

County Kerry



Kerry is as close as you'll get to the mythical Ireland: that Celtic kingdom of misty mountains promised by glossy brochures, Hollywood and our daydreams. Between the county's snow-capped summits are medieval ruins, glacial lakes, coastal peninsulas, blustery beaches, deserted archipelagos, secluded hamlets, and larger towns where live music sparks up every night.

Most visitors touch down in Killarney. The townsfolk know how to run a mean hotel and serve an Atlantic catch or a rack of Kerry lamb. Instead of municipal gardens there's a 10,000-hectare national park, which can be explored by 'jaunting car' (pony and trap) and a boat across the lakes. In the nearby Gap of Dunloe, the road winds crazily beneath the Macgillycuddy's Reeks range, which includes nine of Ireland's 10 highest peaks.

Tourists often arrive at the coast with the idea that the iconic Ring of Kerry is a 'place' they can visit. In fact, it's a 179km circuit of the Iveragh Peninsula, where the mountains-meet-ocean beauty makes for one of the world's great road trips. To paraphrase one pub sign, you'll enjoy Ireland's best known views... fog permitting. Across a dolphin-inhabited bay, the Dingle Peninsula is home to one of the country's highest concentrations of ancient sites and Mt Brandon, Ireland's eighth highest peak.

Such magnificent scenery is, of course, a magnet for buses, but the hordes can be escaped by using back roads and mountain passes. As for the local folk, Kerry men are famous throughout Ireland for their proud provincialism and country cunning. Just listen to the outrageous yarns told by the 'jarveys' who drive Killarney's jaunting cars.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Distracted Motorists** The Ring of Kerry drive past mountains and beaches (p258)
- **Salmon or Steak** Celtic hospitality in Killarney (opposite) and Kenmare (p267)
- **Island Hopping** The rocky Skelligs (p262) and evacuated Blaskets (p294)
- **Pint & a Screwdriver** Vibrant Dingle town's pubs that double as hardware shops (p285)
- **Ripping Yarns** Literary Listowel (p281) and the county's many storytellers
- **Hearty Pursuits** Activities on land and sea at Derrynane (p265) and Rough Point (p290)



■ POPULATION: 139,900

■ AREA: 4746 SQ KM

KILLARNEY

☎ 064 / pop 16,800

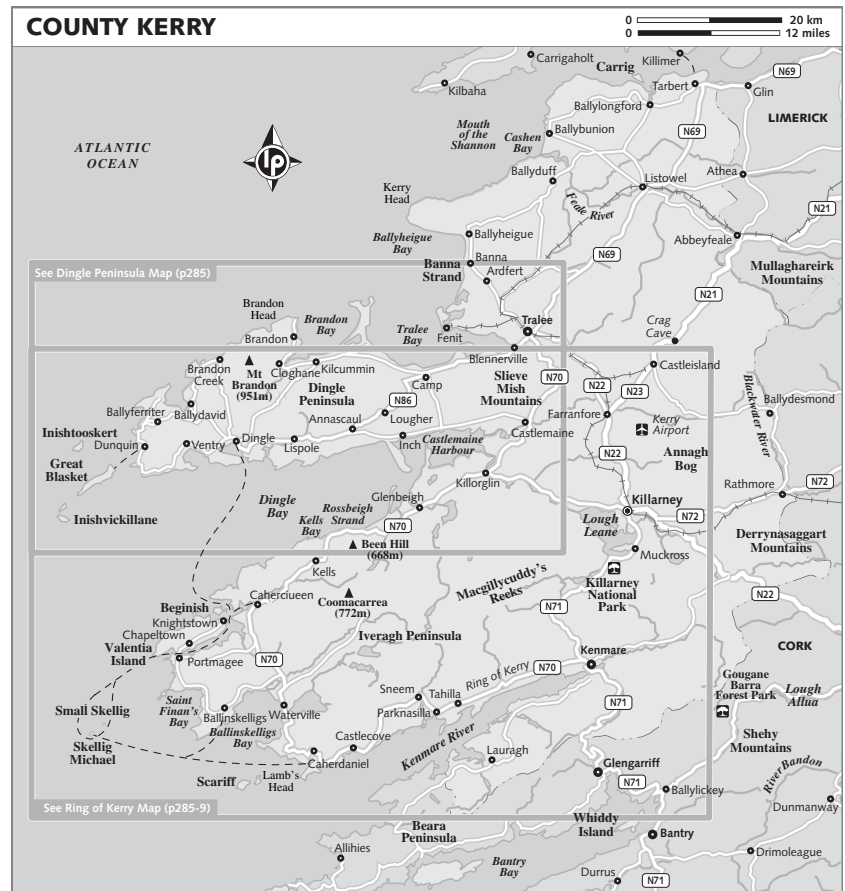
Killarney is a well-oiled tourism machine in the middle of sublime scenery that looks swell on a postcard. Its manufactured twee-ness is renowned – the stream of buses arriving to consume soft-toy shamrocks, the placards on street corners pointing to 'trad' sessions. However, it has many charms beyond its obvious proximity to lakes, waterfalls, woodland and moors dwarfed by 1000m-plus peaks. In a town that's been practising the tourism game for over 250 years, competition keeps standards high, and visitors on all budgets can ex-

pect to find superb restaurants, great pubs and good accommodation.

HISTORY

Killarney and its surrounds have been inhabited probably since the Neolithic period and were certainly important Bronze Age settlements, based on the copper ore mined on Ross Island. Killarney changed hands between warring tribes, notably the Fir Bolg ('bag men'), expert stonemasons who built forts (including Staigue), and developed Ogham script.

In the 7th century, St Finian founded a monastery on Inisfallen Island, and Killarney became a focus for Christianity in the region. The O'Donoghue clan



later ousted the Gaels, before building Ross Castle (in the 15th century).

It wasn't until much later, in the 17th century, that Viscount Kenmare developed the town as a tourist centre, an Irish version of England's Lake District. Among its many notable 19th-century visitors were the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe

Shelley, who began *Queen Mab* here, and Queen Victoria.

ORIENTATION

The centre of Killarney is the T-junction where New St meets High and Main Sts. As it heads south, High St becomes Main St, then turns east into Kenmare Place and

East Ave Rd, where the large hotels are. The national park is to the south, while the bus and train stations are east of the centre.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Killarney Bookshop (☎ 34108; 32 Main St)

Pages Bookstore (☎ 26757; 20 New St)

Emergency

For emergencies (ambulance, fire or police) dial ☎ 999.

Internet Access

Killarney Library (☎ 32655; Rock Rd) Free access.

Leaders (☎ 39635; Beech Rd; per 30 min/1 hr €1.80/3; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-5.30pm Sat)

WEB-Talk (☎ 22523; 12 Main St; per 30 min/1 hr €2/4; ☎ 9.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, 11am-10pm Sun) Also offers cheap phone calls abroad.

Internet Resources
www.corkkerry.ie A useful resource for accommodation and information throughout the southwest.

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Laundry

Gleeson's (☎ 33877; Brewery Lane; per 6kg €12; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat)

Laundry

Left Luggage

Left-luggage office (☎ 37509; per bag €2; ☎ 7am-6pm Mon-Sat) At the bus station; ask at the coffee shop.

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Libraries

Killarney Library (☎ 32655; Rock Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon, Wed, Fri & Sat, 10am-8pm Tue & Thu)

Medical Services

The closest accident and emergency unit is at Tralee General Hospital (p278).

SouthDoc (☎ 1850-335999; Upper Park Rd) Doctors outside surgery hours.

Money

Many banks have either a bureau de change or an ATM, or both. There is also a bureau de change in the tourist office.

Post

Killarney Post Office (☎ 31461; New St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon & Wed-Sat, from 9.30am Tue)

Toilets

There are public toilets on Kenmare Place.

Tourist Information

Publisher **Frank Lewis** (☎ 31108; www.guidekillarney.com; 6 Bridewell Lane) produces the *Guide Killarney* (€5), a good 'what's on' magazine found in many hotels, B&Bs, hostels and bookshops. It can also be obtained directly from the publisher.

Tourist office (☎ 31633; www.corkkerry.ie; Beech Rd; ☎ 9am-8pm Jun-Aug, 9.15am-5pm Sep-May) Busy, but efficient; gives out a good, free map of the national park.

SIGHTS

Built between 1842 and 1855, **St Mary's Cathedral** (☎ 31014; Cathedral Pl), at the western end of New St, is a superb example of neo-Gothic revival architecture. The cruciform Augustus Pugin building was inspired by Ardferth Cathedral (p281), near Tralee.

At the northern end of High St is a **Famine Memorial** to victims, which was erected by the Republican Graves Association in 1972. With a determination reflecting the implacable hope for a united Ireland, the inscription reads: 'This memorial will not be unveiled until Ireland is free.'

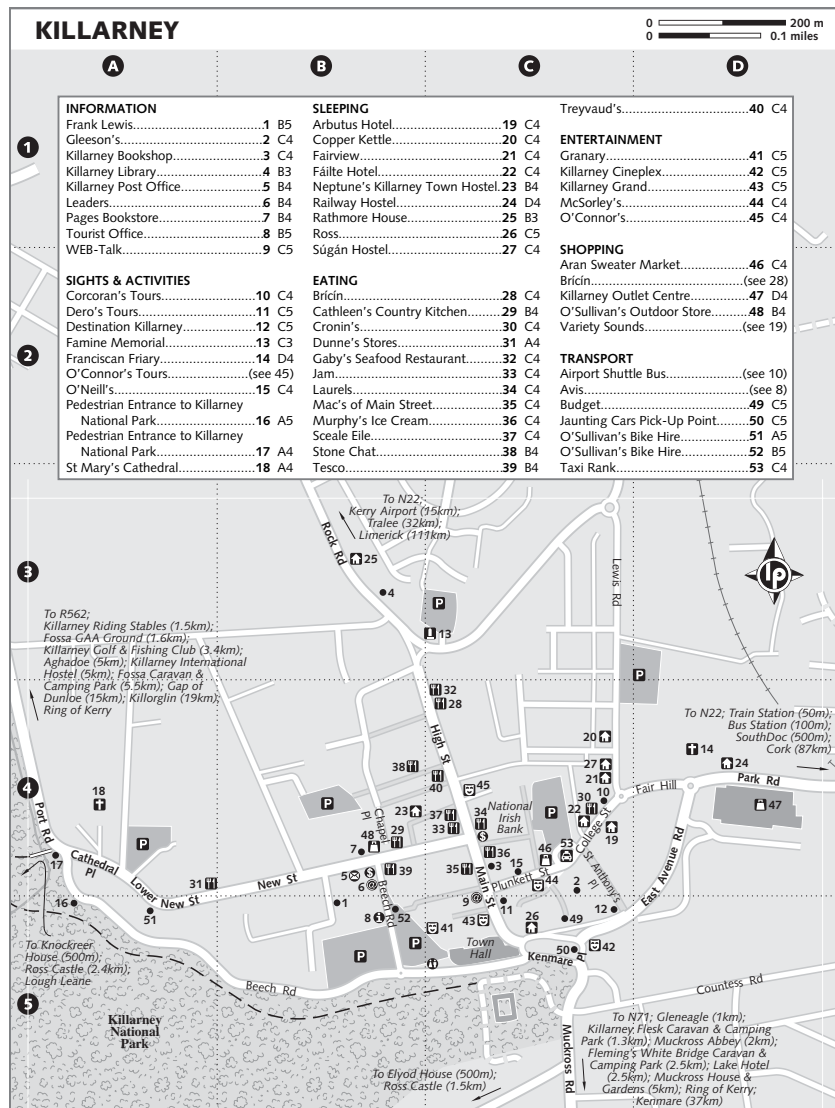
On Fair Hill is an 1860s **Franciscan friary**, displaying an ornate Flemish-style altarpiece, some impressive tile work and stained glass windows by Harry Clarke. The Dublin artist's organic style was influenced by Art Nouveau, Art Deco and Symbolism.

ACTIVITIES

You can fish for trout and salmon in the Rivers Flesk (per day €10) and Laune (per day €25); a state salmon licence (per 21 days €48) is needed. Or you can fish for brown trout for free in Killarney National Park's lakes. Information, permits, licences and hire equipment can be obtained at **O'Neill's** (☎ 31970; 6 Plunkett St), which looks like a gift shop, but is a long-established fishing centre.

Killarney Riding Stables (☎ 31686; Ballydowney; 1-2/3-hr rides €30/50/70) is 1.5km west of the centre on the N72. The well-run complex offers two- and five-day rides through the Iveragh Peninsula for more experienced riders.

Killarney Golf & Fishing Club (☎ 31034; www.killarney-golf.com; Mahony's Point; green fees per person €40-120, club hire €30-40, 3.4km west of town on the N72, has three courses: two alongside Lough Leane, one with artificial lakes, and all with mountain views.



SLEEPING Budget

Some hostels arrange pick-ups from the bus and train stations. Most offer discounted bike hire, horse riding and tours of the Ring of Kerry, the Dingle Peninsula and local attractions. Book ahead during the summer.

Neptune's Killarney Town Hostel (☎ 35255; www.neptuneshostel.com; Bishop's Lane, New St; dm €14-17.50; 📺) Neptune's mixed dorms can sleep over 150, but the central hostel feels much smaller thanks to the roaring fire in reception, free internet access, and the staff's unfailing helpfulness. Continental breakfast (€2.50) is offered in the large kitchen.

Súgán Hostel (☎ 33104; www.killarneysuganhostel.com; Lewis Rd; dm/tw €15/40) Behind its pub-like front, 250-year-old Súgán is an amiably eccentric hostel with a turf fire in the cosy common room and low ceilings with crazy corners. Manager Pa Sugrue confidently offers to reimburse punters if they're not tickled by his storytelling nights at O'Connor's (p252).

Fossa Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 31497; www.camping-holidaysireland.com; Fossa; camp sites €15, hostel €13-17; 📺 Easter-Sep). The better of two parks on the N72 to Killorglin, 5.5km west of Killarney, it has a restaurant, and the location is a relaxing spot with views of the Macgillicuddy's Reeks.

Killarney International Hostel (☎ 31240; anoige@killarney.iol.ie; Aghadoe House, Fossa; dm €16-22, tw €46; 📺) The Headley barons' former residence, built in the 18th century and set in 75 acres of woodland, is surprisingly homely for a 170-bed hostel. Signposted off the N72, 5km west of central Killarney, the An Óige member offers breakfast (€5 to €7), packed

lunch, a laundry room and a free bus to and from town (June to September).

