

Shaped by Sea & Stone

Mid & East Antrim



Journey into the unexpected.

To a land shaped by
sea and stone.

In a world made smaller by tourism, where surprise is no longer on the agenda, how we travellers yearn for the unexpected.

No more crowds inching their way through the same old attractions, driving on over-travelled roads to places whose character has been dulled by endless visits, to be welcomed by people who have seen it all before.

It doesn't have to be like that.

When the makers of Game of Thrones® were searching for a spectacular but unfamiliar landscape to film the world's favourite TV series, they knew just where to go.

To a land shaped by the sea, where a triumph of Victorian engineering created one of the world's most dramatic coastal roads, opening up a unique culture sealed off for centuries.

To a land shaped by stone, where green valleys lie beneath the most spiritual of mountains and spectacular ridges of rock tower over a magical landscape.

Where medieval castles are still occupied by the families who built them and take you to the heart of a tumultuous history.

Where you can revive the soul, watching the thunderous beauty of water cascading down a waterfall in a forest or, relaxing in a hot tub by a plunging river, after a hot stone massage in one of Europe's most luxurious spas.

Where you can travel to the past in an unspoilt 18th century village, learn an ancient craft at the blacksmith's forge and enjoy the sheer delight of a Victorian steam train experience.

Where you can taste an amazing food culture in atmospheric venues in one of Ireland's Top Ten Foodie Destinations and you can choose to stay in a 17th century

You can get so close to that remarkable coastline you are actually part of it on Europe's most dramatic cliff walk.

castle or, overlooking spectacular cliffs in a beautifully restored lighthouse keeper's cottage.

Where you can get so close to that remarkable coastline you are actually part of it on Europe's most dramatic cliff walk.

Where, by ancient stone floors and glowing turf fires, the finest traditional musicians invite you to a night of music you will never forget in Ireland's oldest thatched inn.

Our pace is slower, our people have time to engage, we are at one with our world and we'd love you to share it.

The path less travelled leads you to us. Tempted? Then read on.



Welcome

**Here you will find
a taster of things to
see & do in the region**

For full details visit shapedbyseaandstone.com

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Garron Point, Causeway Coastal Route
BT44 0JS


Coast

Voted Best in Travel
2018 by Lonely Planet,
the world's leading
guidebook, the Causeway
Coastal Route is a journey
unlike any other.



Carnlough
Glenarm
Ballygally
Larne
Islandmagee
Whitehead
Carrickfergus

Belfast

 The Black Arch, Larne
BT40 1TZ

Before William Bald blasted his coastal road, it was easier for locals to sail the few miles to Scotland than travel to Belfast.

Thanks to that triumph of Victorian engineering, this uniquely beautiful area has been opened up and one of the most enthralling road trips on the planet can be enjoyed by all.

But the centuries of remoteness have left their mark. A culture isolated from the rest of Ireland developed its own unique ways and they survive to this day - how people speak, their music, myths and folklore, the warmth and genuineness of their welcome and the way they are at one with their breathtakingly beautiful environment.

 Carrickfergus Castle, Carrickfergus
BT38 7BG



Morning

The Rock of Fergus

We begin with breakfast in Carrickfergus and a tour of its 12th century castle.

If a castle like this existed in any other place, you would be part of a heaving crowd. But in Carrickfergus, there's space to breathe in its history. Carrickfergus Castle stands on the rocks where the ship of Fergus, legendary king of Scotland, ran aground, giving this vitally strategic town its name, the 'Rock of Fergus'.

Look across the harbour from the castle walls and you will understand why John de Courcy, Anglo Norman conqueror of Ulster, built his stronghold here to secure the Lough.

The story of Ulster

In the castle's endless history of sieges, attacks, captures, burnings and changing hands, lies the story of this part of Ulster. It has protected the Antrim Coast from Irish and Scottish armies, not to mention the terrifying Sorley Boy McDonnell, and was a key battleground in the war between James II and William III that changed the course of Irish history forever.

French invasion

In 1760 came the most surprising invasion of all when French troops stormed the castle and captured the town, during the Seven Years' War between France and Britain. All this and much more can be discovered on a guided tour around this remarkably well-preserved Norman castle.

Fall in love with our coast

But the story of our extraordinary coast is only just beginning as we drive the five miles along the coastal road to Whitehead, to the best example you will find of an idyllic Victorian seaside resort.

This area, including neighbouring Islandmagee, offers some of the most exhilarating ways to become immersed in one of Europe's most dramatic coastlines.

Rooms with a view

That includes the amazing views by one of Northern Ireland's most important working lighthouses, Blackhead.

If you had been standing outside the lighthouse keepers' cottages at Blackhead Lighthouse on April 2nd 1912 you would have had a perfect view of RMS Titanic as she sailed out of Belfast. Today you can become a keeper for the day, scanning the waters for boats, as well as dolphins, porpoises and even whales.

The best way to learn about the keepers' lives? Live them! Today, their cottages provide some of the most unique self-catering accommodation anywhere.

Sit back in the evening, listen to the crashing waves below and transport yourself back to a simpler time when people were at one with the natural world around them.

It's a holiday for the soul!

An experience you will never forget

Imagine if you could get so close to this now world famous coastline, that you are actually part of it? You can.

When it was opened back in 1902 The Gobbins Cliff Path was said to have 'no parallel in Europe as a marine cliff walk' and was five times as popular as the Giant's Causeway. Since the path was re-imagined in 2015, a new legion of visitors have come to the same conclusion. The Gobbins Visitor Centre and the tours that depart from it have become one of Northern Ireland's top visitor attractions.

It's about a 15-minute drive from The Gobbins Visitor Centre to our next stop, at Billy Andy's, one of the last original licensed spirit grocers still left in the country. Dating back to the early 1800s this traditional family pub is also famed for its food.

You'll find it near the little village of Glenoe, a hidden gem in the area, and the inspirational Glenoe Waterfall Walk.



Afternoon

We rejoin the coastal road just outside Whitehead, taking it to the ancient seaport of Larne.

Head to the leisure centre carpark and go for a refreshing walk along the Promenade, where you have the option to take a photo outside the Chaine Memorial to James Chaine who was instrumental in the building of Larne Harbour. Going in the opposite direction you will come across Larne's very own Jurassic Coastline.

The unique geology that makes up this part of the coast is never more remarkable than at Waterloo Bay. Just outside Larne, it's one of the most important places in the world when it comes to fossil-spotting for treasures that date back 200 million years ago! Please remember to 'Leave No Trace'.

Walk to the end of the Promenade and you will see a small memorial sculpture overlooking the sea which reads 'Antrim Coast Road' constructed 1832 to 1842 by the Men of the Glynnnes (Glens) under the direction of William Bald. Pay your respects, he, more than anyone else, is responsible for one of the world's greatest touring experiences. With the limited resources of his time, this remarkable engineer created a road through sheer rock, often risking life and limb with his use of explosives. Head back down through Chaine Park to retrieve your car.

Just half a mile on you will see a typical example of his work, as you drive through a manmade arch in the cliff.

“...it's one of the most important places in the world when it comes to fossil-spotting for treasures that date back 200 million years ago!”

Drive on the wild side

As you leave Larne behind, the scenery begins to change. The blue waters are close to your right, with views of Scotland a constant feature on a good day. There's a sense of wildness too, you are in a different world. There are remarkable rock formations on both sides and headlands appear and disappear in the distance as the road veers around.

Beautiful beaches

Of the many unexpected discoveries you will make on this trip, not least surprising is the host of secluded sandy beaches, uncrowded even in summertime. About four miles from Larne on the Coast Road you'll reach Ballygally, where you can surf or paddle board off the golden beach before retiring to Ballygally Castle Hotel for lunch or afternoon tea.

Ancient waterway

For another seven miles the coastal road meanders around headlands, with the deep blue of the water so close on one side, sheer rock formations on the other. We have reached Glenarm where a special walk will give us a wonderful perspective of the historic town's beautiful bay.

The Layde Walk takes us along what was a 19th century waterway, used to power a water wheel at a limestone crushing mill. Walk to the heart of the village along Toberwine Street and steeply up the oldest street in Northern Ireland, The Vennel, once part of the old road from Glenarm to Carrickfergus.

You will pass an old lantern and water pump on your way to the highest part of the village. From this height look back at the village, imposing castle and the scenic bay. It's a magical feeling and you're part of it all.

If you're looking for a special place to stay while you're here, the award-winning five star Water's Edge B&B has wonderful views over the bay.

Chaine Memorial Tower, Larne
BT40 1AD



Inside knowledge

You have explored this unique coast from every perspective now, save one. The sea! That is easily remedied. From Glenarm to Carnlough it's a five-minute drive and you'll soon see the village's lovely harbour.

Board local fisherman Davy Smyth's boat at the stone steps in the harbour that were ascended by Arya Stark in Game of Thrones® and he'll take you around the beautiful bay. If it's possible he can take you further afield too.

The world's favourite road trip

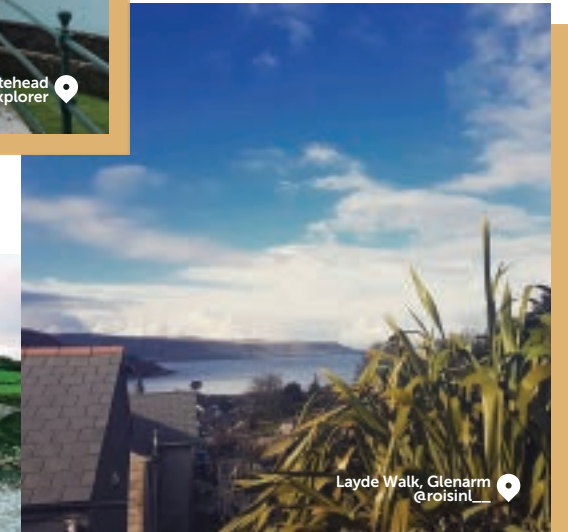
From Carnlough, the Causeway Coastal Route still has far to go if you wish to follow it around. You have yet to experience two gems of the Glens of Antrim, Cushendall and Cushendun before the road veers around the coast to historic Ballycastle, famed for its Auld Lammas Fair. From here you can take the ferry to Rathlin Island and its famous sea bird colonies.

From Ballycastle the spectacular road takes you to the UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Giant's Causeway, 'the eighth wonder of the world', and the world's oldest whiskey distillery at nearby Bushmills. Do you dare cross the Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge, towering over the Atlantic, one of the great rites of passage of this trip? The beautiful little harbour at Ballintoy, like so many stunning locations along this route, will be instantly recognisable to Game of Thrones® aficionados.

Before the McDonnell clan built their castle at Glenarm, the 'Lords of the Route' were based at Dunluce Castle, at the edge of a mighty cliff overlooking the Atlantic. The ruined castle, said to be an inspiration for Narnia's Cair Paravel, remains an extraordinary sight.

Onwards, through the traditional seaside resorts of Portrush and Portstewart, stopping at the wondrous folly of Mussenden Temple and lovely Roe Valley Country Park, and ending this journey of journeys at the historic walls of Derry~Londonderry.

Insta-worthy sights & scenes



Meet the locals **The Gobbins**

“I have been guiding people over this walk since it re-opened in 2015 and it never fails to surprise and amaze me”.

The two-mile path around the cliff passes over some amazing bridges and through a tunnel in which you are below the water level.

Soon after entering, through the hollowed out entrance, Wise’s Eye, you come to your first cliff edge, the first bridge, with the sea crashing below you and Deane’s Point, one of the highest cliffs, towering above you. I love the difference the seasons make, the crystal blue waters of summer, the winds howling through the caves in winter, like Thunder Cave, where dull thunder-like peals resound as the waves hit the back.

