



# IRELAND HOPPING

A leisurely two-month tour of the Emerald Isle reveals cultural depths that leave Karen and Myles Davies spellbound. Here, they reveal their highlights



**Duration**  
Eight weeks

**When**  
Summer 2022

**Why?**  
Fine landscapes and historic places to explore, with a warm welcome wherever you go



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1 Ballydehob is just one of many scenic overnight stops

2 A picture-book thatched cottage in the village of Adare

3 Spectacular sandy beaches are found in places such as Malin Bay, Donegal







4 Kinsale is famous for its brightly painted houses

5 Spectacular Mizen Head Bridge is 150ft above sea level

6 Ballymastocker is one of the many Discovery Points along the fabulous Wild Atlantic Way

7 Omev Island, on the Galway coast, is accessible on foot or by car at low tide

All too often, our touring sights seem to be set on a journey south for some guaranteed sunshine that avoids our unpredictable weather. However, with the UK's departure from Europe and the resulting 90 in 180 days Schengen rules, Ireland now offers a splendid opportunity to extend our road-trip agenda, thanks to its non-Schengen status.

Each of Ireland's compass points provides the explorer with very distinct identities. While the 2000-mile coastline is undoubtedly a major asset, each region has its own unique personality.

And that's before you even dip your toes into the Hidden Heartlands interior. So whichever part of Ireland you might choose to explore, a rich and colourful adventure awaits you.

**The South Coast**

The southern coast's striking peninsulas offer a blend of mesmerising drives, breathtaking scenery and historical testament.

From Cobh near Cork, you can expect a rather emotional rollercoaster ride. Not only is the town pleasing to the eye, you can really feel the spirit of Irish hope and desperation – its port holds 400 years of emigration stories, each one depicting an intense yearning for a better life.

If that doesn't touch you, immerse yourself in Cobh's role in the tragedy of the *RMS Titanic*. This is where the doomed vessel made its final stop before disaster struck on 15 April 1912.

Next to charm us was Kinsale, acclaimed as Ireland's prettiest town. Yet its visual vibrancy conceals a dark moment. On 7 May 1915, 12 miles off shore, the *RMS Lusitania* was torpedoed by a

German U-boat, resulting in the deaths of around 1200 people. Residents of Kinsale courageously helped to rescue survivors and today, the town's vitality seems a fitting tribute to those who perished. It left us feeling very humbled by this spirited little fishing town.

Beyond this, Kinsale is also the gateway to Ireland's 1553-mile Wild Atlantic Way (WAW), raising anticipation and intrigue for all who make this splendid coastal pilgrimage.

At this point, you have some difficult choices to make about which of the shoreline 'fingers' to explore. We chose Mizen and Beara Head, which rewarded us with undulating roads, vertiginous bridges, famous lighthouses and stunning coves.

**Wild West**

The west's rugged terrain is where coast and mountains collide to form a diverse landscape, rich in natural history and scenery that could compete with the finest Norwegian fjord.

At its core are hidden harbours, which support Ireland's fishing roots, and picturesque towns adorned with flowers and colourful facades.

Greek-style islands hug the shore, surrounded by azure seas and white sand beaches.

In contrast to the coast, this region is defined by its peat bogs, covering the countryside like soggy blankets. Commercial peat turfing has ceased, as part of the fight against climate change, yet the bog's influence on the landscape and biodiversity is ever-present, and is now protected, thanks to the Wild Nephin National Park.

Ireland's west coast is where the influence of the wild Atlantic elements shows the greatest impact.



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**The North**

The enchanting Northern Headlands of County Donegal are a peaceful and undiscovered corner of Ireland. This region hosts one of the country's six National Parks, no fewer than 57 WAW Discovery Points, and 12 Blue Flag beaches.

We found hidden waterfalls, secret beaches that bear comparison with Portugal's finest, and folk museums and castles that inspire and inform.

Up here, life seems more remote and rural, yet we felt it was the most authentic of the regions we visited. With hedgerows of honeysuckle, ruby-red fuchsias that dangle like earrings and picturesque white thatched cottages, Donegal gives you a real sense of traditional Ireland, as yet untouched by tourism.

No Ireland road-trip would be complete without exploring this unassuming yet striking region, where you'll experience a wee bit of Irish magic.

**Eastern promise**

The gentle and ancient east has a fascinating story to tell as the birthplace of Irish culture. It is here that you begin to uncover how Ireland's modern identity has been crafted from its bygone era.

Climb the world's oldest working lighthouse at Hook, originally built in the 13th century by William Marshal, said to be the greatest knight who ever lived. Explore lively Graigueanamagh and the medieval beauty of Duiske Abbey.

Or perhaps soak up the atmosphere in ancient Kilkenny – now you can begin to feel Ireland's contemporary personality emerging from its deeply historical foundations.

Thanks to its history of Christian revolution, Viking conquests, Norman invasions and brutal English rule, the eastern region holds the key to understanding something of Ireland's soul.

**Heart of the country**

Last and by no means least, Ireland's spine really should not be ignored. The Hidden Heartlands, a region overlooked by many, reveals a scenic network of waterways that subtly engages your affection with its graceful exuberance.

At 230 miles, the Shannon is Ireland's longest river and on its journey to the sea, contributes to deep loughs, full of busy marinas. It feeds canals that weave their way across the country, linking east and west from Dublin to Galway. Balancing the water's dominance, you will also find ancient



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castles and monasteries, such as Clonmacnoise, whose fifth-century Christian influence has been embedded into Ireland's religious values, forming the roots that make this land so extraordinary.