Railway Hostel (☎ 35299; www.killarneyhostel.com; Fair Hill; dm €16-22, s/d €35/50; 📺) This modern hostel near the train station is about as inviting as hostels get, with ensuite bathrooms, bunks nestling in nooks, and maps and cycling itineraries adorning the walls. Prices include a basic breakfast.

Killarney Flesk Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 31704; www.campingkillarney.com; Muckross Rd; camp sites €19; 📺 Easter-Sep) About 1.3km south of town on the N71, the park is surrounded by woods and has great mountain views. Facilities include bike hire, a supermarket, restaurant, bar and café.

Midrange

B&Bs and guesthouses are as thick on the ground in Killarney as jaunting cars. It can be difficult, however, to find a room from June to August, when it's often easiest to let the tourist office find one for you (€4). New Rd, Rock Rd and Muckross Rd (and the roads leading off Muckross Rd) are good places to look.

Rathmore House (☎ 32829; rathmorehouseky@iol.ie; Rock Rd; s/d €50/80; 📺 Mar-Oct; 📺) There's a warm welcome at this long-established B&B, one of a group of family-run establishments at the northern entrance to town. The ensuite rooms and their cherrywood furniture are as cheerful as the owners.

Elyod House (☎ 36544; www.elyodhouse.ie; Ross Rd; s/d €55/72; 📺) This quietly located modern house is on the road to Ross Castle, and a few minutes walk from town. Rooms are fresh and clean, and the welcome is friendly.

Northwood House (☎ 37181; www.northwoodhouse.com; 5 Muckross View; r €64-80) This B&B in a quiet location to the southeast of town, reached along

Countess Rd, has modern rooms with TVs, en suite bathrooms and wonderful views.

Copper Kettle (☎ 34164; Lewis Rd; s/d €70/100; 📺) A grandfather clock in a purpose-built alcove by the entrance sets the tone for this modern B&B, where the comfy rooms have bright wood surrounds. Big breakfasts are served a few metres away at sister guesthouse Fairview.

Fáilte Hotel (☎ 33404; failtehotel@eircom.net; Colledge St; s/d €75/120) Recently refurbished, the Fáilte is not the best value in town, but has a good location, restaurant, and bar, where there's music nightly during the summer. The 15 rooms, particularly number five, are attractively decorated with patchwork quilts, flowers and contemporary canvases.

Top End

Ourpick Fairview (☎ 34164; www.fairviewkillarney.com; Lewis Rd; s/d €80/130; 📺) Alluring touches such as curvy fittings, antique furniture, under-floor heating, Jacuzzi baths and plasma-screen TVs give this guesthouse both comfort and character. The courteous service and the location (walking distance from the centre, but out of the hubbub) are both perfect.

Arbutus Hotel (☎ 31037; www.arbutuskillarney.com; Colledge St; s/d from €80/150; 📺 Feb-Nov) Bedrooms range from those with 1920s Celtic Deco furniture to more modern rooms with black-and-white bathrooms and the bath in a sweeping alcove. Trad sessions fire up in Buckley's Bar on Saturday and Monday nights and Sunday lunchtimes.

The Ross (☎ 31855; www.theross.ie; Kenmare Pl; tw & d €170-225; 📺) This unrepentantly modern, 29-room boutique hotel cheekily uses the pool and spa of its older sibling, the Killarney Park hotel. A chic haven, it features a cocktail bar, a restaurant reached by a glass staircase and purple-lit corridors with thick carpets patterned with huge, pink flowers.

EATING Budget

Jam (☎ 31441; 77 High St; snacks & meals €2-8; 📺 8am-6pm Mon-Sat) This funky little café is a healthy pit stop for hot meals, soups, salads, sandwiches, and coffee and cake.

Cathleen's Country Kitchen (☎ 33778; New St; breakfast & lunch €3.50-11; 📺 9am-5.30pm) The place for a breakfast roll, boiled bacon for lunch and no-nonsense service.

Scaele Eile (☎ 35066; 73 High St; mains €6-11; 📺 9.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) This canteen café, with

Irish literary memorabilia decorating the walls upstairs, energises Killarney's workforce with baguettes, bagels, burgers, lasagna and roasts.

Cronin's (☎ 31521; 9 College St; mains €9-19; 📺 9am-9.30pm) One of a cluster of eateries in this area, this long-established, family-run restaurant is popular for breakfasts with all the trimmings, roasts lathered in gravy, and sweet pies with dollops of cream. As the curvy lamps and mirrors suggest, it goes upmarket at night.

For homemade ice cream and snacks, head to **Mac's of Main Street** (☎ 35213; Main St) and/or **Murphy's Ice Cream** (☎ 066-9152644; Main St).

Dunne's Stores (☎ 35888; New St) has a well-stocked supermarket with a fill-your-own salad and pasta counter, and there's a **Tesco** on the corner of Beech Rd and New St.

Midrange

Most restaurants offer early-bird specials between 6pm and 7pm.

Laurels (☎ 31149; www.thelaurelspub.com; Main St; mains €14-20; 📺 12-3pm & 6-9.30pm) Tasty but pricey pub grub such as burgers and pizzas with inventive toppings. Sit in the bar rather than the restaurant to enjoy a setting that mixes a traditional feel with slick, friendly service. The Guinness is smooth, and champ (potatoes mashed with spring onions) is a house speciality.

Stone Chat (☎ 34295; 8 Flemings Lane; mains €14-23; 📺 12.30-3pm & 6-9pm) This secluded restaurant serves traditional and more cosmopolitan dishes, from Kerry lamb to Moroccan-style monkfish, and chicken wrapped in Parma ham. The great vegetarian selection includes spicy fajitas and a tagliatelle with coconut cream and chilli essence. Try the grilled salmon with crunchy sautéed vegetables.

Treyvaud's (☎ 33062; 62 High St; mains €15-24; 📺 noon-10.30pm Apr-Sep, check times rest of year) Michael Treyvaud's modish restaurant has a strong reputation for subtle dishes that merge trad Irish with seductive European influences, from prime beef meatballs to deep-fried cannelloni filled with butternut squash.

Ourpick Brícin (☎ 34902; 26 High St; mains €18-20; 📺 12.30-3pm & 6-9pm Tue-Sat) Decorated with fittings from a convent, an orphanage and a school, this Celtic Deco restaurant doubles as the town museum, with Jonathan

FOOTBALL CRAZY

Gaelic football clubs are as common in Ireland as green fields and pub signs bearing the 'G' word. However, among Kerry men, the obsession with the sport reaches fever pitch. Forget about soccer or even hurling; this obsession is akin to rugby in New Zealand and soccer in Brazil.

Run by the GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association), the 15-a-side game is played with a heavy leather ball on a rectangular grass pitch with H-shaped, net-backed goals. Teams score through a confusing combination of kicking, carrying, hand-passing and *soloing* (dropping and toe-kicking the ball into the hands). The game, which closely resembles Australian Rules football, dates back to the 16th century, but took its current form in the 19th century.

If you would like to watch some Gaelic football and you're in town during the season (February to September), head to the Fossa GAA Ground on the N72, 1.6km west of the centre. To learn about the game from some lifelong pub commentators, have a drink at the bar-cum-Gaelic football shrine Jimmy O'Brien's (Fair Hill).

Fisher's 18th-century views of the national park taking pride of place. Dishes such as Kerry lamb, salmon stuffed with crab meat and house speciality *boxty* (potato pancake) draw a loyal local crowd.

Top End

Gaby's Seafood Restaurant (☎ 32519; 27 High St; mains €18-50; ☎ 6-10pm Mon-Sat) Dissenters mutter that Gaby's is overpriced and overrated, preferring alternatives such as nearby Foley's, but we found the restaurant to be well-deserving of its awards, which seem to number one for each of its 31 years of slick but warm service. Peruse the menu by the fire before drifting past the wine cellar to the low-lit dining room, where you'll savour exquisite Gallic dishes such as lobster in a secret sauce that includes cognac and cream. There are even a few choices for non-seafood lovers.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Most pubs put on live music, and most nights are lively here – even Mondays, when many of the town's hospitality staff are released to the fun side of the bar. Plunkett and College Sts are lined with pubs.

O'Connor's (☎ 30977; High St) Typically, this tiny pub is one of Killarney's most popular haunts. There's entertainment every night, from trad sessions to stand-up comedy, storytelling and pub theatre.

Killarney Grand (☎ 31159; Main St; music 9pm-2.45am) There's free entry before 11pm to this busy Killarney institution, where trad music gives way to live bands, set dancing on Wednesdays and a nightclub at weekends.

Granary (☎ 20075; Touhills Lane) Hidden down the alley next to the Killarney Grand, this bar-restaurant is one of the coolest hangouts in town, with low lighting, exposed stone walls, and leather sofas. Bands and DJs play at weekends.

McSorley's (☎ 37280; College St) A popular, clubby bar with multicoloured lighting and kilt-clad cover bands.

Gleneagle (☎ 36000; Muckross Rd) You can catch cabaret nightly during the summer, or bop late at O'D's Nightclub on Friday and Saturday nights.

Cinemas

Killarney Cineplex (☎ 37007; Kenmare Pl; adult/child €9/5.50) This four-screener has a good run of contemporary releases.

SHOPPING

Variety Sounds (☎ 35755; 7 College St) An eclectic music shop with a good range of traditional music, instruments, sheet music and learn-to-play books.

Aran Sweater Market (☎ 39756; College St) Aran sweaters galore wrap round you at this well-stocked place.

Killarney Outlet Centre (☎ 36744; Fair Hill) This mall has a number of shops including Lowe Alpine, Nike Factory Store and Blarney Woollen Mills, all selling brand-name clothing and other products at healthy discounts.

O'Sullivan's Outdoor Store (☎ 26927; New St) There's a general selection of activity gear at O'Sullivan's branches.

Bricin (☎ 34902; 26 High St) One of the craft shops offering interesting items such as local craftwork alongside reproduced vintage Guinness advertisements and touristy fare.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Kerry Airport (☎ 066-9764644; www.kerryairport.com) is at Farranfore, about 15km north of Killarney along the N22 and then about 1.5km along the N23. **Aer Arann** (☎ 0818 210210; www.aerarann.com) has daily flights to Dublin, a Manchester service on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and a flight to Lorient, France, on Saturday between June and September. **Ryanair** (☎ 0818 303030; www.ryanair.com) operates a daily flight to London Stansted (twice daily Easter to October), and serves Frankfurt–Hahn on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.

The small airport has a café, bureau de change, an ATM and wi-fi. Car hire agencies with desks at the airport:

Avis (086-2604454; www.avis.ie)

Budget (064-34341; www.budget.ie)

Dooley Car Rentals (062-53103; www.dooleycarrentals.com)

Europcar (087-2383938; www.europcar.com)

Hertz (064-34126; www.hertz.ie)

Irish Car Rentals (086-1700650; www.irishcarrentals.com)

National and Alamo (086-3846193; www.carhire.ie)

Bus

Bus Éireann (☎ 34777, 30011) operates from next to the train station, with regular links to Tralee (€7.50, 35 minutes, hourly); Cork (€14.50, two hours, 15 daily); Dublin (€22, six hours, six daily); Galway (€20.50, seven

hours, seven daily) via Limerick (€15, 2½ hours); Waterford (€20.50, 4½ hours, hourly); and Rosslare Harbour (€24, six to seven hours, three daily).

From June to mid-September, there are daily Ring of Kerry services (see p259).

Train

Killarney's train station (☎ 31067) is on Park Rd, east of the centre. There are up to three direct trains a day to Cork (€22.50, 1½ hours) and nine to Tralee (€8.50, 45 minutes). There are direct trains to Dublin, but you may have to change at Mallow, while Waterford and Limerick require a few changes.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Bus Éireann services between Killarney and the airport run roughly two hourly, every day between June and September. Outside this period, however, there are only one or two daily services, Monday to Saturday. Another option is to catch a bus to Farranfore, 1.5km from the airport.

A private shuttle bus (☎ 36666), geared towards flights from Frankfurt, departs from outside Concoran's (Map p248) at 10.30am and from the airport at noon. Phone ahead to reserve a seat.

A taxi to Killarney costs about €30. The town taxi rank is on College St.

Car

The centre of Killarney can be thick with traffic at times. **Budget** (☎ 34341; Kenmare Pl) is the only car-hire outfit with an office in town; **Avis** (☎ 36655; Beech Rd) has a booth at the tourist office from June to August. Otherwise contact the companies at the airport.

There is a sizeable, free car park next to St Mary's Cathedral. The central car parks cost €1 per hour, 8.30am to 6.30pm Monday to Saturday.

Bicycle

Bicycles are ideal for exploring the scattered sights of the Killarney area, many of which are accessible only by bike or on foot. Several places hire bikes for about €15 per day including pannier bags, tool kit and maps.

O'Sullivan's Bike Hire (☎ 31282) has branches on New Street, opposite the cathedral, and on Beech Rd, opposite the tourist office.

DETOUR: AGHADOE

On a hilltop 5km west of town, Aghadoe's views of Killarney, the lakes and Inisfallen Island have for centuries moved tourists to trek up here. At the eastern end of the meadow, in front of the Aghadoe Heights Hotel, are the ruins of a **Romanesque church** and the 13th-century **Parkavonear Castle**. Parkavonear's keep, still standing, is one of the few cylindrical rather than rectangular keeps built by the Normans in Ireland. Unsurprisingly, its name translates as 'field of the meadow'.

To get there by car from Killarney, turn right off the N72 after the turning for Killarney Riding Stables. Between Monday and Saturday, June to September, four daily buses link Killarney and Aghadoe. Some tours stop there.