The Devil’s Steps, cut from the rock, leads round to the Smuggler’s Cave, the largest cave we pass on our journey. Even as late as the 60s, bottles of alcohol were found here, though actually the main thing they smuggled in the old days was salt! A photo was taken here on opening day in 1902, with Mr Wise (the engineer who constructed the path) and guests.

Then we come to Tubular Bridge, an amazing construction, hugging the cliff, where you can see the Maidens, and, on a clear day, cars driving on the Mull of Kintyre.

As a place to see wildlife it has few equals, especially the vast colonies of early summer, when thousands of birds arrive to feed on the herring and mackerel spawning. The fish also bring in porpoises, dolphins, otters, hawks and puffins. Some birds are so near, you could reach your hand out to touch them, although that of course is not

permitted under the law. The birds of prey, like kestrels and buzzards, arrive in August when the young birds are coming into flight. Puffins with their brightly coloured bills come here to breed. They, and the auks, push their offspring off the top of the cliff to fly. That’s some sight!

From the Tubular Bridge you go over to the Man of War, a huge basalt rock which looks like a man of war ship setting out. Then a girder bridge takes you back to the mainland over the sea. As on so many times on this walk you are so close to the elements now with the sea splashing spray up to you.

At the cantilevered bridge called the Gallery, the families of people on White Star liners like Titanic would watch as the ships conducted their sea trials.

Kids love the Aquarium, where you’ll see birds fighting over fish left by the retreating tide, and soon after that is my own favourite cave, where massive swells crash into a tunnel below sea level. Only some amazing Victorian engineering keeps the cave free of flooding.

The walk ends after the first of the Seven Sisters Caves and we return the way we came. But you can’t do justice to this experience in mere words. You have to see it, feel it, listen to it, even smell it. There’s nothing else you can do that’s quite like it.”

George McGrand, Tour Guide,
The Gobbins – A Dramatic Coastal Walk.



Meet the locals

Carnlough Bay Boat Tours

Along this coast many towns and villages have developed between the hills and sea.

Locals quarried the hills for minerals, farmed in steeply rising ladder farms bordered by dry stone walls and fished the seas for mackerel and salmon. Sometimes they did all three.

Davy Smyth, a third generation fisherman, can tell you all about this world. He will also take you out from the harbour on his Carnlough Bay Boat Tours to see this spectacular coast from the sea.

His regular trips take visitors through the splashing waves around Carnlough Bay. Where possible, he's happy to arrange special tours of some of the hidden treasures of this stretch of coastline. Ask him for a trip to the Maidens, rocky islets formed by erupting lava, one which still hosts a working lighthouse.

Or maybe he'll take you as far as Garron Point, a headland even more striking when viewed from the sea, watching for dolphins and seals on the way.



Slemish Mountain, Ballymena
BT42 4PE


Wellbeing

From atop Slemish Mountain the vast sky stretches away into the far distance. Beneath you are patchwork fields divided by dry stone walls and the grasslands of beautiful Shillanavogy Valley, burnished gold by the sun. Slowly circle and look out to the Antrim and Scottish coasts on the horizon, the rolling Antrim Hills, meandering blue Lough Neagh and the rugged Sperrin Mountains.

Over 1500 years ago here stood St Patrick. And these same mesmerising views ignited his spiritual journey, as they will yours!

Image courtesy of Connor McCullogh




 Ballyboley Forest, Larne
BT39 9SS

When the pressures of life hit overload and your world offers no escape, try ours. Had enough of urgent deadlines, last minute emails, rushing to meetings, rushing home from work, just rushing?

Here's our solution.

Sit on a rock watching the thunderous beauty of water cascading down a waterfall in a forest where the sun splits through the trees, wander an 18th century walled garden famous for its colourful plants, relax in a hot tub by a plunging river after a hot stone massage in one of Europe's most luxurious spas. You can do all this and more.

 Glenoe Waterfall, Larne
BT40 3LE

Morning

Awaken your spirituality

So let's start the way we mean to go on, embracing that gorgeous natural world, letting the sheer beauty of a glorious waterfall revive our spirits.

Enjoy a hearty breakfast in historic Carrickfergus before driving the six miles or so through the countryside to the delightful village of Glenoe, a hidden gem you won't be able to keep secret.

Just outside the village you'll come to the car park that is the start of the Glenoe Walk. Be sure to wear your boots as you walk up the narrow rising paths. It's just a short walk to the highlight of this journey, the stunning Glenoe Waterfall, located in a deep gorge. Forget the world you've come from, let your senses just absorb the power and spectacle, the sound of plunging water and birdsong.

Is our magic working on you yet?

Now it's about eight miles down country roads to the rugged slopes and wild green beauty of Cairncastle, now better known as the land of the House of Stark in Game of Thrones®.

Set out from Linford Car Park, you'll find yourself treading in the footsteps of history, past ancient Celtic cashels and monuments. On the 'Black Hill' ('Knockdhu'), about a mile west of Cairncastle, you will come across a vast awe-inspiring Bronze Age fort carved into the landscape, where the views sweep down to the sea. Stay here a while and let the enormity of this place sink in. It is a truly mystical experience!

Note: Good footwear and advance preparation are strongly advised.

It's just a short drive from here to Carnfunnock Country Park, where the options to enjoy yourself are endless.

Can you crack the mystery of the Maze or will you be lost in its craftily designed paths forever? Try giant chess, get to know the famous collection of trees close up and personal, enjoy wonderful BBQs, hearty meals in the airy café with wonderful views and we've just scratched the surface. But to truly experience the native life in this natural wonderland by the sea get in touch with Paul Moore and his Northern Ireland Survival School.

Onwards to nearby Ballygally Castle, a luxury hotel fashioned from a 17th century castle, where they can arrange for you to surf (or paddle board) on the lovely beach below, where the plunging waves lead the eye to the Scottish coast barely twenty miles away.

Discovering the coastal road

Now, head back north along the Coast Road (A2). As you drive past Ballygally towards Glenarm, the intense blue waters seem to get closer and closer as unique rock formations appear on either side. Headlands appear in the distance and grow nearer as the road meanders between them, sometimes veering through manmade arches in the cliffs.

At glorious Glenarm Castle the idyllically tranquil grounds belie a history of savage conflict that goes back centuries. Stroll along the Castle Trail to get a bird's eye view of the 17th century Palladian castle and, if you're in a group of ten or more, book ahead and you'll get your very own tour.

The highlight here will be a walk around the intensely colourful walled garden originally designed before Queen Victoria was born. In recent years Viscount and Viscountess McDonnell have created a magical transformation, restoring the garden to the pristine beauty of the original and creating an awesome kaleidoscope of colour that pervades all.

World famous organic beef and salmon, delicious breads, wonderful homemade cakes and scones – lunch at the atmospheric Walled Garden Tea Room is an experience for the true foodie!



“...the rugged slopes and wild green beauty of Cairncastle, now better known as the land of the House of Stark...”

Afternoon

Heavenly mountain

Now it's time to head towards the mountain at the heart of our spirituality – Slemish.

So now we are heading inland on the A42, on the fourteen mile journey through endless rolling green hills and valleys towards lovely Broughshane, at the foot of Slemish Mountain. Relax and enjoy some time in the 'UK Village of the Year 2018', wander the beautifully restored Raceview Mill, a 200-year-old woollen mill, now full of wonderful shops, including delicious locally sourced artisan foods.

Butterfly Path

If you have time, take the delightful two mile Butterfly Path, past water pumps, thatched houses and a beautifully restored old flax mill from the early days of the Irish linen industry, with its lovely bird sanctuary.

A fifteen-minute drive from Broughshane takes you to Slemish Car Park, where you will begin your climb to the summit of 'Patrick's Mountain'. There are several paths to the summit, and if your legs complain, remind them your reward will be heavenly!

The distinctive domed shape of Slemish Mountain, the central core of an extinct volcano, can be seen across Antrim. So you can imagine what views can be enjoyed from its summit, 1500 feet above sea level. Below is the beautiful Shillanavogy Valley, famously recreated in Game of Thrones® as the Dothraki grasslands.

Insta-worthy sights & scenes



St Patrick's vision

As you breathe in this extraordinary 360 degree spectacle, imagine the young shepherd, Patrick, and his lonely six-year vigil on these slopes working for a local farmer. It was here that the captured slave discovered his spirituality through endless prayer and communing with the beautiful natural world around him. From a vision of the angel Victoricus were born the seeds of his crusade to convert the Irish to Christianity, as he was encouraged to escape and return home. You can visit the ruins of nearby Skerry Church, thought to be one of the first churches Ireland's patron saint built on that return.

Last step on your spiritual journey – sheer indulgence!

Now it's time to complete a perfect day with the ultimate in indulgence at the Galgorm Resort and Spa - luxurious treatments, wonderful food and the comfiest of beds to lay your head after an experience to re-awaken all your senses.

“Raceview Mill, a 200-year-old woollen mill, now full of wonderful shops, including delicious locally sourced artisan foods.”

Galgorm Resort & Spa

It's a part of our heritage, part of our natural world, but just on a higher plane of indulgence!

The Galgorm Resort and Spa began life in the 18th century as one of our most gracious country houses. Today it is an internationally renowned spa hotel. Just outside Ballymena, even the drive up the glorious long tree-lined entrance fills you with expectation.

A river runs through

Set amidst woodland on the banks of the plunging River Maine, guests wander its 163 acres, relax in wood-fired hot tubs overlooking the river or in tranquil garden settings, take yoga in meditation rooms or lie back on water beds before the 20 metre indoor leisure pool, letting the neck and back massage cannons ease their stress away. Natural woods, subdued colours, beautiful aromas from scented candles – all is tranquillity.

The Thermal Village

In the heart of the Thermal Village, centred around the indoor leisure pool, be-robed guests are guided through corridors lit by floor lamps, the atmosphere perfumed by scented candles, and into state-of-the-art rooms prepared for a beguiling choice of wonderful treatments. There's deep relaxation massage, bodies nurtured by warm stones and all kinds of facials, skin care and massages, using luxurious products.

The Celtic Sauna Master

Even the sauna and steam rooms can be enjoyed in new and innovative ways. For a truly Scandinavian experience, emerge from the heat of the Sanarium to the extreme cold of the nearby snow cabin, where ice lines the walls, powdered snow

the floor. Then there's the Celtic Sauna, a kind of steamy hot meditation, where a Sauna Master agitates the essential oil infused air with towels to lessen the heat and allow you to stay longer.

Afternoon tea amidst the cherry orchards

The sense of serenity is retained as guests emerge from their treatments, wandering to the riverside or to private hot tubs or heated cabins or perhaps to enjoy afternoon teas amidst the cherry orchards, imported Tuscan trees or innovative waterfall sculptures of the beautiful gardens.

Enjoy the Elements

For those who are too chilled out to return to the main hotel to eat, the circular domed Elements, one of only five such buildings in the world, houses a unique café over two floors, serving healthy food, as well as champagne and cocktails.

Fine dining by the river

People come from near and far for the tasting menu at the fine dining River Room and for the delicious afternoon tea at the adjacent Conservatory, both with sublime views of the river, even more beautiful when lit up at night. The Gillies Bar and Grill is famous for its steaks and fish, while Fratellis restaurant offers a feast of Italian food, including its acclaimed pizzas.

There's so much to enjoy at the Galgorm Resort and Spa, it's hard to know what to choose.



Image courtesy of Galgorm Resort & Spa

Meet the locals

Bushcraft at Carnfunnock Country Park

“I often take visitors around the Walled Garden here, it’s packed with herbs and the most unexpected treasures, like the Kiwi vine, which extends high up over wooden trestles, the fruit is perfectly edible.

We also show them our native trees, like ash, birch and lime but they are fascinated with the Eucalyptus trees and the qualities of the gum oil from it.

We teach bushcraft and wilderness living skills to match each season and this is the perfect place to do it. We build shelters from wood we find in the park, like coppiced hazel, make fires from scratch and live the basic outdoor life like cave people, with furs and flint spears, cooking food in a pit.

