane himself, know the less busy spots and can even direct you to a sea cave at low tide. They will also take you to a wood and to an ancient dolmen in the grounds of Howth Castle, with stories about everything from a visit by pirate queen Grace O'Malley to famous writers who visited the area.

Visit an offshore lighthouse

Seeing the Fastnet Lighthouse off Co Cork is on the list of many visitors. The lonely lighthouse sits on a tiny rock, 13 kilometres out from land, and on a Fastnet Rock Tour (capeclearferries.com, €42), which sets out from either Baltimore or Schull, you can admire the scenery and islands of Roaringwater Bay before you circle the rock itself.

You can see the 50-metre granite tower up close, wondering how it was built and imagining the life of the lighthouse keepers who lived there in isolation and storms in the years from 1904 when it was first powered up, until it was automated in 1989. The tour also stops at Cape Clear island – in the Gaeltacht area, where you can visit the Cape Clear and Fastnet Rock Heritage Centre and learn more about the area's maritime history. There are also sunset tours in the summer months.

For something closer to shore, Ballycotton Island Lighthouse is just over 1km from Ballycotton Harbour in east Cork. A 1.5-hour tour (ballycottonseadventures.com, €25) includes a short crossing and time on the tiny island, where you'll learn about how the lighthouse keepers lived, before climbing the tower for 360-degree views and to see if any whales or dolphins are in the area. You might also spot some of the island's goats.

Sail on a yacht

Getting out in a proper sailing boat (not a motor boat), with sails that are powered by the wind, is an exhilarating experience, especially if it's along some of Ireland's scenic coastline. Sovereign Sailing (sovereignsailing.com, €195 for 4 people) runs three-hour guided sailing trips on a 27-foot yacht from Kinsale where you'll get to work the sails and even steer the boat, as you relax and drift along at the pace of wind and waves, and admire the coast from the water.

For something a little larger, the Brian Boru (dublinundersail.com, €75) is a traditional wooden sailing boat, 17m-long, which runs three-hour sailing trips on Dublin Bay, a recognised Unesco biosphere, with sunset sailing trips on summer evenings. Trips start and finish at Dún Laoghaire Marina, and you can learn about crewing on a traditional boat – and even climb out onto the bowsprit if conditions allow. ■