Jaunting Car

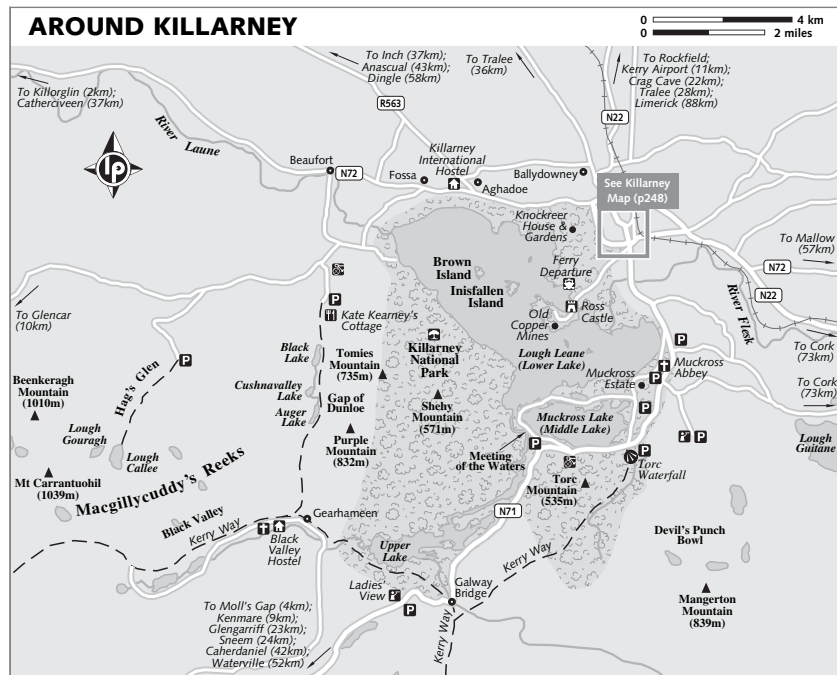
If you're not on two wheels, Killarney's traditional transport is the horse-drawn **jaunting car** (☎ 33358; www.killarneyjauntingcars.com), which comes with a driver known as a *jarvey*. The pick-up point, nicknamed 'the Ha Ha' or 'the Block', is on Kenmare Pl. Trips cost €40 to €70, depending on distance; traps officially carry four people. Jaunting cars also congregate in the N71 car park for Muckross House and Abbey, and at the Gap of Dunloe.

AROUND KILLARNEY

KILLARNEY NATIONAL PARK

Any cynicism built up among Killarney's 'My friend kissed the Blarney Stone and all I got was this lousy T-shirt' stores evaporates when you enter the park. Buses rumble up to Ross Castle and Muckross House, but it's possible to flee the rest of tourist-kind in 10,236 hectares, among Ireland's only wild herd of native Red Deer, the country's largest area of ancient Oakwoods and views of most of its major mountains.

The glacial Lough Leane (the Lower Lake or 'Lake of Learning'), Muckross Lake and the Upper Lake make up about a quarter of the park. Their peaty waters are as rich in wildlife as the surrounding soil: cormorants



skim across the surface, deer swim out to graze on the islands, and salmon, trout and perch prosper in a pike-free environment.

Designated a Unesco Biosphere Reserve in 1982, the park extends to the southwest of town. There are pedestrian entrances opposite St Mary's Cathedral (Map p248), with other entrances (for drivers) off the N71.

Knockreer House & Gardens

Near the St Mary's Cathedral entrance to the park stands Knockreer House, with gardens featuring a terraced lawn and a summerhouse. Built in the 1870s on the advice of Queen Victoria, the original building burned down and the present incarnation dates from 1958. The house isn't open to the public, but the gardens have views across the lakes to the mountains. From the St Mary's Cathedral entrance, follow the path immediately to your right uphill for about 500m.

Ross Castle

Restored by Dúchas, **Ross Castle** (☎ 35851; Ross Rd; adult/child €5.30/2.10; 🕒 9am-6.30pm Jun-Aug, 9.30am-5.30pm Sep-mid-Oct & mid-Mar-May, 9.30am-4.30pm Tue-

Sun & bank holidays mid-Oct-mid-Nov; 📍) dates back to the 15th century, when it was a residence in Munster to succumb to Cromwell's forces, thanks partly to its cunning spiral staircase, in which every step is a different height, in order to break an attacker's stride.

According to a prophecy, the castle would be captured only from the water, so in 1652 the Cromwellian commander, Ludlow, had floating batteries brought to Lough Leane from Castlemaine Harbour along the River Laune. Seeing the prophecy about to be fulfilled, the defenders, having resisted the English siege from the land for months, promptly surrendered.

The castle is a 2.4km walk from the St Mary's Cathedral pedestrian park entrance. If you're driving from Killarney, turn right opposite the Esso garage at the start of Muckross Rd. Access is by guided tour only.

Inisfallen Island

The first monastery on Inisfallen Island (at 22 acres, the largest of the national park's 26 islands) is said to have been founded by St

Finian the Leper in the 7th century. The island's fame dates from the early 13th century when the Annals of Inisfallen were written here. The annals, now in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, England, remain a vital source of information on early Munster history. On Inisfallen (the name means 'island') are the ruins of a 12th-century **oratory** with a carved Romanesque doorway and a **monastery** on the site of St Finian's original.

You can hire boats from Ross Castle to row to the island. Alternatively, boaters charge passengers around €7 each for the crossing. Some Gap of Dunloe boats and bus tours also stop here.

Muckross Estate

The core of Killarney National Park is the Muckross Estate, donated to the state by Arthur Bourn Vincent in 1932. **Muckross House** (☎ 31440; www.muckross-house.ie; adult/child/family €5.50/2.25/13.75, combined ticket with farms €8.25/3.75/21; 🕒 9am-6pm Sep-Jun, to 7pm Jul & Aug; 📍) is a 19th-century mansion, restored to its former glory and packed with contemporaneous fittings. Entrance is by guided tour.

The beautiful gardens sloping down to the lake include a walled garden with ornamental flower beds. A block behind the house contains a restaurant, craft shop and studios where you can see potters, weavers and bookbinders at work. Jaunting cars wait to run you though deer parks and woodland to Torc Waterfall and Muckross Abbey (about €10 each return).

Immediately east of Muckross House are the **Muckross Traditional Farms** (☎ 31440; adult/child/family €5.75/2.35/14.50, combined ticket with Muckross House €8.25/3.75/21; 🕒 10am-6pm Jun-Sep, 1-6pm

May, 1-6pm Sat, Sun & public holidays mid-Mar-Apr & Oct). These reproductions of 1930s Kerry farms, complete with chickens, pigs, cattle and horses, show farming and living conditions before electricity was available.

Muckross House is 5km south of town, signposted from the N71. During the summer, O'Connor's Tours (below) operates a tourist bus, leaving for the house at 1.45pm and returning at 5.15pm (return €10). The house is included in some half-day tours of Killarney, and it would be possible to work it into a circuit of the park and the Gap of Dunloe.

If you're walking or cycling to Muckross, there's a cycle track alongside the Kenmare road for most of the first 2km. A path then turns right into Killarney National Park. Following this path, after 1km you'll come to **Muckross Abbey**, which was founded in 1448 and burned by Cromwell's troops in 1652. William Thackeray called it 'the prettiest little bijou of a ruined abbey ever seen'. Muckross House is another 1.5km from the abbey ruins.

If you're cycling around Muckross lake, it's easier and more scenic to go in an anti-clockwise direction. Given that most people choose this direction, this also lessens the chance of collisions between cyclists speeding in opposite directions.

Gap of Dunloe

Geographically, the Gap of Dunloe is outside the Killarney National Park, but most people include it in their visit to the park. In the winter, it's an awe-inspiring mountain pass, overshadowed by Purple Mountain and Macgillycuddy's Reeks. In high summer, it's a bottleneck for the tourist trade, with buses

MUNROS AND HEWITTS

Macgillycuddy's Reeks is the name of the magnificent group of mountains to the southwest of Killarney, concentrated to the west of the Gap of Dunloe. The name Macgillycuddy derives from the ancient Mac Gilla Muchudas clan; *reek* means pointed hill. In Gaeltacht they're known as Na Crucha Dubha (the black tops).

The red sandstone mountains were carved by minor glaciers into elegant forms, such as Carrantuohil's curved outline – referred to in its name, which translates as 'reversed reaping hook'. The mountains are studded with awesome cliffs, the summits are buttressed by ridges of purplish rock and the cupped valleys between are filled with glittering lakes.

The Reeks are Ireland's highest mountain range, featuring nine of its 12 *munros* (a Scottish term meaning a mountain over 900m). These include the country's seven highest peaks, towering alongside roughly half of Ireland's 211 *hewitts* (hills in England, Wales and Ireland that are over 2000 feet, or 610m).

depositing countless visitors at Kate Kearney's Cottage for the one-hour horse-and-trap ride through the Gap.

The best way to see the Gap is to hire a bike from Killarney (p253) and cycle to Ross Castle. Get there before 11am to catch a boat up the lakes to Lord Brandon's Cottage, then cycle through the Gap and back to town via the N72 and a path through the golf course (for bike hire and boat trip, about €30).

The 1½-hour boat ride alone justifies the trip. It crosses all the lakes, passing islands and bridges and winding between the second two lakes via Meeting of the Waters and the Long Range. The proprietor of Bricín restaurant, which is named after the bridge on the Muckross Peninsula, enthuses, 'Get out on an open boat and you'll feel like Robinson Crusoe'.

On land, walking, pony or four-person trap can be substituted for cycling. The Gap pony men charge €50 per hour or €80 for the two-hour trip between Lord Brandon's Cottage and Kate Kearney's Cottage.

Among the tour companies offering the circuit, **O'Connor's Tours** (☎ 30200; www.gapof.dunloetours.com; High St) and **O'Donoghue Brothers Boating Tours** (☎ 31068; www.killarneydaytour.com; Muckross Rd) specialise in tours to the Gap and the national park.

Lunch, afternoon tea and dinner are available at the 19th-century pub **Kate Kearney's Cottage** (☎ 44146; lunch €10.50-13), a preferable pit stop to **Lord Brandon's Cottage** (snacks €6.50), an ugly snack bar redeemed only by its views down Upper Lake.

In winter it's possible to drive through the gap, but access is restricted during the summer.

WALKING

There are numerous low-level walking opportunities around Killarney, such as the four-hour circuit of Muckross Lake. The Killarney tourist office and local bookshops stock trekking guides, and the map (Ordnance Survey Map Discovery Series No 78) needed to tackle Carrantuohil (1039m), Ireland's highest peak, and the other mountains.

Ascending Macgillycuddy's Reeks and their neighbours (Purple, Tomies and Shehy mountains, between the Gap of Dunloe and Lough Leane, and Torc and Mangerton mountains, southeast of Muckross Lake) should never be attempted without having the skills to use a map and compass. Weatherproof and water-

proof footwear and clothing are essential at all times of the year. Seek advice locally before attempting mountain walks.

There are several ways up Carrantuohil. Some require reasonable hill-walking ability; others are serious scrambling or rock-climbing routes. You can get a taste of the Reeks at close quarters by walking up Hag's Glen, the beautiful approach valley that leads to the lakes of Callee and Gouragh below the north face of Carrantuohil.

The best approach is from **Cronin's Yard** (☎ 34963; www.croninsyard.com; Mealis), where there's a tearoom, showers and toilets, a public telephone, and packed lunches available on request. It's at the road's end (OS ref 836873), reached from the N72 via Beaufort, west of Killarney. You may be asked to pay a small fee for using the car park. From there, the way lies alongside the Gaddagh River, which you need to ford in places; great care is required if it's in flood. It's just over 3km to the lakes.

The popular, but hair-raising, way to the summit of Carrantuohil from the lakes is via **Devil's Ladder**, a gruelling trudge up a badly eroded gully path, southwest of the lakes. The ground is loose in places, and in wet conditions the way becomes muddy. This takes six hours return from Cronin's Yard.

ORGANISED TOURS

Guided two-hour **national park walks** (☎ 33471, 087-639 4362; www.killarneyguidedwalks.com; adult/child €9/4.50) leave at 11am daily from outside O'Sullivan's at the western end of New Street. Guide Richard Clancy, fresh from his post round, and his Irish red setter Rua, meander through Knockreer gardens, then to spots where Charles de Gaulle holidayed, David Lean filmed *Ryan's Daughter* and Brother Cudda slept for 200 years. Trips are available at other times on request.

A number of Killarney companies run daily day trips by bus around the Ring of Kerry (€25), the Gap of Dunloe (p255) and Dingle Peninsula (€25). Tours run from 10.30am until around 5.30pm. Half-day tours (€17), taking in Aghadoe, Ross Castle, Muckross House and Torc Waterfall also operate daily, as do bike tours and lake cruises. Tour operators include **Dero's Tours** (☎ 31251; www.derostours.com; Main St), **Corcoran's** (☎ 36666; 8 College St) and **O'Connor Autotours** (☎ 34833; Ross Rd). However, unless you're really pushed for

time, the tours can be too rushed to do the scenery justice.

Destination Killarney (☎ 32638; East Avenue Rd) and **Killarney Watercoach Cruises** (☎ 31068) operate hour-long lake cruises with commentary (adult/child €8/4). During the summer, they leave from Ross Castle on a roughly hourly basis – check at the tourist office (p249) for departure times.

The **open boats** (☎ 087-6899241) nearby offer more appealing trips for higher prices. While up to 10 boats (seating 12 people) work the lakes in the summer, you'll be lucky to meet a boatman during the winter.

KILLARNEY TO KENMARE

The N71 to Kenmare winds between rock and lake, with plenty of laybys to stop and admire the views. Watch out for the buses squeezing along the road. About 2km south of the entrance to Muckcross House, a path leads 200m to the pretty **Torc Waterfall**. After another 8km on the N71 you come to **Ladies' View**, where the fine views along Upper Lake were much enjoyed by Queen Victoria's ladies-in-waiting, who gave the viewpoint its name. There are cafés here and 5km further on at **Moll's Gap**, another good viewpoint.

WALK: REEKS RIDGE

Experienced walkers with confidence over steep ground could consider the longest and most sustained ridge walk in Ireland, a seven-hour, 13km trek with wide-ranging views. The demanding trek scales six 900m-plus peaks – including Knocknapeasta and Maolán Bui, Ireland's fourth- and fifth-highest summits – with a total ascent of 1050m.

The exposed walk should be avoided in windy conditions. In poor weather, or when there is a chance of encountering snow and ice, it is a serious undertaking. An ice axe, and perhaps other mountaineering equipment, should be carried; only those with winter mountaineering experience should attempt it.

From Cronin's Yard, pass through a gate on the right of the yard. Skirt a field on a grass track, cross a stile and follow the stony track that climbs gently above the Gaddagh River. Leave the track where it crosses a tributary of the Gaddagh and head southeast across open ground, climbing the increasingly steep slopes towards the conspicuous summit of **Cruach Mór** (932m). Aim slightly east of the summit to find easier ground. The top, marked by a stone grotto, has impressive views south across the Iveragh Peninsula (1½ to two hours from the start).