I’ll show people how to find wood and how to carve it too, perhaps into a spoon or bow. Sometimes we’ll go down to the sea, finding shells and fish to eat or I’ll have some locally caught mackerel and I’ll show them how to take the bones out and prepare it, stuffing it with grasses and plants for flavour. We’ll also forage in the park for berries and fruits. They’ll discover a world they never knew existed and learn how to survive in it too!

As we walk around we learn about the trees and their secrets too. We do all kinds of courses for all ages and we’re constantly expanding what we do because of the demand. People really love to get back to nature these days and this is the perfect place to do it.”

Paul Moore, Northern Ireland Survival School

📍 'The Riverlands', Sallagh Braes
BT40 2NF

Game of Thrones®

Ancient castles, timeless history, spectacular mountains and valleys, picturesque old harbours, towering cliffs and some of Europe's most beautiful and unspoilt countryside – is it any wonder that HBO's world famous Game of Thrones® chose Mid and East Antrim to film some of its most memorable scenes?



📍 'Runestone', Galboly
BT44 0JT

Journeying through the real Westeros

When the makers of HBO's Game of Thrones® were scouring the planet for the ideal backdrop for their award-winning medieval fantasy series, their remit was tough.

To find an ancient landscape new to the rest of the world, where dramatic cliffs gave way to beautiful valleys, medieval castles mixed with picturesque old harbours and an endlessly surprising countryside could be as natural a setting for magical happenings as savage battles.

But for all the mystery and intrigue, they also knew this landscape must be real and wild, not over cultivated or familiar.

Perhaps it helped that this part of the world, where the hills and Glens of Antrim meet the spectacular Causeway Coast, still bears the mark of centuries of conflict between warring clans that mirrors that between the Houses of Stark and Lannister and their rivals for the Iron Throne. Or that its own legends, folklore and myths, still alive in local imaginations, have a power every bit as haunting as those of Westeros.

So come along with us and journey through the authentic world of the Seven Kingdoms, visiting locations from key scenes in Game of Thrones® and absorbing the wild beauty of a stunning landscape, still relatively unexplored. There may be banquets and boat trips, a chance to see exquisite jewellery from the series and a door carved from the trees of the Kings Road. You can forge your own medieval knife and follow in the footsteps of the Dothraki hordes.

Fantasy has never seemed so real!

Morning

Game of Thrones® Itinerary

Breakfast in the ancient town of Carrickfergus will set you up for a thrilling day. Then take the A2 around the Lough, passing through Carrickfergus, whose medieval castle has a history that could provide Game of Thrones® with plotlines for several series!

Twelve miles along the coast, we pass by Larne and from this ancient port take the coastal route (A2) around the Causeway Coast. When this road was blasted out of the rocks in the mid-1800s, it opened up a world that had almost been sealed off. That sense of remoteness has left a landscape remarkably untouched by the modern world and a people at one with their place in it.

A seven-mile drive from Larne along the beautiful coastal road takes us to Cairncastle, just above the village of Ballygally and its lovely beach. This is a seminal location for any dedicated Thronie, for it takes us back to the very beginning. In this ruggedly beautiful countryside, in series one, episode one, Ned Stark reluctantly beheaded a deserter from the Night's Watch as Jon Snow looked on.

Later in series one, Ned's wife, Lady Catelyn, captured Tyrion Lannister here, plunging the Houses of Stark and Lannister into fateful conflict when she wrongly blamed him for the attempted murder of her son Bran.


Here too, Bran and others headed to the Wall at the end of the Stark territory and Littlefinger told Sansa Stark they were returning to Winterfell together.

Just further on, a vast wall of sheer basalt rock creates the magnificent natural amphitheatre of Sallagh Braes, where, among other scenes, the Hound helped build a Septry with Brother Ray before discovering the slaughter of the villagers.

Ancient Cairn Castle, from which the area takes its name, is well known in local legend, which claims it was built by the King of Antrim, Mac-fionn, to confine his beautiful daughter Claovala from an unwelcome Scottish suitor. He failed, and she was taken. It's not hard to see why Game of Thrones® merges so seamlessly with this landscape and its stories.

Some believe that the stone from now disappeared Cairn Castle was used in the building of 17th century Ballygally Castle, nearby on the coast. Built at one of the most turbulent times in our history, you can still see the musket holes here used for its defence.

Today Ballygally Castle is a luxury hotel, but as atmospheric as ever, and a dream destination for Thronies.



This is a seminal location for any dedicated Thronie, for it takes us back to the very beginning.

Afternoon

Game of Thrones® Afternoon Tea

If you wish you can book a special Game of Thrones® tour of filming locations, starting and ending at Ballygally Castle, including a banquet and afternoon tea. If you book a day ahead you can linger a little longer and enjoy the Game of Thrones® Afternoon Tea - Dothraki Trifle with Mini Dragon's Egg, John Snow Cakes and Baratheon Bread, among other tasty temptations.

Or just enjoy lunch here, deliciously conjured from the wonderful local produce of the area by talented chefs.

Door Number Nine

Before you enter the Ballygally Castle restaurant, inspect the beautiful Game of Thrones® Door Number Nine at the entrance. In all ten such doors have been carved from beech trees which fell during a storm at the iconic Dark Hedges (the Kingsroad) and placed in pubs, restaurants and hotels near filming locations. Door Nine depicts the famous battle between House Stark and House Bolton in season six. Carved on it are the crests of House Bolton and House Stark, Ramsey Bolton's hungry dogs and Winterfell Castle.

“Davy Smyth’s boat tours leave from the very stone steps Arya Stark ascended in season six after being stabbed by the troublesome Waif in Braavos.”

Before you leave, pay homage to poor Lady Isabella Shaw in the Ghost Room atop the old tower. Trying to escape confinement she plunged to her death from this room. Her soul, they say, has never left but we must, for now.

It's just seven miles of glorious coastal road from Ballygally to Glenarm, the deep blue of the water leading to wonderful views of Scotland beyond. In one of Northern Ireland's oldest villages, which takes its name from the Irish for 'valley of the army', 17th century Glenarm Castle is still occupied by the House of McDonnell, whose forebears would have given the Lannisters a run for their money on any battlefield!

If you have time, don't miss the Castle Trail or a tour of their exquisite Walled Garden. Their atmospheric tea rooms are a great place to sample the region's traditional home baking as well as world famous organic Glenarm Salmon and Glenarm Shorthorn Beef, produced locally.

But for the true Game of Thrones® aficionado your main destination in Glenarm is the exquisite jewellery and goldsmithing of Northern Ireland's finest jewellers, Steensons. It was their talented designers and craftspeople who fashioned many of the wonderful pieces seen in Game of Thrones®.

Much of their work is inspired by the rolling hills of Antrim, but from season one onwards, they have been the jewellers of choice for Game of Thrones®. In their Économusée workshop you will hear all about their work on iconic pieces for the show such as Joffrey's famous crown.

And if you want your own unique Game of Thrones® inspired piece, then how about a direwolf, House of Targaryen or Lannister pendant?

Now it's a short journey along the coast to Carnlough and its lovely Victorian harbour.



Here, local fisherman Davy Smyth's boat tours leave from the very stone steps Arya Stark ascended in season six after being stabbed by the troublesome Waif in Braavos. Why not sample a glass of the finest Irish Whiskey at the historic Londonderry Arms nearby. The staff will be delighted to show you the chair Maisie Williams, who plays Arya Stark, sat on between filming. You'll know it, she wrote a message on the back!

Soul soaring scenery

The Causeway Coastal Route is rated as one of the world's finest road trips, thanks to its dramatic cliffs and vibrant blue waters. But travel inland on the road from Carnlough to Broughshane, and the wide valleys, waterfall studded woods and rolling hills of the Glens of Antrim can make the soul soar.

St Patrick's Mountain and the Dothraki Grasslands

It's just twelve miles or so from lovely Glenarm until you reach Shillanavogy Road, beneath Slemish, Ireland's most famous mountain, where its patron saint, St Patrick, tended sheep for several years after being kidnapped by pirates under the leadership of Niall of the Nine Hostages.

It seems entirely fitting that beneath this extraordinary domed volcanic plug, in delightful Shillanavogy Valley, lie the Dothraki grasslands where Daenerys and Drogo were married. Here Daenerys Targaryen and her brother Viserys, Ser Jorah Mormont and the Dothraki horsemen ride through the grasslands of Essos en route to Vaes Dothrak.

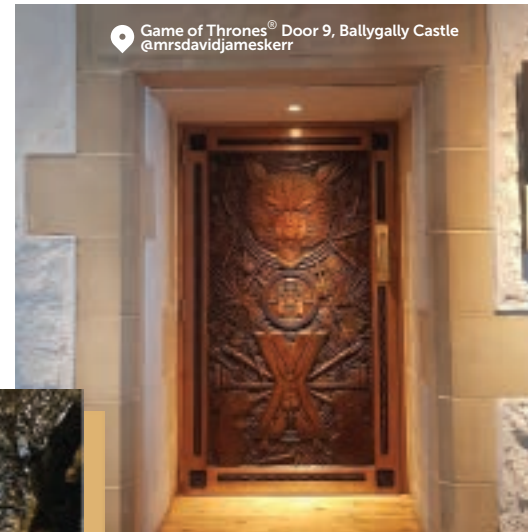
Forged in fire

A few miles from Slemish is our last stop. The coal fired furnaces of Eamonn Higgins' Hot Milk Forge provide the perfect end to a 'Thronie' tour. Eamonn will teach you to craft your own medieval knife to take home, while his Bow Crafty courses will show you to make a long bow, straight from the battles of Game of Thrones®.

Complete your day with a meal in Ballymena and rest your head at one of the historic town's welcoming hotels.



Insta-worthy sights & scenes



The ultimate Games of Thrones® tour

The atmospheric 17th century Ballygally Castle Hotel was home to cast and crew during filming at nearby Cairncastle. Since then it has become a magnet for fans. On a few select dates through the year, a unique Game of Thrones® tour leaves from here. You are advised to book early though, it's very popular!

You'll begin with a delicious Game of Thrones® themed afternoon tea, a veritable feast of sandwiches, freshly baked scones, biscuits, Glenarm Smoked Salmon and delights like Winterfell Jaffa Cake and Stark's Chocolate Cake Pops, Kingslayer Cupcakes and Arya's Madeleines, enjoyed with the finest teas and coffees.

There'll be time to inspect the hotel's famous Game of Thrones® Door and hear its story. Then it's off along the spectacular coastal road to key filming locations. You'll see where Arya Stark ascended the steps after being stabbed by the Waif, where Theon rode on horseback with his sister Yara, where Davos is rescued after the Battle of Blackwater, the atmospheric caves where Melisandre gave birth to her 'shadow baby' and much else besides. Then it's back to a magnificent Game of Thrones® banquet.

Like a true monarch of the Seven Kingdoms you can tuck into a Westeros Tomahawk steak served on a wooden platter with a Valyrian Steel inspired carving knife, while an extra from the series will keep you enthralled with tales of filming the world's most famous TV series.

“The staff will be delighted to show you the chair Maisie Williams sat on between filming. You'll know it, she wrote a message on the back.”

Meet the locals

The Hot Milk Forge

From the top of Slemish Mountain, if you only knew where to look, you could pick out the nearby village of Martinstown, where Eamonn Higgins is reviving the ancient craft of blacksmithing.

“People today are fed up with TVs and computer screens... they want to do, not watch. For two to three hours they’re totally immersed in a traditional craft, one that’s been around since the Iron Age. When they come out, they’re buzzing.”

