

25 Hidden Gems of Ireland

That Most Tourists Never Find

From secret sea stacks to forgotten castles, ancient holy wells to hidden beaches -these are the places that make Ireland magical, far from the tour bus crowds.

A Free Guide from Love Ireland

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Introduction

Ireland is one of the most visited countries in Europe, and for good reason. The Cliffs of Moher, the Ring of Kerry, and the Giant's Causeway attract millions every year. But the Ireland that locals love -the quiet corners, the untouched coastlines, the places where the past feels present -remains hidden in plain sight.

This guide is our love letter to the Ireland most visitors never see. These 25 places won't appear on most tour itineraries. Some require a short hike. Others are simply overlooked because nobody thought to mention them. All of them are real, visitable, and unforgettable.

We've organised them by region so you can build them into your own trip. Whether you're planning your first visit or your fifteenth, we hope this guide leads you somewhere new.

Happy exploring,
The Love Ireland Team

The West

1. Inishturk Island

County Mayo

While tourists flock to the Aran Islands, Inishturk sits quietly off the Mayo coast with just 60 residents, no tour buses, and some of the most dramatic cliff walks in Ireland. The community hall doubles as a pub on weekends.

2. Poll na bPeist (The Worm Hole)

County Galway

A perfectly rectangular natural pool carved into the limestone of Inis Mor. It looks man-made but was sculpted entirely by the Atlantic. The Red Bull Cliff Diving series has used it as a venue, but most days you'll have it to yourself.

3. Derrigimlagh Bog

County Galway

This vast, empty bogland near Clifden is where Alcock and Brown crash-landed after the first non-stop transatlantic flight in 1919. A quiet looped walk takes you past the memorial and the ruins of Marconi's wireless station.

4. Killary Harbour

County Galway/Mayo

Ireland's only fjord stretches 16 kilometres inland between the Mweelrea and Leenane mountains. On still mornings, the water is so calm it mirrors the sky. A famine-era path along its southern shore makes for a haunting walk.

5. Doo Lough Pass

County Mayo

A narrow road between two dark lakes beneath towering mountains, with a memorial to the Doo Lough Tragedy of 1849. It is one of the most beautiful and sombre drives in Ireland -and almost entirely deserted.

The South-West

6. Bull Rock

County Cork

A sea stack off the Beara Peninsula with a natural tunnel running clean through it. In certain light conditions, the arch frames the open Atlantic like a cathedral window. Boat trips from Dursey depart in calm weather.

7. Gougane Barra

County Cork

A glacial valley and lake hidden deep in the Shehy Mountains where the River Lee begins. The tiny chapel on the island -connected by a causeway -is one of the most photographed churches in Ireland, yet it never feels crowded.

8. Ballinskelligs

County Kerry

A Gaeltacht village on the Iveragh Peninsula with a ruined priory on the beach, a medieval castle, and views across to the Skellig Islands. The beach at sunset rivals anything on the Wild Atlantic Way.

9. Derrynane Beach

County Kerry

Daniel O'Connell's home territory -a vast, sheltered beach backed by dunes and subtropical gardens. At low tide, you can walk to Abbey Island and explore the ruins of a sixth-century church.

10. The Priest's Leap

County Cork/Kerry

A single-track mountain road climbing from Bonane to Coomhola with some of the most expansive views in Munster. Named after a priest who allegedly leapt his horse across the mountains to escape soldiers during the Penal Laws.

The South-East & Midlands

11. Hook Head

County Wexford

Home to one of the oldest working lighthouses in the world -over 800 years in operation. The surrounding coastline is rich in fossils, and the rock pools at low tide are some of the best in Ireland.

12. Dunmore East

County Waterford

A fishing village built into red sandstone cliffs with sheltered coves, a working harbour, and a thatched pub. It feels more like Cornwall than the sunny south-east, and the coastal walk to Portally Cove is stunning.

13. Corlea Trackway

County Longford

A preserved Iron Age road built across a bog in 148 BC -the largest of its kind ever found in Europe. The visitor centre houses the original timbers under controlled conditions. It is an extraordinary, under-visited piece of history.

14. Fore Abbey

County Westmeath

A ruined Benedictine abbey in a valley said to contain the Seven Wonders of Fore -including water that flows uphill and wood that will not burn. The valley itself is one of the most atmospheric spots in the Irish midlands.

15. Lough Boora Discovery Park

County Offaly

A reclaimed bogland turned into a sculpture park and nature reserve. Red deer, hares, and over 130 bird species share the landscape with large-scale art installations made from bog oak and industrial machinery.

The North-West

16. Gleniff Horseshoe

County Sligo

A single-lane road that loops through a glacial valley framed by limestone cliffs. Barytes mines dot the hillside, and the views from the top rival anything on the Wild Atlantic Way -without a single tour bus in sight.

17. Mullaghmore Head

County Sligo

A dramatic headland with Classiebawn Castle perched on its edge. The Atlantic swells here have made it one of Europe's premier big-wave surfing spots. On calmer days, the walk around the head is breathtaking.

18. Maghera Beach and Caves

County Donegal

Accessed through a farm gate and down a sandy track, this vast beach reveals a network of sea caves at low tide. One of the caves is large enough to hold a cathedral. It is Donegal's best-kept secret.

19. Poisoned Glen

County Donegal

A U-shaped glacial valley beneath the Derryveagh Mountains. The name may come from a mistranslation of the Irish -'heavenly glen' became 'poisoned glen.' Either way, the silence and scale of this place are extraordinary.

20. Banagher Glen

County Derry

An ancient oak woodland and nature reserve with a sixth-century church, a holy well, and a waterfall. The canopy is thick enough to make midday feel like dusk. It is one of the oldest woodlands in Ireland.

The East & North-East

21. Loughcrew Cairns

County Meath

Often called 'the poor man's Newgrange,' these passage tombs are older than the pyramids and sit on hilltops with 360-degree views across the midlands. Unlike Newgrange, you can enter the main cairn freely -and often alone.

22. Dalkey Island

County Dublin

A short kayak or boat ride from Dalkey village, this uninhabited island has a Martello tower, a ruined church, and a colony of wild goats. It feels a world away from Dublin, though it is barely five kilometres from the city boundary.

23. Carlingford

County Louth

A medieval walled town on the shores of Carlingford Lough, dominated by the ruins of King John's Castle. The town is a base for the Cooley Peninsula -Ireland's smallest Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

24. Struell Wells

County Down

A complex of holy wells and bath houses in a valley near Downpatrick, associated with St Patrick. The stone bath houses date from the 17th century but the wells have been venerated for far longer. Rarely visited.

25. The Gobbins Cliff Path

County Antrim

A dramatic coastal path cut into basalt cliffs on Islandmagee, first opened in 1902 and restored in 2015. Tubular bridges, tunnels, and caves cling to the rock face above crashing waves. Guided tours only -and worth every step.

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