However, your attention is likely to be drawn by the rock ridge running south towards the **Big Gun** (939m). Huge blocks of rock (gendarmes) adorn the crest of the ridge, making it initially difficult to keep to the top. Follow informal paths below and to the west of the ridge, being careful not to lose too much height. Scramble back up to the ridge at a notch, then climb – with care – directly along the exciting rocky arête to reach the Big Gun. The ridge now swings southwest towards Knocknapeasta. Stick to the crest as you descend to a col, but where the ridge becomes difficult again you can drop south (left) of the arête before rejoining it just beneath the summit of **Knocknapeasta** (988m; one hour from Cruach Mór).

The views from the highest point on the walk are tremendous, taking in Ireland's three highest summits to the west and, to the east, the serrated ridge you have traversed. To the north, wild cliffs fall away into the dark waters of Lough Cummeenapeasta, with the patchwork fields of north Kerry beyond. To the south, the mountain falls away to Black Valley, and ridge after ridge of mountains extend towards the Atlantic.

Head south from Knocknapeasta along a broad, stony ridge, then bear southwest as you drop to a col and climb a short distance to the summit of **Maolán Bui** (973m). Cross an unnamed top at 926m to reach **Cnoc an Chuillin** (958m), the last major peak on the ridge. Now descend to a col and climb onto another unnamed summit. It is best to descend directly into Hags Glen from here, keeping to the west of steep ground, though some walkers brave Devil's Ladder (opposite) further to the west. Once in Hags Glen, follow the stony track for 4km to the finish (one to 1½ hours).

An alternative route (eight to 10 hours, 15km, 1450m ascent) for very fit walkers extends the route west across Ireland's two highest peaks – Carrantuohil (1039m) and Beenkeragh (1010m) – before descending to Hags Glen.

RING OF KERRY

This 179km circuit of the Iveragh Peninsula pops up on every self-respecting tourist itinerary for a good reason. The secondary road winds past pristine beaches, the island-dotted Atlantic, medieval ruins, mountains, and loughs (lakes). Even locals stop their cars to gawk at the rugged coastline – particularly between Waterville and Caherdaniel in the southwest of the peninsula, where the beauty dial is turned up to 11.

Although it can be ‘done’ in a day by car or bus, or three days by bicycle, the

more time you take, the more you’ll enjoy it. Tour buses travel the Ring in an anti-clockwise direction. Getting stuck behind one is tedious, but driving in the opposite direction and meeting one on a blind corner is hair-raising. A good place to escape both scenarios is the tip of the peninsula, where the sleepy Skellig Ring is too narrow for coaches.

There’s also little traffic on the Ballaghbeama Gap, which cuts across the peninsula’s central highlands with some spectacular views: it’s perfect for a long cycle, as is the longer Ballaghishheen Pass to Waterville. The 214km Kerry Way (p699) starts and ends in Killarney.

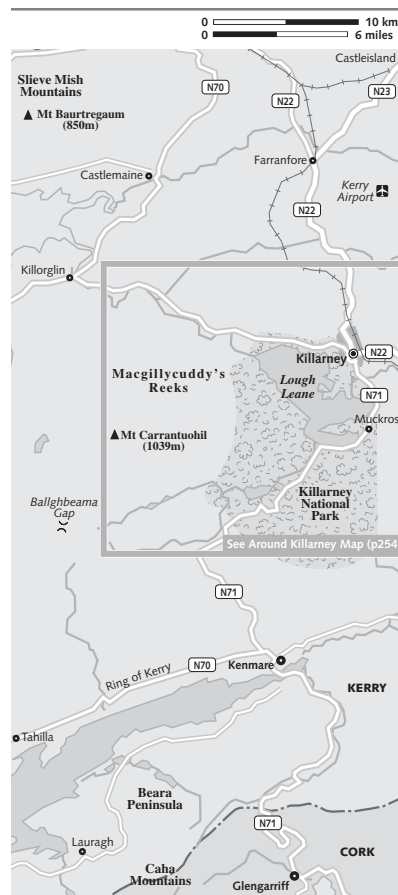
RING OF KERRY



GETTING AROUND

From June to mid-September, Bus Éireann operates a daily Ring of Kerry service (bus 280), leaving Killarney at 1.15pm and returning at 5.40pm. Stops include Killorglin, Glenbeigh, Caherciveen, Waterville, Caherdaniel and Molls Gap. From Monday to Saturday during the same period, bus 279 links Killarney with Waterville and Caherciveen via stops including Killorglin. Services leave Killarney at 9.50am and 3pm, Waterville at 7.30am, and Caherciveen at 12.15pm. For details, ring **Killarney bus station** (☎ 064-30011).

A number of Killarney tour companies also run daily day trips by bus around the Ring of Kerry (€25).



KILLORGLIN

☎ 066 / pop 3870

Travelling anticlockwise from Killarney, the first town on the Ring is Killorglin (Cill Orglan). The town is quieter than the waters of the River Laune that lap against the eight-arched bridge, built in 1885. In August, there’s an explosion of time-honoured ceremonies and libations at the famous pagan festival, the Puck Fair. A handsome statue of King Puck (yes, he’s a goat) can be seen on the Killarney side of the river. Author Blake Morrison documents his mother’s childhood here in *Things My Mother Never Told Me*.

There is a helpful **tourist office** (☎ 976 1451; Library Pl; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) with maps, walking guides, pottery and souvenirs for sale, and free internet access at the **library** (☎ 976 1272; Library Pl; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat). For taxis call **Laune Cabs** (☎ 1800-223 223).

Festivals

The lively **Puck Fair Festival** (Aonach an Phuic; ☎ 976 2366; www.puckfair.ie) takes place 10-12 August. First recorded in 1603, its origins are hazy. It is based around the custom of installing a billy goat (a poc, or puck), the symbol of mountainous Kerry, on a pedestal in the town, its horns festooned with ribbons. Other entertainment ranges from the horse fair and bonny baby competition to street theatre and the pubs staying open until 3am. Accommodation is hard to find if you have not booked in advance.

TOP FIVE KERRY ADVENTURES

- Climb **Mt Carrantuohil** (p256) or **Mt Brandon** (p292), but dress correctly and know how to use a map and compass.
- Try both your hands at rock climbing and canoeing at **Caherdaniel** (p265).
- Pack the seasickness pills and head for the **Skellig Islands** (p262). Who needs Himalayan trekking trips?
- Go horse riding along the western shores and beaches of the **Iveragh Peninsula** (opposite).
- Visit the **Blaskets** (p294). Not as testing as the trip to the Skelligs, but a ticket to a timeless island landscape in its own right.

Sleeping

West's Holiday Park (☎ 976 1240; enquiries@westcaravans.com; Killarney Rd; camp sites €18; ☹ Apr-Oct) This small site has views of Carrantuohil across tree-lined fields. On the N72, just under 2km east of the bridge, it has a tennis court and the owners can advise walkers and fishers.

Coffey's River's Edge (☎ 976 1750; www.coffeysriversedge.com; the Bridge; s/d €50/100; (P)) An unbeatable location right by the bridge over the River Laune on the village side makes this an attractive stop. Rooms are smart and bright.

Eating & Drinking

At the supermarket on the Square, Upper Bridge St, you'll find a help-yourself deli counter.

our pick Sol Y Sombra (☎ 976 2347; Lower Bridge St; dishes €5-13; ☹ Wed-Mon Jun-Aug, Wed-Sun Sep-Jan & Mar-May, closed Feb) This tapas bar, in a beautifully renovated church, transports you to Mediterranean soil with its tapas and larger raciones dishes (for sharing), such as grilled squid, marinated anchovy fillets and pan-fried oyster mushrooms. There are 40 Spanish wines to choose from. Bands play at weekends, with occasional flamenco dancing.

Bunkers Bar & Coffee Shop (☎ 976 1381; Iveragh Rd; mains €7-19; ☹ 9am-10pm) This pub/restaurant pays no dues to smart décor, but offers a good choice of grub from steak to chicken Kiev. Breakfast is about €6.50.

Dev's 'N The Square (the Square; €17-25; ☹ 9am-3pm & 6-10pm) Unpretentious Dev's offers hefty duckling, steak and lamb dishes, accompanied by jacket potatoes with garlic butter. Try the grilled Atlantic salmon with lemon-and-herb couscous.

Nick's Seafood Restaurant (☎ 976 1219; info@nicks.ie; Lower Bridge St; mains €20-38; ☹ 6.30-9.30pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, Wed-Sun Oct-Mar) French-Irish flair makes this fine restaurant an enduring favourite. Dishes such as moules and shellfish mornay get the first-class preparation they deserve; or choose the best Kerry beef and lamb or great vegetarian dishes. The extensive wine list features a seductive house wine.

Pubs include the old and spacious **Clifford's Tavern** (Upper Bridge St), which fills up on Friday and Saturday nights when there are trad sessions. There are Thursday sessions at the **Laune Bar** (Lower Bridge St) on the corner above the bridge.

KERRY BOG VILLAGE MUSEUM

On the N70 between Killorglin and Glenbeigh, the **Kerry Bog Village Museum** (☎ 976 9184; adult/child/family €4.50/4/15; ☹ 9am-7pm Easter-Oct, 9am-6pm rest of year) re-creates a 19th-century bog village, typical of the small communities that carved out a precarious living in the harsh environment of Ireland's ubiquitous peat bogs. There are re-creations of the homes of the turfcutter, blacksmith, thatcher and labourer, and a dairy. Some Kerry Bog ponies are in a field behind the museum.

Next to the museum, the **Red Fox** (☎ 976 9288; Glenbeigh; meals €7-12) serves reasonable nosh between Easter and October, but outside that time the menu is limited to corned beef sandwiches.

ROSBEIGH STRAND

This unusual **beach**, 1.6km west of Glenbeigh, is a tendril of sand protruding into Dingle Bay, with views of Inch Point and the Dingle Peninsula. On one side the sea is ruffled by Atlantic winds; on the other it's sheltered and calm.

Burke's Activity Centre (☎ 976 8872; Rosbeigh) offers horse trekking, crazy golf, a hedge maze and a working farm.

CAHERCIVEEN

☎ 066 / pop 1300

Caherciveen's population, which was over 30,000 in 1841, was desecrated by the Great Famine and emigration to the New World. A sleepy outpost remains, overshadowed by the 688m peak of Knocknadobar. It looks rather dour compared with the peninsula's other settlements, but has a handful of sights and some good accommodation.

Information

Caherciveen has a post office and two banks, both with ATMs. The Allied Irish Bank (AIB) has a bureau de change.

Internet Café (☎ 948 1885; 12 Main St; per 30min/1hr €3/5; ☹ 9am-9pm Jun-Aug, 11am-7pm rest of year)

Tourist office (☎ 947 2589; Community Centre; ☹ Apr-Oct) Opens sporadically. The Old Barracks Heritage Centre also has information.

Sights

O'CONNELL'S BIRTHPLACE

The ruined cottage on the eastern bank of the Carhan River, on the left as you cross

the bridge en route from Kells, is the humble birthplace of Daniel O'Connell, 'The Great Liberator' (see p37). On the opposite bank is an amenity area with a handsome bust of the great Catholic leader. There are paths along the river, with boards explaining the area's wildlife.

BARRACKS

The Old Barracks Heritage Centre (☎ 947 2777; off Main St; adult/child €4/2; ☹ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Mar-May & Oct-Dec, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun Jun-Sep) is housed in a tower of the former Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) barracks. Legend has it that, when the building was reconstructed after anti-Treaty forces burnt it down in 1922, the plans got mixed up with those intended for a barracks in India. There's a definite Northwest Frontier look.

Topped by a spiral staircase ascending to a lookout with underwhelming windows, the museum covers subjects of local and national interest, such as the Fenian Rising, Daniel O'Connell and Caherciveen's other great son, Gaelic football star Jack O'Shea. There are re-creations of a local dwelling at the time of the famine and of the barracks during the 1916 Easter Rising.

BALLYCARBERY CASTLE & RING FORTS

The ruins of Ballycarbery Castle are 2.4km along the road to White Strand Beach from the barracks. The 16th-century castle was inhabited by the McCarthy More chieftains and, later, Sir Valentine Brown, surveyor general of Ireland under Elizabeth I.

Along the same road are two stone ring forts. Cahergall, the larger one, dates from the 10th century and has stairways on the inside walls, a *clochan* (beehive hut), and the remains of a house. The smaller, 9th-century Leacanabuile has the entrance to an underground passage. Their inner walls and chambers give a strong sense of what life was like in a ring fort. If driving, leave your car in the parking area next to a stone wall and walk up the footpaths.

Activities

Local **walks** include the 5½ hour Killelan Mountain circuit, and the less strenuous foreshore walk to the castle and ring forts.

From June to September, a two-hour **guided walk** (☎ 947 3186; adult/child €7/4) to archaeological and historic sites leaves from

the UN Bar, opposite the post office, at 11am every morning.

Boat trips (☎ 947 3186; €15; ☹ Jun-Sep) on the Valentia River are run by the walk organiser each afternoon.

Festivals

Celtic music is a major component of the **Caherciveen Festival of Music & the Arts** (☎ 947 3772; www.celticmusicfestival.com), which takes place over the bank holiday weekend at the beginning of August and features cover bands, busking competitions and set dancing.

Sleeping

Sive Hostel (☎ 947 2717; sivehostel.ie; 15 East End; dm/d €16/44) There is a faint hospital whiff about the pink sheets in this IHH property's small dorms, but the comfortable TV lounge is a winner.

Mannix Point Camping & Caravan Park (☎ 947 2806; www.campinginkerry.com; Mannix Point; camp sites €19; ☹ Mar-Oct) Mortimer Moriarty's award-winning coastal site has radio piped into the bathrooms, a lounge and music room, an inviting kitchen with gas stoves, a barbecue area, and even a bird-watching platform.

O'Shea's B&B (☎ 947 2402; www.osheasbnb.com; Church St; s/d €37/64; (P)) Four en-suite rooms in a comfortable family house with views of the castle and barracks. A good source of local information, the O'Sheas organise walking and boat trips.

Sea Breeze (☎ 947 2609; seabreezebandb@eircom.net; Reenard Rd; s/d €45/70) This gleaming B&B has a conservatory gazing across the harbour at the castle and Doulus Head. It is 500m southwest of town en route to Reenard Point.

Eating

Helen's Coffee Shop (☎ 947 2056; Main St; snacks €4-6) Helen's is a cheerful gem of a place serving a range of coffees as well as various tasty soups and sandwiches, homemade cakes and confectionery.

Amarantine (☎ 947 3499; 14 Church St; meals & snacks €4-11) This nondescript café-wine bar has a good name locally for its ciabattas, salads, pastries and mains.

Fertha (☎ 947 2023; 20 Main St; bar food €7-12) This is a spacious pub offering a range of steady dishes including roasts and poached salmon.