Forging metal

Eamonn Higgins stands by one of the eight forges he has constructed from scrap metal in the old milking shed built on the family farm by his father. The coals are glowing hot, the hammer and tongs ready to fashion the burning hot metal over an anvil. When the right temperature is reached, the metal will be pushed and knocked into medieval blades, fire implements, a leaf key ring, anything that can be achieved in a single session by a beginner in the craft.

An ancient craft

Here, amidst the unspoilt beauty of Glenravel, the ‘tenth’ Glen of Antrim, Eamonn is reviving a hugely valued craft. The blacksmith traditionally made implements, shoed horses and even made weapons (as the makers of pikes for rebels, they were often the first to be arrested during rebellions).

An experience you will never forget

Today, that craft is no longer needed for practical reasons, but Eamonn has seen a dramatic interest in blacksmithing from locals and visitors alike. People of all ages and backgrounds, from teenagers to brain surgeons, make their way to the Hot Milk Forge these days. It’s an experience they will never forget.

Getting into the rhythm

“Each person has their own anvil, forge and hammer. The forge is already heated, the coal glowing like in a grate but a wee bit more aggressive. Perhaps a thousand degrees centigrade, with the air pumped in below. The hot metal is like playdough, to be knocked and teased into shape on the anvil. If they’re making a knife, they’ll use a knife grinder to finish it off. But that’s it. There’s music on the sound system to help them get into the rhythm and with the heat and noise they become totally immersed in this intense experience.”

Men of the Night’s Watch

People have come dressed as men of the Night’s Watch and characters from Star Trek, but Eamonn has only one request. “Wear thick soled shoes not stilettos! I provide safety equipment, aprons, gloves and glasses, it’s not scary, just common sense.”

Crafting a longbow

Eamonn, an acclaimed metal sculptor, who works using traditional methods, is a qualified teacher in blacksmithing, blade-making and crafting longbows fit for Game of Thrones®. Group classes can be booked in advance on his website, private lessons are more flexible but a little more expensive.

Crown of the Seven Kingdoms

**Most of the exquisite jewellery
and designs for Game of Thrones®
were made by Northern Ireland's
finest craft jewellers, Steensons.**

Brona Spencer, director of Steenson's jewellers, explains that much of the workshop's designs are inspired by the rolling hills of Antrim. Since Game of Thrones® began filming nearby, they have been making all kinds of beautiful pieces for the show. Brona and her husband Dan Spencer regularly welcome tour groups to the workshop. It's a key stop on every Game of Thrones® tour - and no wonder.

Not only will you hear all about their work for the world-famous TV series, but you can see how they made crowns for the kings and queens of the Seven Kingdoms. You can even pick up your own, unique Game of Thrones® inspired piece. How about a direwolf or a House of Targaryen pendant?



 Carrickfergus Castle, Carrickfergus
BT38 7BG

Heritage

Wherever we visit, it seems the world has been there before. We follow tourist trails as though propelled on tram tracks, as rows of coaches unburden themselves of yet more crowds to join our path.

Look here - look there, now we're done. Well, no we're not. Not here at any rate.



Belfast ●

**Do you look for
somewhere fresh, off
the beaten track, where
a stunningly beautiful
landscape sings of the past
and magical happenings,
and leads you to a history
you can almost touch?**

Where a fiddle and a pint can conjure up more of our heritage than a thousand souvenirs. Where a magnificent castle takes you to the heart of Irish history, a sleepy Georgian village ushers you gently into the 18th century and a Victorian steam train experience will entrance young and old alike.

Not least, where the family once known as the 'Lords of the Route' will welcome you to the land they have called home for centuries and you can stroll the beautiful gardens and even stay in one of their gate lodges.

Look no more. Our heritage will surprise and engage you. So what are you waiting for? Come and join us for two days you will never forget.

Carrickfergus Castle, Carrickfergus
BT38 7BG

Day One

Morning

Begin in the town which once called Belfast its little cousin, Carrickfergus. Overlooking Belfast Lough, the great Anglo-Norman conqueror of Ulster, John de Courcy chose this idyllic location to build his imposing castle in the 12th century.

Take a tour and you'll be surprised how little has changed in one of Ulster's best preserved medieval castles.

As you walk by the walls with their mighty cannons, wander the ancient keep and medieval chambers, you'll absorb the history of this part of Ulster. Watch the film of Edward the Bruce's attempt to seize the Irish crown when he captured the town. A power base for the Anglo Normans, Carrickfergus later became the Ulster stronghold of the English Crown. Scots, Gaelic Irish and French all attacked this place. Some succeeded, some failed. You'll see the damage they inflicted as you go.

Last witchcraft trial in Ireland

Take your bearings as you venture out into the modern world again, history lies on every side. Across the Marine Highway and turn right and you will soon arrive at Carrickfergus Museum, housed next to the old Court House, where the last witchcraft trial in Ireland took place.

Present from a French King

With audio visual and interactive displays, the museum will give you an enthralling insight into the remarkable history of the town and there will be some surprises along the way, such as the strikingly beautiful atlas presented to Carrickfergus man Richard Kane by Louis XVI of France.

Now it's time for another quick dander, this time along part of the old town walls that are so much a part of this town's story. Built by Sir Arthur Chichester in the 1600s, when he became Governor of Carrickfergus, these are the oldest town walls in Ulster and among the best preserved in Ireland.

Imagine the terror felt by locals when they were breached by the French troops of Commodore François Thurot in 1760, on their way to capture Carrickfergus Castle or the babble of tongues you would have heard here in earlier times – Irish, English, Scots Gaelic, lowland Scots, French, Spanish and other languages of the many visiting sailors.

“Only once, to this day, has an elite American commando force been formed outside the US.”

Thurot's men also captured St Nicholas's Church, just around the corner, breaking the (now repaired) font. Originally built by de Courcy, transformed by Chichester, this remarkable and beautiful church is one of Northern Ireland's true hidden gems.

The US connection

Back on the road but we've not too far to go. It's just a short drive (or a long walk) to the wonderfully named Boneybefore.

Carrickfergus has several surprising links with the US and the 1750s thatched farmhouse you find here is one of the most enthralling. Near here, in an identical house, lived Andrew and Elizabeth Jackson, Presbyterian settlers from Scotland.

Authentically furnished, its simple charm entrances but the history it tells is remarkable. Two years after leaving Boneybefore for the promise of the New World, the Jackson's son was born. His achievements were many, including winning a key battle to save the nation, and he would change the course of US politics forever. His name? Andrew Jackson, the 7th President of the United States.

We have another unique link to America too. And it's just yards away!

US Rangers Centre

Only once, to this day, has an elite American commando force been formed outside the US. That unique event occurred in Carrickfergus in 1942 when the First Battalion of the US Rangers was formed here by volunteers from US regiments stationed in Northern Ireland. These men would be the first US soldiers to see action in Europe, helping turn the tide of war.

Here, in the grounds of the Andrew Jackson Cottage, you'll get the moving story of these men and the herculean task they were given – through artefacts, personal accounts, photographs and an extensive film footage never seen before.



Afternoon

The lure of steam

We head off on the Coast Road (A2), to experience the very definition of a Victorian railway town, delightful Whitehead, about five miles away. It was developed by the great railway engineer Berkley Dean Wise as a staging post to the world famous Gobbins Cliff Path he created. It's a role it still performs.

As well as the spectacular Gobbins Cliff Path, Whitehead hosts another of the country's most unique attractions, the steam train experience at the Whitehead Railway Museum. It's a great place for all the family to spend an afternoon and its atmospheric Edwardian tea room is the perfect place for lunch beforehand!

Ancient monastery

It's about ten minutes drive from Whitehead across the Coast Road (A2) to Ballycarry, where you will find the roofless ruin of medieval Templecorran Church. This was the site of an early Christian monastery and the graveyard here hosts an early Christian cross-inscribed stone. Just as revealing are the twelve musket loops in the wall. Given our turbulent Ulster Scots history, even a church had to be built with self-defence in mind!

Don't miss the memorial here to the great weaver poet, James Orr. He was famous not just for his words but his deeds too, as a courageous United Irishman who joined the failed 1798 Rebellion against the English Crown.

From fearsome warriors to welcoming hosts

The heart sings as you drive along the meandering Coast Road to one of Northern Ireland's oldest villages, Glenarm.

The McDonnell family once owned the land for many miles around and as 'Lords of the Route' dominated this territory from medieval times. Today, they are more likely to welcome you to their beloved Walled Garden or magnificent castle but a few hundred years ago, when their fearsome ancestor Sorley Boy was in charge, you would have received a very different welcome!

Time for bed and on this trip you're not going to settle for anything ordinary!

Back in 1825 Countess Anne Catherine McDonnell built the Barbican Lodge, a kind of miniature castle with turrets, towers and Gothic windows, as a back entrance to Glenarm Castle. Thanks to the Irish Landmark Trust, you too can enjoy its charms!

Day Two

Morning

Surprising history

A late and delicious breakfast at the Walled Garden Tea Room at Glenarm with all kinds of home baked treats and fine teas and coffees to choose from. We take the five-minute drive along the coast to the Victorian town of Carnlough, famed for its delightful little harbour. At the town hall built by Lady Londonderry, now the Heritage Hub, you can discover the surprising history of this village and the surrounding Glens of Antrim, one of the best-kept secrets in Europe!

Thriving Victorian hub

You can absorb our history in a variety of other ways too. Have a drink in the atmospheric Londonderry Arms Hotel, beautifully preserved from its 19th century origins, toasting the formidable Lady Londonderry, who with her husband, developed this village into a thriving hub and built the inn too.

Work off breakfast in a most unusual walk with a beautiful ending! Take the two-mile path along the trail of the narrow gauge railway Lady Londonderry had built to bring limestone from the quarry in the hills above to the harbour. The views back to the harbour will delight as you slowly climb the hill but even that pales when you get to the end - the bewitching Cranny Falls.

From Carnlough, it's a thirty-minute drive through green valleys and hilly roads to the historic town of Ballymena and then, just a little further, to Gracehill.

Walled Garden, Glenarm Castle
BT44 0BQ



“...discover the surprising history of this town and the surrounding Glens of Antrim, one of the best-kept secrets in Europe!”

Afternoon

Step back in time to Gracehill

The year is 1759. Just outside Ballymena a Moravian settlement is established. Originally from ancient Bohemia in what is now the Czech Republic, the Protestant Moravian Church is famous for its progressive education and close-knit community life. The village of unique Georgian buildings features houses, a church, shop and even an inn based around a large, tranquil green.

Fast forward to today. It's barely changed! In 1975 Gracehill became Northern Ireland's first Conservation Area, for which we should all be thankful.

Turn off the Galgorm Road from Ballymena and you will arrive in the 18th century. For the next while as you walk these quiet streets and the delightful green you are in a gentler, more elegant world. These people were truly extraordinary, among the first to properly educate girls and the poorer members of society, regardless of religion, at a time when such ideas were revolutionary.

Daily life in the 18th century

You can discover much more of their fascinating story in the Old School, which now hosts a Visitor Centre as well as an excellent restaurant. Here the daily world of this unique community comes alive in words and images and you can see examples of their lovely craftwork and read diary extracts relating to the great events of the day.

First mail from America

The church itself, built in 1765, is still in use but there are times when you can pop inside. A walk around either side will eventually bring you the ancient burial ground where men and women continue to be buried in separate plots. You can also see the old village shop where some of the first stamped mail to be sent from the US arrived.



Gracehill, Ballymena
@morethanireland



Crosskeys Inn, Toomebridge
@scullion_hurts

Insta-worthy sights & scenes



Barbican Lodge, Glenarm
@rockybyrose



Kilcoan Gardens, Islandmagee
@carlyasmith

Adair Arms

Return to Ballymena to check into your overnight stay, the welcoming Adair Arms Hotel. Built by Sir Robert Adair way back in the 1840s, it was designed by the great architect, Sir Charles Lanyon, responsible for many of Belfast's finest buildings. They serve an excellent dinner here, with meat from an acclaimed local butcher.