In Athlone, stop to enjoy a pint in Sean's Bar, which dates back to 900 and is recognised by *Guinness World Records* as Ireland's oldest pub.

**NEED TO KNOW**

■ **When to visit**

We planned our Ireland road-trip from mid-June to mid-August, which was not ideal, given it was the height of summer, although it fitted into our European travel and Schengen navigation.

Although Ireland's schools break up at the end of June, this didn't really affect our travels. But in August, the campsites were busy and expensive, as you might expect.

With the benefit of hindsight, we would prefer to visit in the shoulder seasons, partly because of the reduced south-coast crowds, but also because the spring and autumn colours must be incredible. Many of the coastal routes are fringed by rhododendrons, so you can imagine the splash of colour they would create in May.

Visiting in the summer doesn't guarantee fine weather. This is called the Emerald Isle for good reason – its lush greenery is thanks to its ample, year-round rain. You don't go to Ireland hoping for a tan and as long as you expect changeable conditions, you won't be disappointed. When the sun does appear, the land sparkles like diamond, so just make the most of those sunny days. ➔

8 Malin Head is the most northerly point of County Donegal

9 Dating back to medieval times, Hook is the world's oldest lighthouse still in operation



**10** Sean's Bar, in Athlone, is officially recognised as the oldest pub in Ireland

**11** Don't miss the chance to enjoy a plate of Irish stew!



■ **Camping in Ireland**

Ireland has a multitude of overnight options to suit all preferences. Prolific off-grid sites are available - but you should always make sure that you have permission to stay.

These sites are embraced by the locals, who recognise the contribution motorhome owners make to their economy. So long as you always ask permission, are respectful of residential homes and leave no trace, you really can find a wonderful freedom in Ireland.

There are some coastal councils, frustratingly, putting up height barriers, which did restrict our ability to visit some villages. But *aires* are also popping up everywhere, especially on the inland waterways, where marinas gladly accepted us.

Their philosophy is, "Whether you have an engine or wheels, you are welcome." They all have free water and toilets, and paid-for showers and electricity, accessed via an Inland Waterways Smart Card, which you can buy at local stores.

■ **Driving in Ireland**

Ireland's road network is generally good. National roads are great for covering the miles, but this country can't be properly experienced with any form of acceleration or short-cuts. So we took our time on the Regional roads, which are like B-roads in the UK, but narrower.

Along some routes, we often found the 'van vibrating over the cat's eyes that simply could not be avoided, while others had us bouncing about like Tigger. Local roads are not ideal for our size of vehicle and they are often adorned with grass growing up the middle.

As our journey unfolded, we became a bit more confident in choosing the 'little' roads; we would simply urge caution, because they are often used as rat-runs. We soon learnt that driving in Ireland requires far more concentration, so a brief spell of slow driving every day was the name of the game.

■ **Day-to-day costs**

Our lifestyle was on the costly side, although given that we visited during an unprecedented period of inflation, we accepted the situation, knowing that it was affecting everyone.

Our fuel, for example, ranged from €2.18 when we arrived, to €1.84 by the time we left, while food was generally more expensive. There are lots of supermarkets, but bear in mind that Tesco does not accept UK Clubcards here. Be aware that alcohol sales are not allowed before 10.30am on Mondays to Saturdays and before 12.30pm on Sundays.

# TOUR ESSENTIALS

**WAY TO GO**

Karen and Myles travelled to Ireland from Fishguard, landing at Rosslare, later crossing from Dublin to Cherbourg to continue their European travels.

You can also sail from Liverpool or Cairnryan to Belfast, Holyhead to Dublin or the Isle of Man to Dublin or Belfast. Over the course of their trip, they covered approximately 2000 miles.

**WHERE TO STAY**

Their stops included a great mix of *aires*, marina stopovers and campsites - there is something here to suit everyone's preferences.

Karen and Myles found their overnighters through Searchforsites, Park4Night and Total Motorhome Ireland. Their campsites and stop-overs included:

- **Barrow Valley Activities Hub** Graigueenamanagh
- **Coral Gables Aire** Rosslare
- **Dun Laoghaire Aire** Ideal for visiting Dublin
- **Eco Camping and Seaweed Hot Tubs** Clifden
- **Ferrybank Caravan & Camping Park** Wexford
- **The Getaway** Dungarvan
- **Redbarn** Youghal
- **Wolohans Silver Strand Caravan Park** Wicklow

**COSTS**

Travelling from 15 June to 16 August 2022, costs were influenced by high-season prices and the inflationary conditions prevailing at the time.

- **Ferries** £240 inbound, £420 outbound to Cherbourg
- **Camping fees** £553
- **Food** £1600
- **Entry tickets** £24
- **Entertainment** £37
- **Diesel** £600
- **LPG** £48



**FIND OUT MORE**

- **Total Motorhome Ireland**
- [yourtmi.com](http://yourtmi.com)
- **Tourism Ireland**
- [tourismireland.com](http://tourismireland.com)
- **Visit Ireland**
- [ireland.com](http://ireland.com)
- **The Motoroamers**
- [motoroaming.com](http://motoroaming.com)

Ireland has a private refuse collection policy, so most sites (except those on the east coast and the marinas) charge to dispose of rubbish - from €2.50 to €5.00, depending on the size of the bag.

This wonderful land really blessed us with its scenic beauty, generous spirit and overwhelming warmth, which became symbols of our trip. The locals' clear love of their country, and its peaceful ambience, left us feeling like family. We realised that resistance against a return visit is futile! ■