Entertainment

Trad sessions can be found in An Bonnán Buí, the Anchor, and among the fishing tackle in Mike Murts.

VALENTIA ISLAND

☎ 066 / pop 715

Crowned by Geokaun Mountain, 11km-long Valentia Island (Oileán Dairbhre) is an altogether homier isle than the brooding Skelligs to the southwest. Its hills and fields roll in harmony with those of the mainland, to which it's connected by ferry and bridge. Like the Skellig Ring that it leads to, it's a worthwhile, coach-free detour from the Ring of Kerry. A bracing walk takes in Geokaun Mountain and Fogher Cliff.

Valentia was chosen as the site for the first transatlantic telegraph cable. When the connection was made in 1858, it put Caherciveen in direct contact with New York, although it had no connection with Dublin. The link worked for 27 days before failing, but went back into action years later. The telegraph station operated until 1966.

Portmagee (population 376), overlooking the south side of the island from the mainland, consists of a line of attractive, colourful houses on a single street. On summer mornings, its small pier comes to life with boats embarking on the choppy crossing to the Skellig Islands (right).

Sights & Activities

Immediately across the bridge from Portmagee is an interesting building with turf-covered barrel roofs, a not-entirely-successful re-creation of bygone vernacular buildings. The **Skellig Experience** (☎ 947 6306; adult/child/family €5/3/14; ☒ 10am-7pm Jun-Aug, to 6pm Apr, May & Sep-Nov, last admission 45 min before closing) contains exhibitions on the life and times of the Skellig Michael monks, the history of the island's lighthouses, and the wildlife. If you're planning a trip to the Skelligs, it's worth coming here for background information; if the weather's bad, it may be the closest you get to the islands. Island and harbour cruises are also on offer.

Portmagee holds **set-dancing workshops** (☎ 947 7108) over the May bank holiday weekend, featuring plenty of stomping practice sessions in the town's Bridge Bar.

Sleeping

Spring Acre (☎ 947 6141; rforan@indigo.ie; Knightstown; s/d €35/70) The most remarkable thing about this bungalow overlooking the Valentia Island ferry terminal – and owned by the ferry operator – is its view across the harbour to Killelan Mountain. But if you want to stay on the island, it's in a handy location: near pubs, restaurants, walks and the pier where boats leave from for the Skellig Islands.

The Moorings (☎ 947 7108; www.moorings.ie; Portmagee; s €55-90, d €80-130, tr €120-190, f €100-245) A friendly local gathering point, with 16 rooms split between muted modern choices and more traditional, earthier options. The nautical-themed restaurant (meals €20 to €37) specialises in seafood. There is live music and Irish dancing in the cosy Bridge Bar on Tuesdays in July and August and a Skelligs package available including B&B and trips.

Getting There & Away

Most visitors reach Valentia Island via the bridge from Portmagee. From April to October, there is a **ferry service** (☎ 947 6141) to Knightstown on Valentia Island from Reenard Point, 5km southwest of Caherciveen. The five-minute crossing costs one way/return €5/8 for a car, €2/3 for a cyclist and €1.50/2 for a pedestrian. It operates between 8.15am (9am Sunday) and 10pm.

SKELLIG ISLANDS

gannet pop 45,000

The Skellig Islands (Oileáin na Scealaga) explode out of the Atlantic Ocean with a defiance to match the empty-eyed gannets perching on their barren rocks. They measure up to any of the attractions offered by yellow-bellied landlubbers on the mainland, but you'll need to do your best grisly sea-dog impression on the 12km crossing, which can be rough. There are no toilets or shelter on Skellig Michael, the only island visitors are permitted to land on. Bring something to eat and drink and wear stout shoes and weatherproof clothing, including a waterproof jacket for the wave-spattered boat trip. (The boat operators can also often lend passengers old waterproof jackets and trousers for the crossing.)

Activities

The Skelligs are a **bird-watching** paradise. Keep a sharp lookout during the boat trip and you may spot diminutive storm petrels

(also known as Mother Carey's chickens) darting above the water like swallows. Gannets are unmistakable with their savage beaks, imperious eyes, yellow caps and 100cm-plus wing spans. They dive like tridents into the sea, from up to 30m at well over 100km per hour, to snatch fish below the surface. Kittiwakes – small, dainty seabirds with black-tipped wings – are easy to see and hear around Skellig Michael's covered walkway as you step off the boat. They winter at sea then land in their thousands to breed between March and August. Further up the rock you'll see stubby-winged fulmars, with distinctive bony 'nostrils' from which they eject an evil-smelling green liquid if you get too close. Look also for razor-bills, black-and-white guillemots, and the delightful puffins with their multicoloured beaks and waddling gait. In May, puffins come ashore to lay a solitary egg at the far end of a burrow, and parent birds can be seen guarding their nests. Puffins stay only until the first weeks of August.

Skellig Michael

The jagged, 217m-high rock of **Skellig Michael** (Archangel Michael's Rock; like St Michael's Mount in Cornwall, England and Mont Saint Michel in Normandy, France) is the larger of the two islands and a Unesco World Heritage site. It looks like the last place on earth that anyone would try to land, let alone establish a community, yet early Christian monks survived here from the 6th until the 12th or 13th century. Influenced by the Coptic Church founded by St Anthony in the deserts of Egypt and Libya, their determined quest for ultimate solitude led them to this remote, windblown edge of Europe.

SCARY SKELLIG

A notice on the island warns of 'an element of danger' in visiting Skellig Michael. It can certainly be an adventurous and sometimes tough trip: not a joyful experience for seasickness sufferers on rock-and-roll days. You also need to be sure-footed on the rocks and stone steps. One boat operator comments, 'On a lot of occasions, I say, "If anyone is of a nervous disposition, do not come". Having said that, it's normally okay.'

The monastic buildings are perched on a saddle in the rock, some 150m above sea level, reached by 600 steep steps cut into the rock face. The astounding 6th-century oratories and beehive cells vary in size; the largest cell has a floor space of 4.5m by 3.6m. You can see the monks' south-facing vegetable garden and their cistern for collecting rain water. The most impressive structural achievements are the settlement's foundations – platforms built on the steep slope using nothing more than earth and dry stone walls.

Little is known about the life of the monastery, but there are records of Viking raids in AD 812 and 823. Monks were kidnapped or killed, but the community recovered and carried on. Legend even has it that the monks converted one of the raiders, Olaf Tryggvesson, and he became Norway's first Christian ruler. In the 11th century a rectangular oratory was added to the site, but although it was expanded in the 12th century, the monks abandoned the rock around this time, perhaps because of particularly ferocious Atlantic storms.

After the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in 1582, Skellig Michael became a popular spot for weddings. Marriages were forbidden during Lent, but since Skellig used the old Julian calendar, a trip to the islands allowed those unable to wait for Easter to tie the knot.

In the 1820s two lighthouses were built on Skellig Michael, together with the road that runs around the base.

The guides on the island ask you to do your picnicking on the way up to the monastery, or at Christ's Saddle just before the last flight of steps, rather than among the ruins. This is to keep sandwich-loving birds and their droppings away from the monument.

Small Skellig

While Skellig Michael looks like two triangles linked by a spur, Small Skellig is longer, lower and much craggier. From a distance it looks as if someone battered it with a feather pillow that burst. Close up you realise you're looking at a colony of over 20,000 pairs of breeding gannets, the second-largest breeding colony in the world. Most boats circle the island so you can see the gannets, and there may be a chance of seeing basking seals. As Small Skellig is a bird sanctuary, no landing is permitted.

Getting There & Away

Because of concerns for the fragility of Skellig Michael there are limits on how many people can visit on the same day. There are 15 boats licensed to carry no more than 12 passengers each, so there should never be more than 180 people there at any one time. Because of these limits, it's wise to book ahead in July and August, bearing in mind that if the weather's bad the boats may not sail. Trips usually start running around Easter, but high seas and bad weather can put them off until May.

Boats leave around 10am and return at 3pm. You can depart from Portmagee (and even Caherciveen), Ballinskelligs or Derrynane. The boat owners try to restrict you to two hours on the island, which is the bare minimum, on a good day, to see the monastery, look at the birds and have a picnic. Check that your boat does actually land on Skellig Michael. The crossing takes about 1½ hours from Portmagee, one hour from Ballinskelligs and 1¼ hours from Derrynane (around €40 return from all places).

Local pubs and B&Bs will point you in the direction of operators, including:

Casey's (☎ 947 2437; Caherciveen)

Des Lavelle (☎ 947 6124; Portmagee)

Eoin Walsh (☎ 947 6327; Valentia Island)

John O'Shea (☎ 087-670 5121; Caherdaniel)

Sea Quest (☎ 947 6214; Reenard Point)

Skellig Cruise (☎ 947 9182; Ballinskelligs)

SKELLIG RING

This 18km detour from the Ring of Kerry links Portmagee and Waterville via a Gaeltacht (Gaelic-speaking) area centred on Ballinskelligs (Baile an Sceilg). Ballinskelligs' name translates as 'town of the crag', which may elicit sniggers from fans of Father Ted and his Craggy Island pals. The area is as wild and beautiful as anything on Ted's fictional isle, with the ragged outline of Skellig Michael never far from view.

Tourist information is available at Café Coistrá (see right).

Sights

SIOPA CHILL RIALAIG

This contemporary **art gallery** (☎ 947 9297; cillrialraig@easatclear.ie; Dun Geagan; ☞ 10am-7pm Jul-Aug, 11am-5pm rest of year) is packed with work by local artists and talent from around Ireland and the world. It is the shop window of the Cill Rialaig Project, which provides a retreat

for creative people on the site of a village abandoned during the famine. Free accommodation and studio space are available to artists, who are invited to donate work to the gallery at the end of their stay. Standards are high and the attractive space houses as fine a collection of pieces as you'd find in a top Dublin gallery.

The gallery is by the R566 at the north-eastern end of Ballinskelligs. You'll spot its circular, thatched roofs and the sculpture that resembles a hallucinogenic mushroom. There is a café inside.

BALLINSKELLIGS PRIORY & BAY

The sea and salty air are eating away at the atmospheric ruins of this medieval building, a monastic settlement that was probably associated with the Skellig Michaels monks after they left their rocky outpost in the 12th century. To reach it, follow the sign to the pier at the western end of town and you will see it on the left.

Another sign points to the fine little Blue Flag **beach**. At the western end of the beach are the last remnants of the 16th-century **castle** stronghold of the McCarthys, built on the isthmus as a defence against pirates.

Activities

St Finian's Bay is good for surfing. **Ballinskelligs Water Sports** (☎ 086-389 4849) hires out surfboards, kayaks and windsurfers, and gives lessons. **Sean Feehan** (☎ 947 9182) offers fishing, diving and boat trips to the Skelligs.

Sleeping & Eating

Skellig Hostel (☎ 947 9942; www.skellighostel.com; Ballinskelligs; dm €14.50, s & tw €36, d €44-48, f €60; (P) (♿)) This modern building is a little characterless, but the rooms, lounge and dining room are comfortable, and it's in an elevated position with sea views.

Ballinskelligs Inn (Cable O'Leary's; ☎ 947 9106; www.ballinskelligsinn.com; s/d €40/80; lunch €9, dinner €12-20; (P)) A classic rural establishment: the conversation is in Gaelic and the hot water is shy, though the rooms are comfortable. Food is not its strong point, but there is some interesting history; ask about Cable O'Leary.

Café Coistrá (☎ 947 9323; ☞ 9am-6pm) At the car park for Ballinskelligs strand, this beach-hut café and craft shop is a great place for a coffee and a nose through the old local photos.

WATERVILLE

☎ 066 / pop 550

A line of colourful houses strung between Lough Currane and Ballinskelligs Bay, Waterville lacks its neighbour Caherdaniel's charm. However, the breezy beach resort has attracted famous admirers such as Charlie Chaplin, who stayed at the Butler Arms Hotel and is commemorated in an uncannily lifelike statue. Locals also hope the new Skellig Bay Golf Club will give the town a boost.

There is tourist information and a bureau de change at **Waterville Craft Market** (☎ 947 4212; ☞ 9am-9pm Jun-Aug, 10am-6pm Sep-May).

Sights

At the north end of Lough Currane, **Church Island** has the ruins of a medieval church and beehive cell. Reputedly founded as a monastic settlement by St Finian in the 6th century, it is a good alternative to the Skelligs in choppy weather.

Chartering a three-man boat costs €40 to €50; contact Lakelands B&B (see below).

Activities

Waterville Golf Links (☎ 947 4102) charges a hefty €165 per round, or €115 before 8am and after 4pm Mondays to Thursdays; but it is one of the most stunning links courses in the world and attracts serious golfers from all over. A cheaper alternative is the **Skellig Bay Golf Club** (☎ 947 4133; Mon-Fri €60, Sat & Sun €70).

There is free **fishing** for sea trout on Lough Currane and the other lakes; a state licence is required. Sea angling offers the chance of catching mackerel, pollack and shark. **Tadhg O'Sullivan tackle shop** (☎ 947 4433; Main St) has information.

Sleeping & Eating

O'Dwyer's (☎ 947 4248; Main St; s €30, d & tw €60) A central budget option, above a bar/restaurant, with small en-suite bathrooms, and small beds in the doubles.

Clifford's B&B (☎ 947 4283; cliffordbandb@eircom.net; Main St; s/d €35/60; ☞ Mar-Oct; (P)) Excellent-value, comfortable house with clear views of the sea from the front upstairs rooms.

Lakelands (☎ 947 4303; www.lakelandshouse.com; Lake Rd; s/d €75/96) A farmhouse B&B offering fishing. The attractive modern building has sweeping views of Lough Currane, and some rooms have Jacuzzis and balconies.

Smuggler's Inn (☎ 947 4330; www.the-smugglers-inn.com; Cliff Rd; s €90-130, d €120-160; ☞ Apr-Oct; (P)) Standing in splendid isolation between the links and a long, sandy beach, this pleasant guesthouse is among the smart establishments north of town that cater to golfers. Seafood, particularly shellfish, is a speciality in the beach-facing restaurant (mains €20 to €30, bar food €5 to €15).

The Huntsman (☎ 947 4124; huntsmanclub@eircom.net; s/d €125/150; ☞ Mar-Oct) The five self-catering units opposite St Michael's Church are surprisingly luxurious inside, with saunas, double Jacuzzis and sea-facing balconies. The French-orientated restaurant (mains €15 to €30) is decorated with an amusing hodge-podge of ornaments including fibreglass models of monsters of the deep.