Then it's off to Crosskeys Inn, about 25 minutes away, for the most exciting way to enjoy our heritage you can find, in Ireland's oldest thatched inn.

Jigs and reels at the inn

No one knows exactly how old the Crosskeys Inn is, but 1650 is a modest guess. Walk through the worn stone floors of the UK Country Pub of the Year 2017 and you'll feel its timeless atmosphere straight away. You'll find a warren of low ceilinged rooms warmed with glowing turf fires. Chatting to locals sitting by the roaring hearth, nursing a glass of fine Irish whiskey - this is how life should be!

However, the real reason you're here hasn't even begun. Not until the first jig or reel is heard. Virtually every leading Irish traditional musician has played one of the regular sessions here at some time or another. It's an experience like no other, the perfect way to end your journey of discovery.

“No one knows exactly how old the Crosskeys Inn is, but 1650 is a modest guess.”



Whitehead Railway Museum, Whitehead
BT38 9NA

LOCAL SPOTLIGHT

Meet the locals

Whitehead Railway Museum

“People assume the Railway Museum is just for the older generation. It’s true that many visitors talk about the smell of the smoke and memories it brings back but thanks to Thomas the Tank Engine and Harry Potter and the Hogwarts Express you’d be amazed at the number of kids that love it here.”

I guess my journey here started with a model railway in the loft as a kid. I joined the Modern Railway Society of Ireland, which ran tours here and when I saw the interaction volunteers had with the visitors I was hooked.

The Railway Preservation Society of Ireland started this place over 50 years ago in what had been the Whitehead excursion station. Special excursion trains used to arrive here. The visitors used to congregate at the Stables, where we now have an exhibition, before being taken by horses and jaunting cars to The Gobbins, which was then more popular than the Giant’s Causeway.

Whitehead was a railway town and we have some great photos of crowds of daytrippers from Belfast arriving in the excursion station. I think the record for the day is around 7,000 visitors in 1904.

One of the few structures that were here at the beginning was the old water tower. People are amazed when I tell them how much water a steam engine uses, water storage needed much more space than the coal and the train had to stop regularly to top up.

Everyone likes to have a go at the signal box. It gives you an idea of what it would be like to be a signalman in the old days.

At the moment we have railway carriages from the 1960s on the platform which people can enjoy. We usually use these for our steam train excursions too. We don’t have our own track but we use Northern Ireland Railway tracks and go as far as Dublin as well as seaside excursions to Portrush, just like in Victorian and Edwardian times. We also have special trains at Halloween, Easter and Christmas. All I can say is book early though. Steam trains take a while to get ready, so volunteers have to be here all night before an excursion, gradually building up the pressure!

We have the largest workshop in Ireland and our restoration team is constantly working on old engines and carriages. You can see all of our engines in our museum on the tour, including a blue engine the kids love because it looks just like Thomas. Our engines are film stars too. One was in the Great Train Robbery, another in Michael Collins. Others are still used for the excursions. There are some really old atmospheric carriages you can wander through in the carriage room too. One of the carriages was even used by Queen Elizabeth II. The tour takes around an hour but it will fly by!

Roy Thompson - Volunteer

Meet the locals

Glenarm Castle

It's like walking back into our past. The brutal medieval conflicts of the Glens and Causeway Coast, giving way to an 18th century elegance that transformed this achingly beautiful site into one of the treasures of Northern Ireland.

There has been a castle here since Anglo-Norman John Bissett was granted the Glens of Antrim back in 1242 but it was nearly another three centuries before the McDonnell clan claimed the castle for their own. And it wasn't until over a hundred years after that Randal Arranagh McDonnell, the First Earl of Antrim, built his own castle on the site, which was unhelpfully burned by a visiting Scots army just a few years later.

It would be yet another hundred years or more before the wonderful building we see today began to take shape. For much of that time the McDonnells lived in their other great home, Dunluce Castle, whose ruins tower over the Atlantic Ocean along the coast from here. According to legend, they finally decided to vacate Dunluce when their kitchen hurtled into the crashing waves below, taking some members of staff with it!

It was the 5th Earl who transformed the ruin of Glenarm into one of Ireland's finest palladian houses. With some refinements, extensions and re-developments, that's pretty much what we see today under the ownership of Viscount Randall McDonnell and his wife, Viscountess Aurora. But it is only in recent years that the rest of us have been able to experience this extraordinary place, with its sumptuous castle and exquisite walled garden, for ourselves.

It has been under their watch that the early 1800s walled garden, created by Randall's ancestor, Countess Ann, has been developed into one of our leading visitor attractions and spectacular public events have finally opened up Glenarm Castle to the world.

One man who has played a part in this unique story is the Castle's Managing Director, Adrian Morrow, who fell in love with this place as a child. "My father was chauffeur and then estate manager here and I used to hide under a blanket in his van and sneak in, just to be part of the place."

Virtually growing up on the estate, Adrian was influential in staging the first open days here, when a curious public finally got inside to watch events like sheep dog trials. With this success, they were encouraged to seek more ways to bring in visitors. The four acre walled garden with its ancient Irish Yews seemed an obvious attraction. Largely used as a sick bay for animals as well as a market garden, restoration was long and costly, not least of the vast Victorian glasshouse, but it ultimately put Glenarm on the map.

It would be impossible to do justice to the sheer vibrancy of the garden's colour, the tranquillity of its walks, or its sense of history but when you go don't miss the manmade

mount. From here, the diversity of colour is like a kaleidoscope and the garden's magical design flows into one. The castle can be glimpsed from here, as well as the fruit trees and the gorgeous glen beyond.

In recent years, with help from Adrian, Glenarm Castle has added the world-beating Glenarm Shorthorn Beef to its achievements and along with locally produced Glenarm Organic Salmon, both can be enjoyed at the elegant tea rooms here.

Now that the door has opened on this magical world, don't delay. Come and see the famous Tulip Festival in spring, their atmospheric Christmas celebrations and, well, just come when you can!

"My father was chauffeur and then estate manager here and I used to hide under a blanket in his van and sneak in, just to be part of the place"

The witches of Islandmagee

In 1711, decades after the famous Salem witch trials shocked America, a similar furore rocked lovely Islandmagee, where the spectacular Gobbins Cliff Path now attracts visitors from around the world.

Mary Dunbar, a beautiful and seemingly pious girl, accused eight local women of attacking her while in spectral form.

The episode allegedly started before Mary arrived, when her aunt, the widow of a local Presbyterian minister, lay dying in her house. It was said that her bed was stripped by unseen hands and bedclothes rearranged in the shape of a corpse. A demonic apparition foretold of her impending doom. When she died, of stabbing pains in her back, the local community blamed it on witchcraft.

When Mary arrived in Islandmagee soon after, the supernatural incidents appeared to multiply. These, allegedly, included the bizarre spectacle of a pillow walking by itself, dressed in a nightgown!

Mary, who now appeared to be possessed, suffering terrible convulsions, blamed the eight women of using witchcraft to possess her. She told of fits, throwing bibles and trances.

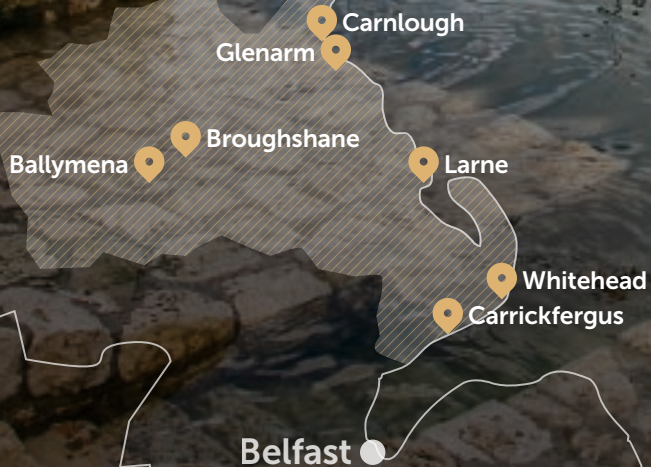
At the famous trial in Carrickfergus Court House (now the Museum), the eight women were found guilty, placed in the stocks for rotten fruit and stones to be thrown at them and sentenced to a year in prison. Thankfully, no more witchcraft trials were ever held and Islandmagee slowly returned to normality.



Carnlough Harbour
BT44 0HQ

Towns & Villages

At the heart of Irish history for centuries, you can almost taste our tumultuous past – the great conflicts, the endless shifts of power – carved into this extraordinary landscape.





Carrickfergus Town Walls
BT38 7BG



This journey around our atmospheric towns and villages is not the usual well-trodden tourist trail between crowded attractions. It's about engaging with a unique heritage and people who are proud to share that heritage with you.

Nor is it just about battles and sieges or epoch changing moments in our history, like the birth of Irish Christianity (though the view from the summit of Slemish Mountain that inspired St Patrick is remarkable).

History can be absorbed here, hearing about the link to a famous racehorse in a historic hotel bar, the romantic story behind the naming of a fisherman's boat or the friendly ghost that haunts your hotel.

Or just the passion of a steam train aficionado as they lovingly take you around Ireland's finest collection of working steam engines. Expect to be surprised!

Ann's Pantry, Larne
BT40 1SP



Morning

Start with breakfast at the ancient port of Larne, welcoming sea borne visitors for over 900 years. Ann's Pantry, a family bakery that never stops winning awards, is probably the best place in the whole of Northern Ireland to indulge in the delights of our unique baking tradition. Wonderful breads, home baked pancakes, potato breads, scones and, well, you name it, they bake it. Breakfast here is a tribute to that delicious tradition.

Where it all began

You're nicely fuelled for the 30-minute drive to Ballymena, City of the Seven Towers, where the history of this area is brought to life from man's first steps on this landscape, 9,000 years ago, onwards at the wonderful Braid Museum. Once you have absorbed our history it's time to venture out, and live it.

The gift of Frances Anne

We take the A42 from Ballymena on the increasingly beautiful drive through the Glens of Antrim to the pretty Victorian town of Carnlough. It was in the mid-1800s that the formidable Frances Anne, Lady Londonderry, transformed a sleepy village into a thriving industrial hub with a narrow gauge railway to take the limestone from the quarry in the beautiful hills down to the harbour for export.

Her legacy remains virtually everywhere you look, from railway arches to historic inns and the pretty harbour itself. The quarry has long been closed but the town's sense of the past is all around, as though frozen in its Victorian heyday. Check out this unique history at the exhibition at the old town hall Frances Anne had built, now known as the Hub.

As always here, you'll also hear a more personal kind of history from the locals too. At the atmospheric Londonderry Arms Hotel, built by Lady Londonderry, owner Denise O'Neill will tell you about the hotel's close connection to Ireland's most famous racehorse, Arkle.

Enjoy a superb seafood chowder here for lunch, or an open Glenarm Organic Smoked Salmon sandwich on wheaten bread made daily to the secret O'Neill's family recipe.

Out on his boat trip around the harbour, fisherman Davy Smyth will reveal the tragic story of forbidden love that led to his boat, in the family for three generations, being named Flora.

Afternoon

Lords of the Route

From Carnlough, it is just three miles along the beautiful coastal road to Glenarm, which lays claim to being Northern Ireland's oldest village. Since medieval times, the McDonnell family, Earls and Viscounts of Antrim, have been part of life here.

The clan were once headed by the fearsome warrior Sorley Boy, who rarely left an opponent's head on his body if he could help it. Today, you will receive a much friendlier welcome at the McDonnell's glorious ancestral home, Glenarm Castle.

Meet the family

Maybe you haven't heard of it? Well its delightful 18th century Walled Garden with its ancient Irish yews and wonderful Tulip Festival, has only been open to the rest of us for a short while. Take a stroll around the castle and, if you're in a group of ten or more, you can get a tour inside if you book ahead.