Sheilin (☎ 947 4231; Top Cross; lunch €10, dinner €14-28; ☞ noon-3pm & 6-10pm) Friendly, if hopelessly eccentric, seafood restaurant split between two houses, serving dishes such as Valentia scallops and fresh crab in wine sauce.

Paddy Frog's (☎ 947 8766; the New Line; mains €25-28; ☞ 6.30-9.30pm March-Oct) This French-Irish gourmet restaurant in an inventively decorated new building is overpriced, but offers a good mix of local seafood and meat.

CAHERDANIEL

☎ 066 / pop 350

Hiding between Derrynane Bay and the foothills of Eagles Hill, Caherdaniel is a tiny hamlet with a surprising vibrancy pulsing along its few streets. It boasts a Blue Flag beach, activities galore and the ancestral seat of Daniel O'Connell, 'The Liberator' (p37). At night, you can toast the village from beneath the driftwood and fishing tackle decorating the Blind Piper pub (p266).

Wave Crest (see p266) offers tourist information.

Sights

DERRYNANE NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK

Derrynane House (☎ 947 5113; Derrynane; adult/child €2.90/1.30; ☞ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-7pm Sun May-Sep, 1-5pm Tue-Sun Apr & Oct, 1-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar, last admission 45 min before closing) is the ancestral home of Daniel O'Connell, the campaigner for Catholic emancipation. His family bought the house and surrounding parkland having grown rich on smuggling with France and Spain. It's largely furnished with O'Connell memorabilia, including the restored triumphal chariot

in which he lapped Dublin after his release from prison in 1844.

There is a walking track through the gardens – where palms, four-metre tree ferns, gunnera (‘giant rhubarb’) and South American species grow thanks to the Gulf Stream – to wetlands, beaches and clifftops. You can spot wild pheasants and other birds. The **chapel**, which O’Connell added to Derrynane House in 1844, is a copy of the ruined one on **Abbey Island**, which can usually be reached on foot across the sand.

Look out for the **Ogham stone** on the left of the road to the house. With its carved notches representing the simple Ogham alphabet of the ancient Irish, the stone has several missing letters, but may represent the name of a local chieftain.

Activities

Caherdaniel competes with Valentia Island as the diving base for the Iveragh Peninsula. Try **Activity Ireland** (☎ 947 5277; www.activity-ireland.com), which also organises a range of other outdoor activities including rock-climbing. Popular **Derrynane Sea Sports** (☎ 087-908 1208) organises sailing, canoeing, windsurfing and water-skiing for all levels, operating from the beach between June and August.

Eagle Rock Equestrian Centre (☎ 947 5145) offers beach, mountain and woodland treks for all levels (€25 per hour).

John O’Shea (☎ 087-670 5121; Bunavalla Pier) runs fishing trips and excursions to the Skelligs.

Walkers should head to **Bunavalla Pier**, 3.2km downhill from the N70, west of Caherdaniel. Walk there and you’ll descend towards ‘Ireland’s best known view’ (according to the Scarriff Inn’s sign at the top) along what could be Ireland’s windiest, steepest lane. Keep left and conserve your energy for the slog back uphill.

Sleeping & Eating

Wave Crest (☎ 947 5188; www.wavecrestcamping.com; camp sites €16; ☞ mid-Mar–mid-Oct; ☑) This friendly site, 1.6km southeast of Caherdaniel, has a superb coastal setting and well-kept facilities. Booking during peak season is advised.

Glenbeg Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 947 5182; glenbeg@eircom.net; camp sites €17; ☞ mid-Apr–early Oct) Some 2.5km east of Caherdaniel on the N70, Glenbeg has an unbeatable seaside location, overlooking a sandy beach with views of the Beara Peninsula.

Travellers’ Rest Hostel (☎ 947 5175; dm/d €16.50/39; ☑) All low ceilings, board games and dried flowers in the grate, Travellers’ Rest has the quaint feel of a country cottage. Call at the garage opposite if there’s nobody about.

Olde Forge (☎ 947 5140; theoldeforge@eircom.net; s/d €40/70; ☑) This B&B has six attractive rooms and fantastic views of Kenmare Bay and the Beara Peninsula. It’s 1.2km southeast of town on the N70.

Kerry Way B&B (☎ 947 5277; www.activity-ireland.com/bab; s/d €45/60; ☑) Run by the same people as Activity Ireland, this pleasant old house has good-sized en-suite rooms.

Glaise Rinn (☎ 947 5013; lunch €4-7; ☞ May-Aug) Breakfast, baguettes, homemade quiches and pizzas are served at this deli at the entrance to Wave Crest.

Blind Piper (☎ 947 5126; bar food €10-18; ☞ noon-9.30pm Jun-Aug, to 8.30pm rest of year) This local institution is a great family pub during the day, serving expensive but quality grub. The deep-fried monkfish, Cajun chicken panini and *croque monsieur* with brie are recommended. After dark, locals and visitors crowd in here; music sessions have been known to happen.

A decent place open during the summer, and a cheaper alternative to the pub, is **Court-house Cafe** (☎ 947 5834; dinner €10; ☞ 11am-4pm & 6pm-10pm Jun-Sep), near the Blind Piper. Fish cakes and chips, and other filling feeds are available to take away or eat upstairs.

STAIGUE FORT

This ring fort is an imposing sight at the head of a valley, and a powerful evocation of late-Iron Age Ireland. Its circular stone wall, up to 6m high and 4m thick, is surrounded by a protective bank and ditch. Steps criss-cross the interior of the wall, which contains two small rooms and a narrow entrance tunnel.

Staigue probably dates from the 3rd or 4th century, and the building’s sophistication suggests it belonged to a powerful chieftain. Despite having sweeping views down to the coast, it can’t be seen from the sea. It may have been a communal place of refuge, or a cultural and commercial centre where people came to celebrate, exchange goods and stage ceremonies.

The fort is near the village of Castlecove, about 4km off the N70, reached by a potholed country lane that narrows as it climbs to a road-end car park beside the site. Traffic jams can occur.

The battered building that would look at home in Havana is the **exhibition centre** (☞ 10am-9pm Easter-Sep), which has a café and an interpretative display.

A scrawled sign, before it descends into a stream of consciousness about trespassing, asks for €1 for access to the Dúchas site across private land.

SNEEM

Halfway between Caherdaniel and Kenmare, Sneem (An tSnaidhm) is a good place to stop for an ice cream and a clamber on the rocks under the bridge (not at the same time). The village’s Gaelic name translates as ‘the knot’, which is thought to refer to the River Sneem that swirls, knot-like, into Kenmare Bay nearby. It’s nicknamed ‘the knot in the Ring of Kerry’.

President Charles de Gaulle is among the luminaries who have been attracted to the peaceful spot, and he is commemorated by a statue. In the sculpture park are pieces donated from around the world, including the *Goddess Isis* from Egypt and the *Peaceful Panda* from China.

KENMARE

☎ 064 / pop 2460

The copper-covered limestone spire of Holy Cross Church, drawing the eye to the wooded hills above town, gives Kenmare an alpine appearance. Of course, you couldn’t be anywhere other than southwest Ireland with rivers named Finnihy, Roughty and Sheen emptying into Kenmare Bay. Nonetheless, Kenmare is a town of some distinction. Elegant streets with superb restaurants fan out from Fair Green. It does get busy in the summer, but is less hectic than Killarney, and is ideally situated for visiting both the Ring of Kerry and Beara Peninsula.

Orientation

In the 18th century, Kenmare was laid out on an X-plan, with a triangular market square in the centre and Fair Green nestling in its upper V. To the south, Henry and Main Sts are the main shopping and eating/drinking thoroughfares, with Shelbourne St linking them at the southern end. Kenmare Bay stretches out to the southwest, and there are glorious views of the mountains.

Information

The post office on the corner of Henry and Shelbourne Sts has local walking maps and guides, as well as internet access (€1 for 15 minutes). There are two Kenmare websites: www.kenmare.eu and www.kenmare.com.

There’s free parking throughout town, with a two-hour limit between 9am and 6pm.

AIB (cnr Main & Henry Sts) ATM and bureau de change.

Bank of Ireland (the Square) Also has ATM and bureau de change.

Finnegan’s Taxis & Tours (☎ 41491) Located above the tourist office.

Kenmare Bookshop (☎ 41578; Shelbourne St) Has a wide range of books, including a strong Irish section with maps and guides.

O’Shea’s Laundry (☎ 41394; Kenmare Business Park; ☞ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 5.30pm Sat; self-service €1) Located 2km north of town on the N71.

Public toilets (Old Killareny Rd) Opposite the Holy Cross Church, next to a car park.

Tourist office (☎ 31633; the Square; ☞ Apr-Oct)

Gives out free maps detailing a heritage trail around town and longer walks of up to 13km.

Sights

The **Kenmare Heritage Centre** (☎ 41233; the Square; adult/child €2.70/1.30; ☞ 9.15am-7pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, to 5.30pm Mon-Sat Easter-Jun & Sep), reached through the tourist office, tells the history of the town from its founding as Neidín by the swash-buckling Sir William Petty in 1670. The centre also relates the story of the Poor Clare Convent, founded in 1861 and still standing behind Holy Cross Church. Local women were taught needlepoint lace-making skills at the convent, and Kenmare was catapulted to international fame through the work produced by the women.

Upstairs, the **Kenmare Lace and Design Centre** (☎ 42978; ☞ 10.15am-5.30pm Mon-Sat Easter-Oct, 10.30am-1.30pm Nov-Mar) has displays including designs for ‘the most important piece of lace ever made in Ireland’ (in a 19th-century critic’s opinion). It’s run by lace-maker Nora Finnegan, who was taught by the Poor Clare nuns. Also interesting is the story of Margaret Anna Cusack (1829-99), the Nun of Kenmare and an early advocate of women’s rights. She was hounded out of Kenmare, converted to Protestantism and died, embittered, in Leamington, England.

Signposted southwest of the Square is an early Bronze Age **stone circle**, one of the biggest in southwest Ireland. Fifteen stones ring

a boulder dolmen, a burial monument rarely found outside this part of the country.

Built in 1862, the **Holy Cross Church** on Old Killarney Rd boasts a splendid wooden roof with 14 angel carvings. There are fine mosaics in the aisle arches and around the stained-glass window over the altar. The architect was Charles Hansom, collaborator and brother-in-law of Augustus Pugin (the architect behind London's Houses of Parliament).

Activities

Kenmare Golf Club (☎ 41291; 18 holes Mon-Fri €50, Sat & Sun €55) has its entrance on the R569, about 100m from the top of Main St.

Star Sailing (☎ 41222; Daurus), on the R571, offers activities including sailing, sea kayaking, diving, windsurfing, pony trekking, cycling and hillwalking for novices and experts.

Warm yourself on tea, coffee, rum and the captain's sea shanties on a two-hour quest to spot sea cubs and other sea life with **Seafari** (☎ 42059; Kenmare Pier; adult/child €20/12.50). Reservations are advised.

For fishing, try **Kenmare Bay Angling & Sight-seeing Cruises** (☎ 087-2592209; Kenmare Pier).

For horse riding, there's **Dromquinna Stables** (☎ 41043; Templehoe), 10km west of town on the Ring of Kerry (N70).

The tourist office has details of walks around Kenmare Bay and into the hills, on sections of the Kerry Way (see p699) and Beara Way (see p698).

Sleeping BUDGET

Kenmare Lodge (☎ 40662; 27 Main St; dm €15-20, tw €34, d €50) This pleasant, modern hostel has a patio, and cream walls enlivened by Modernist reproductions. There are laundry facilities and a roomy kitchen and dining area.

Ring of Kerry Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 41648; Reen; camp sites €18-20; ☽ Apr-Sep) Mountains and sea surround this beautiful site in wooded country. It's 3.5km west of town and 1km down a side road, off the north side of the Sneem road.

MIDRANGE

Hazelwood (☎ 41420; www.kenmare-bnb.com; s/d €45/70; ☐) Some 3.5km southwest of town at the beginning of the Ring of Beara (R571), this family-run B&B was built to resemble an African bungalow by owner Miffy's grandfather.

Grab a tome from the bookshelf and lounge by the fire or in the conservatory overlooking Kenmare Bay.

Whispering Pines (☎ 41194; wpines@eircom.net; s/d €45/80; ☽ Easter-Nov; ☐) In a quiet location near the pier, with four immaculate rooms and a cheerful welcome. Breakfasts range from stewed prunes and apricots to Kenmare smoked salmon and scrambled eggs.

Hawthorn House (☎ 41035; www.hawthornhousekenmare.com; Shelbourne St; s/d €55/80; ☐) This stylish house has seven spacious rooms, including a majestic family room, all named after local towns and decked out in light pine. Chatty owner Mary is a fount of local information.

Rose Cottage (☎ 41330; the Square; d €70-80; ☐) This picturesque building set back from Fair Green has old-fashioned but comfortable and homely rooms. The Poor Clare nuns stayed here when they arrived in Kenmare, then had to leave just as the apples were ripening in the orchard. Note that rooms are double only: no singles are allowed.

TOP END

Sheen Falls Lodge (☎ 41600; www.sheenfallsodge.ie; r from €445; breakfast €24; ☽ Feb-Dec; ☐) The Marquis of Landsdowne's former summer residence still feels like an aristocrats' playground. Oscar's bar/bistro is named after the local heron, and there's a 1920s Buick that is used to go on picnics. Beyond such flourishes, the lodge is a luxurious retreat with a spa and 66 rooms with DVD players and Italian marble bathrooms. With views of the falls and across Kenmare Bay to Carrantuo-hil, it's a beautiful place to escape the less amusing aspects of the 21st century.

Eating

Kenmare has a deserved reputation for its fine eateries.

BUDGET

For self-caterers, there's a **SuperValu** (☎ 41307; Main St) supermarket

Jam (☎ 41591; Henry St; meals & snacks €2-9; ☽ 8am-5pm) Funky, comfy Jam offers filo pastry and quiches brimming with goodness, and a long list of increasingly elaborate coffees.

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(Continued from page 268)

Café Mocha (☎ 42133; the Square; meals & snacks €4-13; ☽ 9am-5.30pm) Soup, salads, sandwiches, breakfast and homemade ice cream are on the menu in this popular café with painterly canvases decorating the yellow walls.

Purple Heather Bistro (☎ 41016; Henry St; meals & snacks €5-15; ☽ 10.45am-6pm Mon-Sat) With a great atmosphere and comfy traditional décor, this Kenmare favourite serves a great range of tasty sandwiches and Irish dishes with a dash of European cuisine. There are good veggie options and the homemade desserts are a real flourish.

MIDRANGE

Horseshoe (☎ 41553; 3 Main St; mains €12-26; ☽ 5-10pm) The decent vegetarian options at this gastro-pub include spinach and wild-onion risotto, while steaks, scallops, burgers and mussels are prepared using simple, traditional recipes.

our pick BÁCÚS (☎ 49300; Main St; mains €13-25; ☽ 8.30am-9.30pm) Everything's homemade; the produce is local and seasonal; the ales are from microbreweries; the décor is Art Deco lamps and black-and-white French photos. This could be Ireland's best midrange restaurant – it's certainly great value. The bouillabaisse is recommended, as is Sunday brunch (9am to 4pm).

PF McCarthy's (☎ 41516; 14 Main St; dinner €13-27; ☽ noon-3pm Mon-Sat, 5-9pm Tue-Sat) A convivial pub with German and Czech beers on tap, and dishes such as Thai crab lasagna and Moroccan bean stew alongside the usual hostelery fare.

TOP END

Packies (☎ 41508; Henry St; mains €13-30; ☽ 6-10pm Mon-Sat Mar-Oct, Thu-Sat Nov-Feb) This stylish, award-winning restaurant underpins Mediterranean flair with tried-and-tested Irish methods. Seafood matters here, and there's a strong bias towards organic produce. There are also chicken, lamb and tagliatelle choices.

Mulcahy's Restaurant (☎ 42383; 36 Henry St; mains €17-29; ☽ 6.30-10pm Wed-Mon Apr-Sep, Thu-Mon Oct-Mar) Acclaimed Mulcahy's brings world style to Kenmare. The food is satisfyingly modernist, with sushi starters and Pacific Rim flair, but with inventive Irish touches. Vegetarians and wine buffs are well catered for.

D'Arcy's Oyster Bar and Grill (☎ 41589; mains €19-31; ☽ 6.30-9.30pm) Newspapers have raved about D'Arcy's, but a sign hanging in the window summarises its charms: 'Eat fish – your heart will love you for it'. Lobster and red snapper are among the fresh catches served in modern, low-key surrounds. Landlubber dishes such as Irish T-bone and Kerry lamb are available from the grill.

Entertainment

For good trad sessions try Crowley's on Henry St, while Florry Batt's in the same street sees a cheerful crowd and occasional sing-alongs. A wide range of acts plays PF McCarthy's on Main Street (Thursday to Saturday).

Shopping

Kenmare has a disproportionate number of quality craft shops. There's a **market** (☎ 84236; the Square) on Wednesday mornings (closed from December to January). On August 15 every year, marketers from throughout Ireland, with crafts, local produce, ponies, cattle, sheep, bric-a-brac, etc come to town.

PFK Gold & Silversmith (☎ 42590; pfkelly@indigo.ie; 18 Henry St) Minimilastic jewellery by Paul Kelly and contemporary Irish designers. Check out the salt servers with enamel linings by West Cork designer Marika O'Sullivan. Prices start at €80; Kelly also takes commissions.

Soundz of Muzic (☎ 42268; 9 Henry St) Has a selection of Irish and contemporary music.

Noel & Holland (☎ 42464; 3 Bridge St) Find that elusive favourite at this excellent secondhand bookshop that sells some rare editions and also has a terrific range of paperbacks, all neatly collated.

Kerry Wool Market (☎ 89168; Henry St) A mountain of Aran jumpers.

Getting There & Away

There are twice-daily buses to Killarney (€7.60, 50 minutes), where you can change for Tralee. On Friday afternoon buses go to Sneem, and to Lauragh and Ardgroon on the Beara Peninsula. Twice-daily buses carry on to Castletownbere during the summer. Buses stop outside Roughty Bar (Main St).

Getting Around

Finnegan's Cycle Centre (☎ 41083; Shelbourne St) is the Raleigh Rent-a-Bike dealer, with bikes costing €15/85 per day/week.

NORTHERN KERRY

The landscape of Northern Kerry is often dull compared with the glories of the Iveragh and Dingle Peninsulas, Killarney and Kenmare. There are some fascinating places all the same with enough compelling history to reward a few days exploration. Ballyunion and the blustery beaches south of the Shannon estuary are certainly worth a look.

TRALEE

☎ 066 / pop 22,070

Despite being the county town, Tralee is dismissed in the rest of Kerry as an overflow valve for Limerick and its social problems. Tralee is certainly a down-to-earth place, more engaged with the business of everyday life than the tourist trade. A request for a cigarette is never far away and you should take care after dark. However, if you've just emerged from Kerry's rural areas, this is a refreshingly lively, heterogeneous spot with some friendly pubs and worthwhile attractions.

Founded by the Normans in 1216, Tralee has a long history of rebellion. In the 16th century the last ruling earl of the Desmonds was captured and executed here. His head was sent to Elizabeth I, who spiked it on London Bridge. The Desmond castle once stood at the junction of Denny St and the Mall, but any trace of medieval Tralee that survived the Desmond Wars was razed during the Cromwellian period.

Orientation

You'll find most things you need along the Mall and its continuation, Castle St. Elegant Denny St and Day Place are the oldest parts of town, with 18th-century buildings. Ashe St is home to the circular Courthouse, a solemn, fortresslike building. The tourist office is at the southern end of Denny St. The bus and train stations are a five-minute walk northeast of the town centre. The Square, just south of the Mall, is a pleasant open space with a contemporary style.

Information

On Castle St you'll find banks with ATMs and bureaux de change. The big car park opposite the Brandon Hotel costs €3

per day, Monday to Saturday. The metered parking in the rest of town is €1.20 per hour.

Antech (☎ 719 1441; 40 Bridge St; per hr €4) For internet access, cheap international calls, Western Union transfers, photocopying and mobile top-up.

Luggage storage (per item €2.50; ☎ 7am-5pm) At the train station.

Polymaths (☎ 712 5035; 1-2 Courthouse Lane) New bookshop with a good selection of books on Kerry.

Post office (Edward St) Off Castle St.

Public toilets (Denny St)

Tourist office (☎ 712 1288; Denny St) Helpful office at the side of Ashe Memorial Hall.

Tralee General Hospital (☎ 7126222; Boherbee) Has an accident and emergency unit.

Sights & Activities

Housed in the Ashe Memorial Hall is the **Kerry County Museum** (☎ 712 7777; Denny St; adult/child/family €8/5/22; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Tue-Fri Jan-Mar, 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sat Apr, May & Sep-Dec, 9.30am-5.30pm Jun-Aug). It has excellent interpretive displays on Irish historical events and trends, with an emphasis on Kerry. The **Tom Crean Room** celebrates the local hero (see boxed text, p286) who accompanied both Scott and Shackleton on epic Antarctic expeditions. Also here is the **Medieval Experience**, an enjoyable multimedia presentation re-creating life (smells and all) in Tralee in 1450. Children love strolling the medieval streets and there's a commentary in various languages.

Blennerville used to be the chief port of Tralee, though it has long since silted up. A 19th-century flour **windmill** has been restored and is the largest working mill in Ireland and Britain. The modern **visitor centre** (☎ 712 1064; adult/child/family €5/3/15; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm May-Oct) houses an exhibition on grain-milling, and on the thousands of emigrants who boarded 'coffin ships' from what was then Kerry's largest embarkation point. There's also a database of the Irish émigrés who flocked to America. The admission price includes a 30-minute guided tour of the windmill, which is 1km southwest of Tralee on the N86.

Between 1891 and 1953 a narrow-gauge **steam railway** connected Tralee with Dingle. The last surviving steam engine on this line runs along the restored Tralee-Blennerville section of the track, but at the time of research it was indefinitely closed for repair.

Tralee's water-fun centre, **Aquadome** (☎ 712 8899; www.aquadome.ie; off South Circular Rd; adult/child

€12/10; ☎ 10am-10pm Jul & Aug, 10am-10pm Mon, Wed & Fri, noon-10pm Tue & Thu, 11am-8pm Sat & Sun rest of the year), has gushers, geysers, sauna and steam room as well as plenty of water just to swim in.

Festivals

The declining **Rose of Tralee** (www.roseoftralee.ie; Ashe Memorial Hall, Denny St) festival is at the end of August. Community arts group **Samhlaíocht** (www.samhlaiocht.com) organises cultural festivals throughout the year.

Sleeping

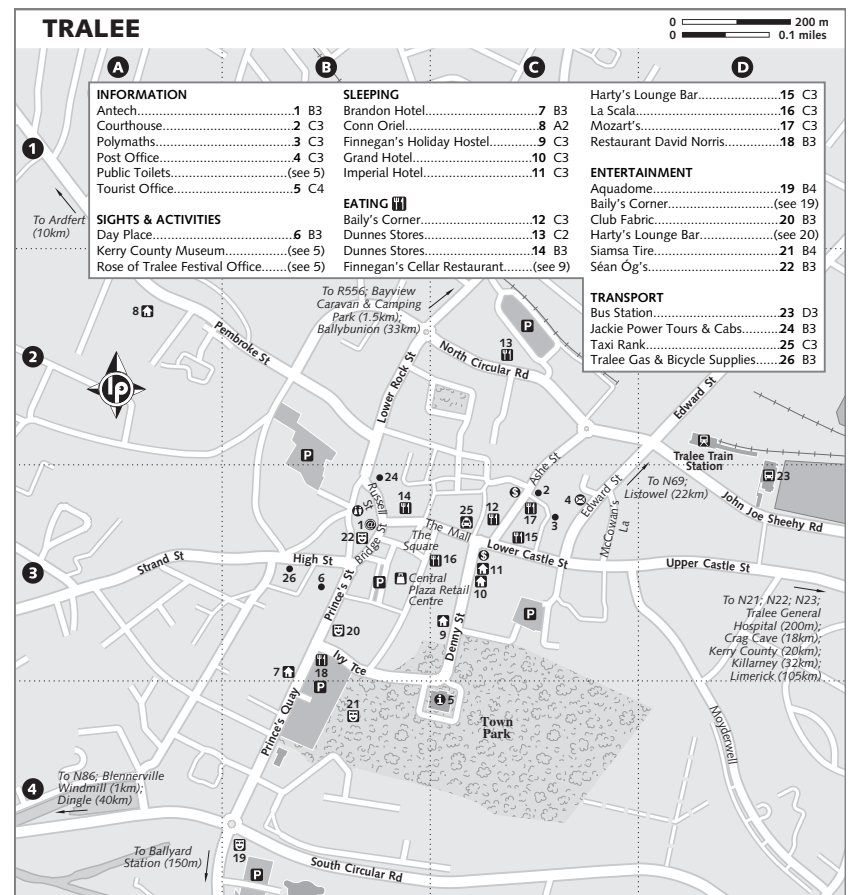
Bayview Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 712 6140; bayviewtralee@eircom.net; Killeen; camp sites €14; ☎ Apr-Oct) This small park in a pleasant tree-lined

location has good facilities. It's 1.5km north of the centre on the R556.

Finnegan's Holiday Hostel (☎ 712 7610; www.finneganshostel.com; 17 Denny St; dm/s €17/30) Don't be deterred by the elegant Georgian façade – this is a hostel. Inside, the grandeur has faded, but there are a sizeable kitchen and lounge. The dorms, named after Irish scribes, have en-suite bathrooms.

Conn Oriel (☎ 712 5359; www.connoriel.com; 6 Pembroke Sq, Pembroke St; s/d €40/70; ☎) One of a line of B&Bs, this friendly mother/daughter operation has cheery decorative art on the yellow walls.

Imperial Hotel (☎ 712 7755; www.imperialtralee.com; Denny St; s/d €65/120) The friendly, family-run Imperial is not as stylish as the Grand but



has modern bedrooms and good facilities, including a wood-panelled bar offering trad sessions on Friday and Saturday.

Grand Hotel (☎ 712 1499; www.grandhoteltralee.com; Denny St; s/d €85/130; (P)) Built in 1928, the Grand's prices are a trifle grand, but it maintains the feel of a proper county-town hotel in its public rooms and pleasantly aged bedrooms.

Brandon Hotel (☎ 712 3333; www.brandonhotel.ie; Prince's St; s €105-145, d €160-240; (P)) If you want corporate big-hotel anonymity, the Brandon is the place. Pricey but with good facilities, including a spa and leisure centre, the smart rooms have cream colour-schemes.

Eating

There are plenty of lunchtime eateries in Tralee, and a couple of excellent restaurants and pubs.

Baily's Corner (☎ 712 6230; Ashe St; bar meals €4-7) A top choice for soup, sandwiches and a chat with friendly landlord Garry and the regulars at the bar. A relaxed mid-morning scene gives way to a busy rest-of-the-day.

Harty's Lounge Bar (☎ 712 5385; Lower Castle St; bar meals €4.50-9, mains €9-22) Despite its svelte appearance, this modernised Tralee institution serves no-nonsense nosh, but with tagliatelle joining beef and Guinness stew on the menu. It was the birthplace of the Rose of Tralee festival in 1959.

La Scala (☎ 712 2477; the Square; mains €6-19; ☎ 10am-12am Fri & Sat, 10am-11pm Sun-Thu) A popular Irish-Italian eatery where locals banquet on pizza and pasta, sizzling fajitas and meatballs. Breakfast is served until 5pm.

Mozart's (☎ 712 7977; 4 Ashe St; snacks & mains €8-20; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) Not content with composing Don Giovanni, he's inspired a bistro in Tralee. Mozart's is great for a daytime bite, serving burritos and baps, focaccias and croissants.

Finnegan's Cellar Restaurant (☎ 718 1400; 17 Denny St; mains €15-24; ☎ 5.30-10.30pm May-Sep, Wed-Mon rest of year) In a low-beamed Georgian cellar with candles on the intimate tables, Finnegan's serves reasonably priced, traditional meat and fish dishes given a twist by unusual sauces, herbs and dressings.

Restaurant David Norris (☎ 718 5654; Ivy Tce; mains €18-24; ☎ 5.30-9.30pm Tue-Fri, Sat 7-9.30pm) Norris' modern façade is uninspiring, but inside the décor is stylish and the menu exciting. Starters such as crisp-fried calamari are terrific. The emphasis is on steaks and shanks, but vegetarians and fish fanciers have delicious options

too. A €25, four-course early bird special is available until 7pm Monday to Friday.

Dunnes Stores (the Mall) is the perfect place for self-caterers. There's also a branch on North Circular Rd.