Want to know more about the history of this remarkable family? You might just be able to ask them yourself as they still live here. It's that kind of place.

Gothic splendour

It's said that, centuries ago, the rector of McDonnell's local church, St Patrick's, sealed off the family's special entrance after they stopped him taking a short cut through their land. You can still go in the normal way though and you should. One of Ireland's oldest, and surely most atmospheric, Gothic churches, it's like stepping back in time.

Just around the corner from St Patrick's is Steensons, where you can watch Ireland's finest goldsmiths at work. Or just absorb the utter tranquillity of beautiful Glenarm Forest on the Red Squirrel Trail. You'll be unlucky if you hear another voice!

The aroma of steam

Now along the glorious coastal road, between the deep blue of the water and the vivid green of the hills. It's about twenty miles along this road to the Victorian seaside resort of Whitehead.

Is there a more evocative smell in the world than that of coal fired smoke trailing back from a steam engine? Even to those born in the diesel era, it evokes nostalgia. But speak to one of the many passionate volunteers at Ireland's finest railway museum at Whitehead and they will tell you their most enthusiastic visitors are children - Thomas the Tank Engine fans.

Edwardian Tearoom

Whitehead was developed around its railway in Victorian times and the sleepy resort still retains its period charm. You can see for yourself on a walk around the town, ending with a delicious tea at the Railway Museum's atmospheric Edwardian Tearoom.

“One of Ireland's oldest, and surely most atmospheric, Gothic churches, it's like stepping back in time.”

Sieges, settlers, spirits and song

Whitehead is about five miles down the Coast Road from Carrickfergus, once much more important than nearby Belfast and celebrated in a famous Irish ballad, "I wish I was in Carrickfergus"... and now you are. So let's start with a tour of one of the best preserved Norman castles you will ever find.

St Patrick's Church, Glenarm
BT44 0BD



Ireland's finest Anglo-Norman castle

Built by the Anglo-Norman adventurer John de Courcy way back in the late 1100s, this castle could tell you the history of this part of Ireland, if it could talk. And in a way it does. Holes in its defensive walls made by cannon rounds tell of the many desperate sieges it has endured. Banqueting rooms reveal the pomp of medieval aristocracy, the ancient keep and strong walls indicate why this place became such an important stronghold for the Anglo-Normans and then the English Crown.

De Courcy's church

Anglo Norman John de Courcy, who built Carrickfergus Castle, also built St Nicholas' Church nearby. The church we know today owes much to Sir Arthur Chichester, who built the town walls in the 1600s, the oldest in Northern Ireland.

American connection

History comes to life in so many ways here. If industrial heritage is your thing, you'll love the Flame Gasworks Museum, round the corner from the castle, one of only three of its kind in the whole of the UK.

At the Andrew Jackson Cottage, on the outskirts of Carrickfergus, a 1750s thatched farmhouse brings to life the home of the parents of one of the US's most well-known presidents, whose beliefs led to the formation of the Democratic Party.

The ghost of Elizabeth

Why not stay the night in one of Northern Ireland's oldest and most haunted hotels, Dobbins Inn. The Daubin family were originally Normans who came here in the time of John de Courcy. There are various stories about the ghost, known as Elizabeth, and her lover, a soldier stationed at Carrickfergus Castle. To learn about her fate and the ghostly apparitions since, why not ask a bartender at the hotel's friendly bar. By the way, these days she is better known under another name. So, if you wake with your face being stroked by an unseen hand, you will have actually met Maud!



Dobbins Inn, Carrickfergus @dobbinsinn



FLAME Gasworks Museum, Carrickfergus @arcadiaartdesign



Knockagh Monument, Carrickfergus @rollinspromo

Insta-worthy sights & scenes



The Old Teahouse, Whitehead @imagining_daniela



The Gobbins, Islandmagee @chrisgheaney

“...if you wake with your face being stroked by an unseen hand, you will have met Maud!”

St Nicholas' Church

Is there a building in Northern Ireland more marked by history than St Nicholas'?

Built by Ulster's Anglo Norman conqueror John de Courcy in the late 12th century, it seems every invasion or change of power or tumultuous local event has left its imprint here. It was the Governor of Carrickfergus and architect of the Plantation, Sir Arthur Chichester who transformed de Courcy's ruin into the beautiful church we see today in the early 1600s.

Burned by rebels, captured by French soldiers, it is also the story of ordinary people in past times, their lives poignantly captured in elaborate marble memorials. In St Nicholas resides the living history of this part of the world.

Encased in the present walls for hundreds of years, the original Norman pillars are now evident again. In the baptistery nearby, once used as a Coroner's Court, you'll see sword cuts into stone, left by soldiers as they sharpened their halberds.

There's so much else to see, from an exquisite copy of the Book of Kells, to the staff of Bishop John MacNeice, rector here and father of poet Louis, communion table and chairs, dating from the 1600s, carved in

ancient Irish bog oak and an ancient piscine, once used to ward off witches. Don't miss the Leper window where Communion was given to those afflicted with the terrible disease, probably drawn by the healing well of St Bride or the ancient leper hospital here. Then picture yourself in the Freeman's Aisle, gazing up not just at the rector but Sir Arthur, one of the architects of the Plantation, and his family in the aisle above. Beneath his aisle lies the Chichester Family tomb, now sealed off. But you can view the unique marble and alabaster memorial to Sir Arthur, wife Lettice and baby son Arthur who died in infancy. Beneath them is a bust of Arthur's brother John, whom he replaced as governor after John's head was removed by one of the McDonnell clan. It is said that visiting the church the beheader was heard to announce, "how the deil he cam to get his head again? for he was sure he had anes taen it frae him."

And as you end this journey through history, gaze back down the central aisle. Very unusually, its crookedness symbolises that Christ's head fell to the right when he was crucified.

The Braid

Built on the site of the old town hall, one of the original Seven Towers of Ballymena, this interactive museum is a touchstone for all that has happened here, beginning with enthralling film that takes you into the lives of the first humans to make their mark on this land.

You can walk through our surprising history here, from ancient pagan stone tombs to the dawn of a new religion. On the slopes of Slemish mountain, St Patrick, kidnapped by Niall of the Nine Hostages, worked as a shepherd before a visitation from an angel led to Ireland becoming a Christian country.

Then came the Vikings to rampage the landscape and the Anglo-Normans who began their dominance when John de Courcy built Carrickfergus Castle in 1187. Ireland's best preserved Anglo Norman castle is as forbidding and imposing as ever. On a more modest scale, the remains of a famous Norman motte and bailey castle can be seen in nearby Harryville.

Now it's a three-way battle for power between the Anglo Normans, powerful local clans, like the McDonnells and O'Neills and the English Crown. A time of shifting loyalties, savage warfare, brutality and intrigues, whose great fortifications still stand guard over the landscape.

Nowhere was the impact of the Plantation, where Scottish and English were settled on confiscated Irish lands following the final defeat of the Gaelic lords, greater than in this area. As you travel around Ballymena, still a small village in the 1600s, you'll see the heritage of the powerful settler family, the Adairs, who transformed it from a small settlement into one of Ireland's most thriving towns.

In the idyllic Gracehill village, unchanged to this day, new weaving technology was introduced by the Moravian community, helping the area become a centre of the linen industry. Here at The Braid you can experience the life and work of a linen worker through fascinating interactive screens.

The story comes up to date with dramatic images, sounds and music from the 1960s, while the kids can enjoy the experience on a fantastic digital trail with quizzes, puzzles and games for every part of our history.

Ann's Pantry, Larne
BT40 1SP



Hospitality

To truly know a place and its people, you have to taste their culture. So, you're really in for a treat on a tour of Mid and East Antrim, one of Ireland's Top Ten Foodie Destinations of 2018!



The Rinkha, Islandmagee
BT40 3SW



Come along with us on a two-day journey of indulgence, enjoying the famed local produce of this area, beautifully cooked by some of Northern Ireland's finest chefs, in some of its most atmospheric and unexpected venues.

World-famous organic salmon and beef to unique bread, Irish whiskeys, local craft beers and ice cream parlours that have been delighting beachgoers for generations. Taste your way around the best Northern Ireland has to offer.

Stay in a historic seaside inn once owned by Winston Churchill, a luxurious hotel famed for its food and drink, or meet the locals and stay in a traditional B&B.

Day One

Morning

Victorian delight

Breakfast in the delightful Victorian seaside resort of Whitehead. The Bank House is typical of the town's charming tearooms.

Sinead Brennan, owner of this combined deli and café is a real foodie and has earned her success by sourcing the best local produce she can find.

Weather allowing, it's hard to beat sitting outside in the Bank House garden in the company of their impressive willow ploughman statue, sipping an Americano from local coffee roasters and tasting sublime home baked scones.

Foodie tour

There's so much to enjoy here; mouth-watering cakes and soups, fine Irish cheeses, award-winning local breads and yoghurts, no wonder food expert Portia Woods makes it the first stop on her popular 'Toast the Coast' food tour.

While you're in town, there's plenty to keep you occupied between meals! The spectacular Gobbins Cliff Path, built in and around the towering local cliffs, has been described as Europe's most dramatic walk.



The Bank House, Whitehead
BT38 9QB



Traditional ice cream

Love ice cream the way they used to make it? Just yards away from The Gobbins Visitor Centre, Ross Hawkins, the fourth generation of his family to run The Rinkha ice cream store, still makes delicious ice creams from an old family recipe.

Check out the photos from The Rinkha's days as a leading local music venue while you indulge yourself with their traditional vanilla ice or decadent Belgian chocolate.

Another way to experience this extraordinary coastline is to visit the lighthouse keepers' cottages at the working Blackhead Lighthouse, a short hop from The Rinkha. You can even stay in these old cottages, now authentically restored. No better way to capture that sense of union with nature as the waves crash against the rocks below on long summer evenings.

The nostalgic amongst you (and Thomas the Tank Engine fans) can inspect the old steam engines and carriages at the Whitehead Railway Museum. Portia Woods' walking tour of the town ends with a delicious afternoon tea at the museum's atmospheric Edwardian Tea Room.

Cooking the local way

From Whitehead it's just a fifteen-minute drive to the lovely countryside around Ballycarry for our next stop, Bellahill Cookery School.

Here, in her large open plan kitchen, acclaimed cook Arlene Thompson will lead you through a range of traditional recipes, all made with the finest local artisan produce, like smoked Glenarm Organic Salmon and the fabulous black and white puddings from Gracehill.

Hospitality isn't just about food and drink, it's also the way we engage with people here. Arlene's easy warmth will put even the beginners amongst you at ease. This is about having fun as well as treating your taste buds.

Afternoon

It's a short but delightful drive along the coastal road to 17th century Ballygally Castle, now a luxurious hotel. To work up an appetite for their famous afternoon tea, take a stroll along Ballygally's secluded beach with views of Scotland across the road or head off to nearby Cairncastle, whose rugged beauty was used by Game of Thrones® for several scenes, including the very first episode, when Ned Stark beheaded a deserter from the Night's Watch.

Now enjoy an afternoon tea by a roaring fire while you take in the panoramic sea views from the lounge. Freshly baked pastries, buttermilk scones with cream and exquisite finger sandwiches are on the menu, but if you pre-book the Game of Thrones® version, you can enjoy such culinary gems as John Snow Cakes and Baratheon Bread!

Londonderry Arms

Now we drive about ten miles along the beautiful coastal road, past little bays and great headlands, cliffs and wide blue waters so close you feel you could touch them, to stay in one of Northern Ireland's most historic hotels, the Londonderry Arms, where food and drink are taken very seriously indeed.

“...acclaimed cook Arlene Thompson will lead you through a range of traditional recipes, all made with the finest local artisan produce...”

Day Two

Morning

We begin with a wonderful breakfast at the Londonderry Arms, where even the wheaten bread is special, baked daily to a recipe handed down through owner Denise O'Neill's family.

The path to Cranny Falls

Before we head back the three miles to Glenarm, there's a wonderful way to walk off the calories (how else do you make room for lunch?). Stroll down to the lovely Victorian harbour just along the road, under the railway arch and walk up the steps you find there. Here, where the views lead to the Maidens (rocky islands) and Scotland beyond, you'll find the signposted walk to the stunning Cranny Falls waterfall along the route of the old railway line that once took limestone from the quarry to the harbour.

Glenarm Castle Walled Garden

Now, we drive back just a couple of miles to Glenarm and its famous castle. Park outside its elegant Walled Garden Tea Room, beautifully fashioned out of the estate's old Mushroom House. Here too is the entrance to the idyllic Walled Garden itself, which you'll have time to tour after lunch.

The vegetables, herbs and even fruit that will be a memorable part of your lunch (an enticing choice of dishes will be featured on the blackboard) have a food mile journey of precisely none, having come from the garden itself! Nor have the delicious salmon or beef travelled far. Glenarm Shorthorn Beef and smoked Glenarm Organic Salmon are both produced locally and you'll soon see why they are genuinely world famous.

Cranny Falls, Carnlough
BT44 0LJ



Afternoon

Award winning beer, made for cows!

From Glenarm we take the beautiful 45-minute drive through the rolling hills and plunging valleys of the Glens of Antrim, to Randalstown to discover the secrets of craft ale brewing at the Hillstown Brewery.

Their hand-crafted ales, brewed using traditional methods, are now award winners and available throughout the area. It's hard to believe the farm's Shorthorn cattle were the first admirers of their beer. It seems the owners believed their beer fed cattle deserved the best beer. That must be some beef!

While you're here, take an Économusée tour of the brewery, learning about the different grains and hops used in the beers, meet the brewers and see them in action.

River views and wine pairing

Now take the short drive to Ballymena to try the tempting tasting menu at the River Room restaurant at the Galgorm Resort and Spa, one of only four restaurants in Northern Ireland to be awarded three AA rosettes.

The local produce they cook with here - crab and scallops, lamb and monkfish - is simply out of this world. This is fine dining at its finest, where you'll receive expert assistance in pairing each dish with a top class wine.

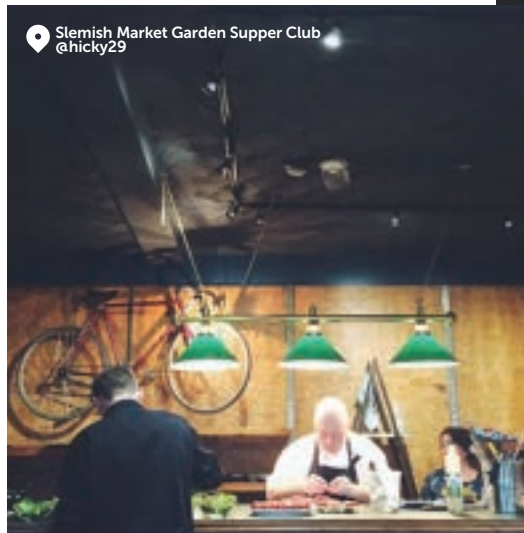
All that is needed to complete a heavenly evening are the views of the plunging Maine River outside, even more beautiful as dusk falls and the gently cascading water is lit up.

For a really unique local gourmet experience, here's a little inside knowledge. Why not join one of the increasingly popular supper clubs, springing up in the area as food lovers take matters into their own hands?

One of Northern Ireland's finest, the Slemish Market Supper Club, creates menus based around vegetables, fruit and herbs grown in the Slemish Market Garden outside Ballymena. Check out their Facebook page for news of their monthly dinners.



Glenarm Castle Walled Garden
@clairemichelledavis



Slemish Market Garden Supper Club
@hicky29

Insta-worthy sights & scenes



Hillstown Brewery
@lobik_brewery

Ireland's oldest thatched inn

Maybe it's time for a nightcap or two at the hotel's Gin Library, where experts are on hand to help you choose from a list of over 400 gins or you could take in the live music in Gillies Bar.

But, if you can summon the energy, you can venture further afield, to Toomebridge, for a night of sizzling Irish traditional music at the atmospheric Crosskeys Inn, Ireland's oldest thatched inn. The whiskey selection here is legendary and, believe it or not, they're hoping to add their own pretty soon!

“Why not join one of the increasingly popular supper clubs, springing up in the area as food lovers take matters into their own hands?”

Meet the locals

A taste of tradition

Growing up near the beautiful Causeway Coast, Portia Woods was raised on the traditional baking and wonderful produce of the area. Today, her role is to bring those delights to a whole new audience with her 'Toast the Coast' tour.

Portia's beguiling tour starts at Whitehead's Bank House, where owner Sinead Brennan presents diners with a sublime breakfast of Clondeboye yoghurt, fine Irish cheeses and boiled ham, washed down with Armagh apple juice.

At Ann's Pantry in Larne, you can discover why Northern Irish baking is famous around the world as owner Helen tells you all about this traditional family bakery, winner of 45 Great Taste Awards. By the way, the potato bread, pancakes, black pudding, bacon and wheaten bread you enjoy here will be cooked on a griddle belonging to Portia's grandmother.

Other stops include Ballygally Castle Hotel, Glenarm Castle, and the Londonderry Arms.

En route you will have sampled everything from Irish whiskeys to dulce (seaweed), Glenarm fudge, Glenarm beef and smoked salmon, and lots more. Feel free to bring home the fine foods you can buy along the way.



Meet the locals

The Londonderry Arms

Want to really make the most of this atmospheric hotel, whose graceful Georgian rooms are adorned with lovely antiques?



Try and get a quick chat with the ever welcoming but busy (this is a very popular place) owner Denise O'Neill or her dad, Raymond, in the hotel's famous Arkle Whiskey Bar.

They'll tell you the story behind Lady Londonderry building the hotel in the 1840s, the long seat in the Churchill Lounge that had been destined for Titanic and the deeds framed on the wall that confirm Winston Churchill's ownership of the hotel.

They'll also tell you the story behind the Arkle Whiskey Bar itself. Back in the 60s, this was the meeting place for the Arkle Club, formed in 1964 to follow the exploits of the famous steeplechaser. Arkle's jockey Pat Taafe and trainer Tom Dreaper attended celebratory dinners here, donating the shoes Arkle wore in the second of his three consecutive Gold Cup wins, now displayed at the bar.

The 'Whiskey' in the bar's title is a reference to the hotel's exhaustive collection of the best of Irish whiskeys, like Bushmills from

just around the coast, Ireland's oldest continuously licensed distillery. Try a pint of the flavoursome Hillstown ales here, also visit this award-winning brewery on this itinerary.

Dining in the Londonderry Arms is an event in itself. Not formal or stuffy, though you could be eating in the Frances Anne Restaurant (named after Lady Londonderry) whose Georgian splendour is enhanced by period antiques. The ambience couldn't be friendlier but the O'Neills take food very seriously. A founding member of Taste of Ulster, their dedication to local produce is such they even use the famous local harvested seaweed of the area.

But if you want a steak burger with a difference, try their Glenarm Shorthorn steak burger, served in a toasted brioche bun with dry cured Northern Irish smoked bacon. Often touted as the world's finest beef, produced from cattle reared just up the road, it's typical of this inn, and this area, to serve such a culinary gem in such an accessible way.

Meet the locals

Linda de Vecchis

 Linda's Original, Broughshane
BT42 4JJ

“The aim of Linda’s Original is to bring back the tradition of homemade baking I inherited from my grandmothers. They were truly exceptional cooks and I learned so much from them”.

Everything I produce is handmade, and using the best local ingredients I can find. It’s so important to keep that tradition alive and it’s something visitors to this area love.

I grew up in Ballymena and studied catering at Ballymena Catering College. Then I worked in England for ten years, where I met my husband, also a chef, but we moved back when we had children.

I worked in a local farm shop for a while but I wanted to try something myself. I thought there would be a market for the kind of baking I learned from my grandmothers, using just small batches and small mixers. My idea was that I would specialise in just a few products but become expert in them and expand the number of flavours of each product.

So, I have three kinds of sticky toffee pudding, a dozen different brownies and several gourmet sausage rolls. The key is quality. Wherever possible I use local artisan produce, like butter and chutneys or organic apples for the top of our sticky toffee pudding.

So for my gourmet sausage rolls I use the wonderful pork from a renowned local butcher, as well as the award-winning black pudding from Gracehill Fine Foods in Ballymena and famous Northern Irish dry cured bacon. I actually combine all three in our Ulster Fry sausage roll, along with mushrooms and tomatoes. It’s a unique way of celebrating a wonderful Northern Irish dish and it flies out!

My production kitchen is in the beautiful Raceview Mill, a converted woollen mill in Broughshane, one of the loveliest villages in Northern Ireland and the stopping off point for Slemish Mountain, where St Patrick lived as a shepherd. Raceview Mill is a wonderful place for people who love artisan crafts, arts and foods and has a great café called the Red Brick. People can buy all our products here if they wish.

As well as supplying cafes, delis and restaurants I also sell my products at artisan markets in Ballymena and the Causeway Coast and Glens and hopefully other markets in the Mid & East Antrim area soon. The council have been very pro-active in encouraging artisan markets and local artisan food producers and the word is spreading fast.

It’s a way for visitors to taste local tradition, when you travel you want to try local foods and you want something unique to take home too. We had a bus full of French tourists and every single one bought one of our award-winning Irish Whiskey and Porter sticky toffee puddings to take home!

Probably our most popular pudding is a cross between sticky toffee and Christmas pudding. We sell it in November and people are always asking when it will be ready. But I tell them it takes a month just to soak the fruit, like all good things it takes time!

Linda’s Original sausage rolls, brownies and sticky toffee puddings are available from artisan markets and from her kitchen at Raceview Mill.



Don't just stay. Experience.

Lighthouse keepers' houses, 19th century follies and haunted hotels. It's only natural that this unique part of the world has some unique places to stay.

Image courtesy of Connor McCullagh

Blackhead Lighthouse stands atop the basalt cliffs of Islandmagee, keeping watch over the busy shipping lanes at the mouth of Belfast Lough. It was built in 1901, saw the heyday of Belfast's shipbuilding industry, and helped guide the ill-fated Titanic on the first leg of its maiden voyage.

Today, the light is automated, but it was once staffed by lighthouse keepers who lived in the houses to its rear. These beautifully-restored homes are now available for self-catering stays, and nothing exemplifies life on the sea and stone coast more than a getaway to this isolated spot. The windows look out onto sweeping views of The Gobbins Cliffs and the Irish Sea. Gulls and guillemots circle overhead. Each night you are lulled to sleep by the surging of the waves on the rocks far below.

The Barbican looks as if it has been guarding over Glenarm village since the Middle Ages. In fact, it was built in the early 19th century, when ornamental gardens and romantic follies were all the rage among the upper classes. Its stone turrets, gothic windows and period décor evoke nostalgia and whimsy. Come for a self-catering stay in the tower room where thick rugs, vaulted ceilings and wood-burning stoves promise evenings of cosy comfort.

The best way to get close to daily life is to stay in a B&B. The Water's Edge, in Glenarm, is a beautiful home right on the water where hosts Jenny and Pete love to introduce newcomers to this quaint village. Their rooms are bright and modern, the breakfast is delicious, and the views are to die for. It's no wonder that the Water's Edge won Northern Ireland's Best Overnight Stay at the 2018 Tourism NI Awards.

Oranmore Guesthouse & Tearooms in Ballymena offers warm hospitality in an idyllic country setting. Each room has been lovingly decorated around a different garden theme. A roaring fire warms the sitting room in the colder months and the kitchen provides hearty Irish fare. Explore the gardens where ancient trees preside over colourful flower beds. Treat yourself to traditional, country hospitality at this hidden gem in the heart of County Antrim.

The Adair Arms, a boutique hotel, was designed by Charles Lanyon – the architect responsible for Queen's University Belfast's main building and the Palm House at Belfast Botanic Gardens. This is one of the finest hotels in County Antrim, with luxury rooms, traditional afternoon teas and fine dining right in the heart of Ballymena. It's a great place to spoil yourself.

The Dobbins Inn, in Carrickfergus, is perhaps the most storied hotel in the region. It has been standing for over 800 years, built in the 13th century by the Norman knight, Reginald D'Aubin. The ancient walls and old timbers have been lovingly restored, and the halls are lined with fascinating items like hunting trophies and suits of armour. Beware though, these rooms are frequented by the benign ghost of Elizabeth Dobbin, the wife of the inn's 15th century owner. He had her put to death after he discovered that she was having affair with a young soldier from Carrickfergus Castle.

These are just some of the fascinating places you can stay on the sea and stone coast.

For more, visit shapedbyseaandstone.com.

For those looking for a hotel there is a great range in the area:

- Rosspark Hotel
- Tullyglass House Hotel
- Belfast Loughshore Hotel
- Ballygally Halfway House
- Curran Court Hotel
- Londonderry Arms Hotel
- Galgorm Resort & Spa
- Premier Inn Carrickfergus
- Leighinmohr House Hotel
- Ballygally Castle Hotel
- Adair Arms Hotel
- The Dobbins Inn

 Tullyglass Hotel, Ballymena
BT42 1HJ



The Gobbins, Islandmagee
BT40 3TB

48-Hour Itinerary

We have explored so many hidden gems, embraced a kaleidoscope of experiences, from ancient castles in achingly beautiful locations to following miraculous paths built into our spectacular coastline. Now it's time to put them together in an easily accessible two day journey of excitement through a landscape and history that will never stop surprising you.



Day One

Start the morning in Carrickfergus, taking a guided tour of Northern Ireland's finest medieval castle.

See the ancient keep and banqueting hall and imagine life here during one of the terrible sieges.

Discover the lives of the parents of the 7th President of the US, born just two years after they emigrated from Carrickfergus, at the 1750s Andrew Jackson Cottage.

While you're there explore the enthralling story of the elite US Rangers and their base in the town during World War Two.

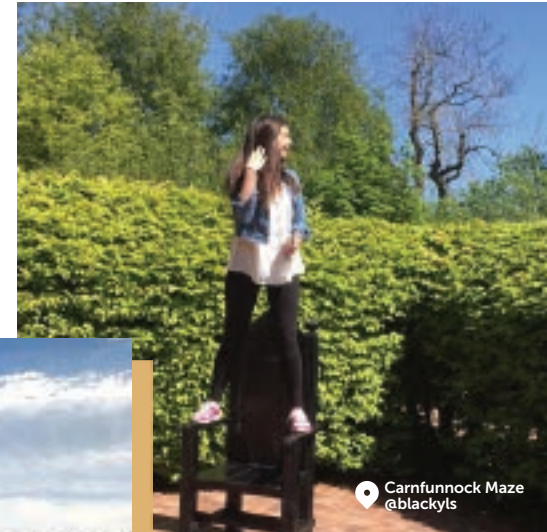
Take the short journey to Whitehead to explore the steam engines at the Railway Museum and enjoy lunch in their Edwardian Tea Room.

Stop off for wonderful homemade ice creams at the Rinkha store before enjoying a pre-booked tour of the spectacular Gobbins Cliff Path. Tours leave from The Gobbins Visitor Centre.

A few miles from Larne, Carnfunnock Country Park has lots to amuse the family (it's also a great picnic area), including a famous Maze, play park and wonderful walks.

It's a short drive to Ballygally and its lovely beach. Enjoy superb locally sourced food for dinner, check out their Game of Thrones® door and look out for friendly ghosts if you stay the night.

Insta-worthy sights & scenes



Day Two

A few miles down the coast is the historic Glenarm Castle and its beautiful grounds.

Tour its stunning Walled Garden, take a trail around the castle and enjoy delicious homemade cakes and scones at its acclaimed tearoom. In the grounds you can pop into Granny Shaw's Fudge Factory for a demonstration.

Around the corner you will find the workshop of artisan jewellers Steensons. See how they made the famous pieces for Game of Thrones® and buy pendants and brooches inspired by the series.

Lunch at Carnlough's historic Londonderry Arms with Glenarm salmon or beef.

A beautiful drive takes you to Slemish, the dramatic mountain on which St Patrick spent years as a shepherd, where the spectacular views from the summit include the gorgeous Shillanavogy Valley, recreated as the Dothraki grasslands in Game of Thrones®.

Next stop is Arthur Cottage, the ancestral home of Chester Alan Arthur, the 21st President of the United States of America.

A superb dinner at the Galgorm Resort & Spa or Adair Arms Hotel in Ballymena can be followed by an exhilarating traditional music session at Ireland's oldest thatched inn, The Crosskeys Inn in Toomebridge.

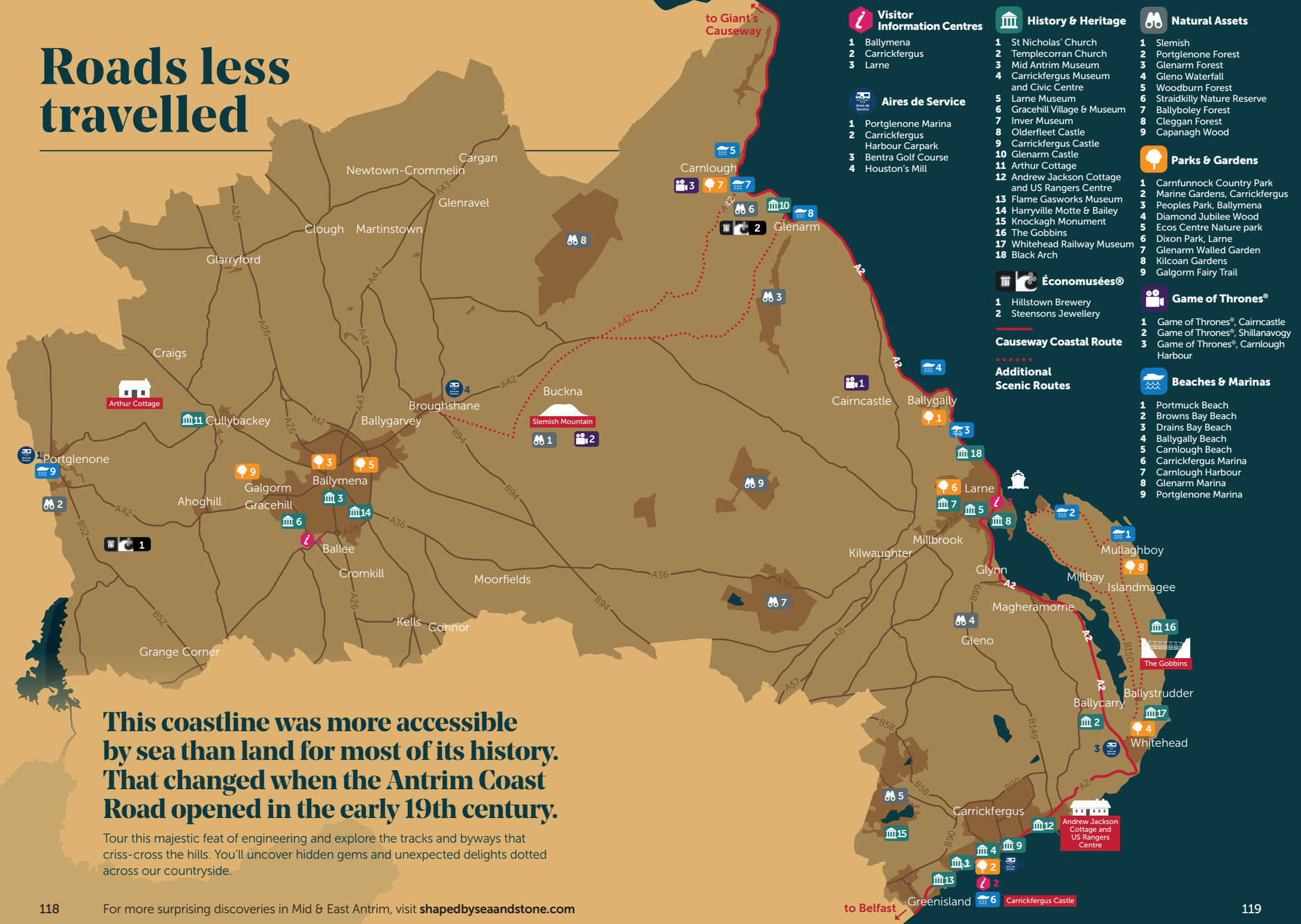
Finally, lay your head down at the Rosspark Hotel or Tullyglass House Hotel.



Arthur Cottage and Interpretative Centre, Cullybackey
BT42 1EB

Period costume and baking over an open turf fire... come along and enjoy the soda bread and pancakes.

Roads less travelled



Visitor Information Centres

- 1 Ballymena
- 2 Carrickfergus
- 3 Larne

Aires de Service

- 1 Portglenone Marina
- 2 Carrickfergus Harbour Carpark
- 3 Bentra Golf Course
- 4 Houston's Mill

History & Heritage

- 1 St Nicholas' Church
- 2 Templecorran Church
- 3 Mid Antrim Museum
- 4 Carrickfergus Museum and Civic Centre
- 5 Larne Museum
- 6 Gracehill Village & Museum
- 7 Inver Museum
- 8 Olderfleet Castle
- 9 Carrickfergus Castle
- 10 Glenarm Castle
- 11 Arthur Cottage
- 12 Andrew Jackson Cottage and US Rangers Centre
- 13 Flame Gasworks Museum
- 14 Harryville Motte & Bailey
- 15 Knockagh Monument
- 16 The Gobbins
- 17 Whitehead Railway Museum
- 18 Black Arch

Économusées®

- 1 Hillstown Brewery
- 2 Steensons Jewellery

Causeway Coastal Route

Additional Scenic Routes

Natural Assets

- 1 Slemish
- 2 Portglenone Forest
- 3 Glenarm Forest
- 4 Gleno Waterfall
- 5 Woodburn Forest
- 6 Straidkilly Nature Reserve
- 7 Ballyboley Forest
- 8 Cleggan Forest
- 9 Capanagh Wood

Parks & Gardens

- 1 Carnfunnock Country Park
- 2 Marine Gardens, Carrickfergus
- 3 Peoples Park, Ballymena
- 4 Diamond Jubilee Wood
- 5 Ecos Centre Nature park
- 6 Dixon Park, Larne
- 7 Glenarm Walled Garden
- 8 Kilcoan Gardens
- 9 Galgorm Fairy Trail

Game of Thrones®


- 1 Game of Thrones®, Cairncastle
- 2 Game of Thrones®, Shillanavogy
- 3 Game of Thrones®, Carnlough Harbour

Beaches & Marinas

- 1 Portmuck Beach
- 2 Browns Bay Beach
- 3 Drains Bay Beach
- 4 Ballygally Beach
- 5 Carnlough Beach
- 6 Carrickfergus Marina
- 7 Carnlough Harbour
- 8 Glenarm Marina
- 9 Portglenone Marina

This coastline was more accessible by sea than land for most of its history. That changed when the Antrim Coast Road opened in the early 19th century.

Tour this majestic feat of engineering and explore the tracks and byways that criss-cross the hills. You'll uncover hidden gems and unexpected delights dotted across our countryside.

 The Gobbins, Islandmagee
BT40 3TB

shapedbyseaandstone.com