Entertainment

PUBS & CLUBS

Castle St is thick with pubs, many of them offering live entertainment. There are some reasonable café/bars on the Square where you could easily pass an afternoon watching Tralee coming and going.

Baily's Corner (☎ 712 6230; Ashe St) Baily's is deservedly popular for its traditional sessions, with local musicians performing original material most weeknights.

Harty's Lounge Bar (☎ 712 5385; Lower Castle St) The slick surroundings suit the DJ sets on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and the live modern music on Sunday.

Seán Óg's (☎ 712 8822; Bridge St) Fair diddling trad is on at this raucous 'drinking consultant' bar from Sunday to Thursday.

Club Fabric (☎ 712 4174; Godfrey Place) Tralee's club of the moment with the right mix of a chill-out bar, an upstairs level for '70s and '80s faves, and a main disco for some floor-burning DJs.

THEATRE

Siamsa Tíre (☎ 712 3055; www.siamsatire.com; Town Park; shows per person €15-25; booking office ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) In a pleasant location in the town park, near the tourist office, Siamsa Tíre, the National Folk Theatre of Ireland, re-creates dynamic aspects of Gaelic culture through song, dance, drama and mime. There are several shows a week from May to September at 8.30pm. Winter shows range from dance to drama and mainstream musicals.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (☎ 716 4700) is next to the train station, east of the town centre. Eight daily buses run to Dublin (€20.50, six hours), going via Listowel (€5, 30 minutes) and changing in Limerick (€13.50, two hours). There are hourly buses to Waterford (€20.50, 5½ hours), Killarney (€6, 40 minutes) and Cork (€14.50, 2½ hours), some continuing to Wexford (€22, 6½ hours) and Rosslare Harbour (€23, seven hours).

From the **train station** (☎ 712 3522) there are three direct daily services to Cork (€30, 2¼

hours), nine to Killarney (€8.50, 45 minutes) and one to Dublin (€44, four hours). More trains pass through Mallow (€20, 1½ hours).

Getting Around

There's a taxi rank on the Mall, or try **Jackie Power Tours & Cabs** (☎ 712 9444; 2 Lower Rock St). **Tralee Gas & Bicycle Supplies** (☎ 712 2018; Strand St) hires out bikes.

AROUND TRALEE

Crag Cave

This **cave** (☎ 714 1244; Castleisland; adult/child €12/5; ☎ 10am-6pm Wed-Sun Jan & Feb, 10am-6pm mid-Mar-Jun & Sep-Dec, 10am-6.30pm Jul & Aug) was discovered in 1983, when problems with water pollution led to a search for the source of the local river. In 1989, 300m of the 4km-long cave were opened to the public; admission is by 30-minute guided tour. The remarkable rock formations include a large, wine bottle-shaped stalagmite in the 'Kitchen Cave'; the 'Crystal Gallery', with its thousands of straw-thin stalactites; and a stalagmite shaped like a statue of the Madonna.

The cave is signposted from both Castleisland and the Abbeyfeale-Castleisland stretch of the N21. Castleisland is well connected with both Tralee and Killarney by bus.

Ardfert

☎ 066 / pop 940

Ardfert (Ard Fhearta), about 10km northwest of Tralee on the Ballyheigue road, is most notable for the Dúchas-owned **Ardfert Cathedral** (☎ 713 4711; adult/child €2/1; ☎ 10am-6.30pm May-Sep; last admission 45 min before closing). Most of the building dates back to the 13th century, but it incorporates elements of an 11th-century church. Set into one of the interior walls is an effigy, said to be of St Brendan the Navigator, who was educated in Ardfert and founded a monastery here. The grounds contain the ruins of two other churches, 12th-century Templenahoe and 15th-century Templenagriffin, and a small visitor centre with an exhibition on the cathedral's history.

Turning right in front of the cathedral and going 500m down the road brings you to the extensive remains of a **Franciscan friary**, dating from the 13th century, but with 15th-century cloisters.

Ardfert Indoor Market (☎ 087-920 9673; Community Centre; ☎ 11am-2pm Sun) sells organic produce as well as bric-a-brac.

During the week, Bus Éireann 274, between Tralee and Ballyheigue, stops in Ardfert once daily in either direction; more frequently on Sundays, and in June and September.

LISTOWEL

☎ 068 / pop 3900

The late writer Bryan MacMahon said of Listowel: 'I harbour the absurd notion of motivating a small town in Ireland, a speck on the map, to become a centre of the imagination.' Listowel certainly has more literary credentials than your average provincial town, with connections to such accomplished scribes as John B Keane, Maurice Walsh, George Fitzmaurice and Brendan Kennelly. Keane wrote with wry humour about subjects ranging from Limerick's beggars to the perils of giving up porter as a New Year's resolution. Outside these connections and a few venues, however, the town is little more than some tidy Georgian streets and a riverside park.

Orientation & Information

The Square is the main focus of the town. At its centre is the St John's Theatre and Arts Centre, formerly St John's Church. Most pubs and restaurants are on Church and William Sts, north from the Square, while a short walk southeast along Bridge Rd takes you to the River Feale and Childers Park. The river can also be reached down the road alongside the castle.

There's metered parking in the main square and free parking, downhill to the right of the castle.

Ó Hannán's Book Shop is opposite where William St joins Main St. The Kerry Literary & Cultural Centre bookshop also stocks titles by local writers

Bank of Ireland (the Square) Has an ATM and bureau de change.

North Kerry Together (☎ 23429; 58 Church St; 15min/1hr €1/3; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Thu, 9.30am-1pm Fri)

Post office (William St) At the northern end of the street.

Tourist office (☎ 22590; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2-5.15pm Mon-Sat May-Sep) Housed in the St John's Theatre & Arts Centre.

Sights

Kerry Literary & Cultural Centre, with its audiovisual **Writers' Exhibition** (Seanchaí; ☎ 22212; www.kerrywritersmuseum.com; 24 the Square; adult/child

€5/3; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, to 4.30pm Mon-Fri Oct-May; ♿), is an absolute gem that gives due prominence to Listowel's heritage of literary observers of Irish life. Rooms are devoted to local greats such as John B Keane and Bryan MacMahon, with simple, haunting tableaux narrating their lives and recordings of them reading their work. There is a café and a performance space where events are sometimes staged.

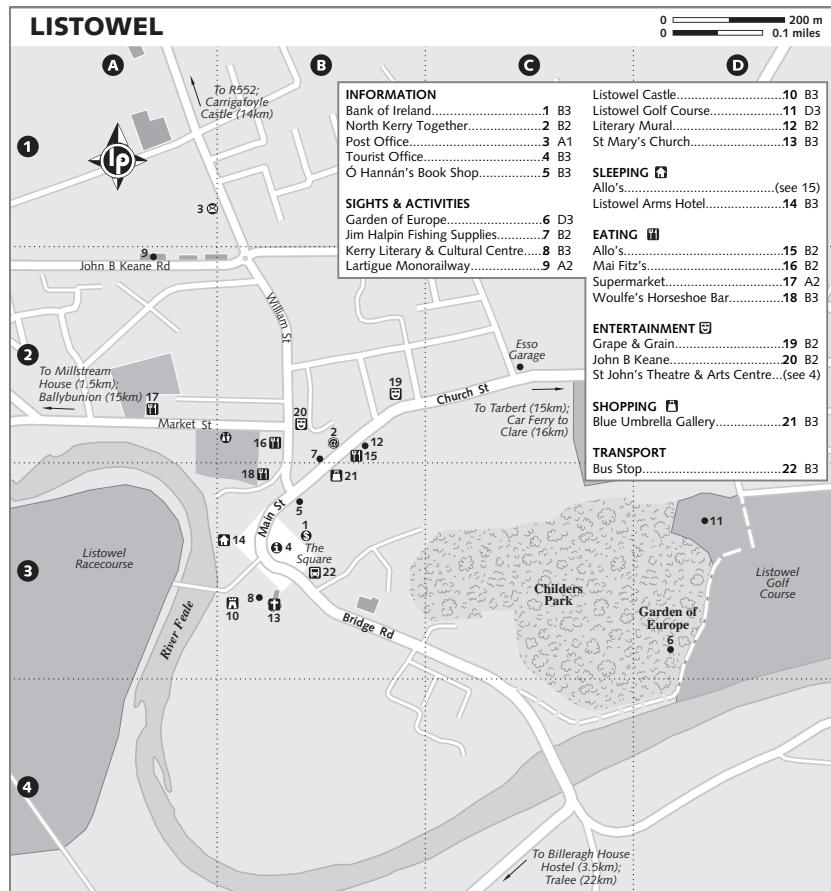
St Mary's Church, in the Square, was built in 1829 in the neo-Gothic style. It has some lovely mosaic work over the altar and a vaulted roof with timber beams.

The 12th-century **Listowel Castle**, behind the Kerry Literary & Cultural Centre, was once the stronghold of the Fitzmau-

rices, the Anglo-Norman lords of Kerry. The castle was the last in Ireland to succumb to the Elizabethan attacks during the Desmond revolt. What remains of the castle has been thoroughly restored. Free guided tours are available between June and September.

In Childers Park is the **Garden of Europe**, opened in 1995. Its 12 sections represent the 12 members of the EU of the day. There is a fine bust of the poet Schiller and, strikingly, Ireland's only public monument to those who died in the Holocaust, and to all victims of injustice.

On Church St there is a **literary mural** depicting famous local writers and their pronouncements.



Activities

Lartigue Monorailway (☎ 24393; John B Keane Rd; adult/child €6/3; ☎ 2-4pm May-Sep) was designed by Frenchman Charles Lartigue. This unique survivor of Victorian railway engineering operated between the town and Ballybunion on the coast. The renovated section of line is short but fascinating, with manual turnstiles at either end for swinging the train round.

Listowel Golf Course (☎ 21592; per 9 holes €30), on the banks of the River Feale, is about 2km west of the centre off the N69 to Tarbert. You can also walk through Childers Park and the 'Garden of Europe' to get there.

The River Feale provides many opportunities for angling year round. For licences and information, contact **Jim Halpin Fishing Supplies** (☎ 22392; 24 Church St), which also sells angling equipment.

The tourist office has leaflets on walks such as the 3.5km river walk and the 10km Sive walk, which takes in John B Keane Rd, a disused railway track and a bog.

Festivals & Events

Writers' Week (☎ 21074; www.writersweek.ie; 24 the Square) takes place in May. Readings, poetry, music, drama, seminars, storytelling and many other events are held at various places around town. The festival attracts an impressive list of writers that in recent years has included Roddy Doyle, DBC Pierre, journalist Robert Fisk, and Joe Simpson, author of the mountaineering epic *Touching the Void*, who has family connections in Listowel.

Listowel Food Fair (☎ 23034; www.listowelfoodfair.com) takes place in November. The four-day event includes a farmhouse cheesemaker competition, a market featuring local producers, cookery demonstrations and tastings of all sorts of goodies.

Listowel Races (☎ 21144) take place over Whit weekend in June, and for a week during the harvest festival in September.

Sleeping

Billeragh House Hostel (☎ 40321; billeraghhousehostel@yahoo.com; dm/s/d/f €15/20/35/50) Housed in an ivy-clad Georgian hall, this hostel is 3.5km south of Listowel on the N69. Facilities include ensuite bathrooms, a kitchen and dining room, and a laundry room.

Millstream House (☎ 21129; Greenville; s/d €30/60) This excellent B&B, 1.5km from the centre, has blanket warmers and power showers.

The welcoming Sheahans make you feel instantly at home.

Listowel Arms Hotel (☎ 21500; the Square; www.listowelarms.com; s €85-100 d €140-170; ♿) Listowel's only hotel is a family-run affair in a Georgian building that balances touches of grandeur with country charm. Antiques, marble sinks and power showers abound in the rooms, some of which overlook the river and the racecourse. There's a palatial restaurant and the bar is a good place to find music in the summer.

There are three rooms above the bar/bistro **Allo's** (☎ 2288; Church St; s/d €50/100)

Eating

Listowel has several good eateries and a supermarket on Market St.

Mai Fitz's (☎ 23144 William St; lunch €4-9, mains €12-23; ☎ noon-9pm Tue-Sun) A pleasant, small pub serving chowder, breaded mushrooms and the like. After 3pm, more solid dishes such as Dingle Bay scampi are available.

Allo's (☎ 22880; Church St; mains €12-29; ☎ noon-9pm Tue-Sat) A popular bar/bistro with an intimate feel created by the wooden booths and saloon-style doors. As well as hake, monkfish and duck breast, the more expensive a la carte menu (from 7pm) features continental dishes such as pork fillet wrapped in Serrano ham.

Woulfe's Horseshoe Bar (☎ 21083; 14 Lower William St; bar food €13-20, dinner €18-28; ☎ noon-9pm) Enjoy the cosiness of the downstairs bar or the upstairs restaurant at this long-established place. The menu offers meat, chicken and fish dishes with international touches.

Entertainment

Listowel has plenty of pubs, several with live music and traditional sessions during the week.

John B Keane (37 William St) Once run by the late writer himself, this small, unassuming bar is swathed in Keane memorabilia. At 9.15pm on Tuesday and Thursday during July and August, his son performs sketches, and excerpts from his plays are acted.

St John's Theatre & Arts Centre (☎ 22566; the Square) The centre hosts drama, music and dance events as well as art exhibitions.

Grape & Grain (☎ 23001; Church St) Music can be found at the weekends at this refurbished Listowel institution, a good place for a pint and a bite.

Shopping

Blue Umbrella Gallery (21 Church St; ☎ 10-6pm Tue-Sat)
An arts and crafts cooperative opposite the large Archangel gallery. There are changing exhibitions and lots of work for sale.

Getting There & Away

There are frequent daily buses to both Tralee (40 minutes, €5) and Limerick (1½ hours, €13). In July and August there is one daily service to the Cliffs of Moher and Galway. The bus stop is on the northern side of the Square.

AROUND LISTOWEL

Ballybunion

There are a surprising number of reasons to visit this one-seahorse beach town, 15km northeast of Listowel on the R553. Beyond the statue of a club-swinging Bill Clinton, commemorating his visit to the local golf club in 1998, there are two Blue Flag beaches.

Overlooking the southern beach are the remains of **Ballybunion Castle**, the 16th-century seat of the Fitzmaurices. There's an underground passage leading from the castle to the cliff.

The **Ballybunion Bachelor Festival** takes place in June. The 30-year-old event sees 15 tuxedo-clad bachelors from across Ireland vying to impress the judges, while the town enjoys a long weekend of street entertainment and celebrations.

In July and August there are two buses from Listowel to Ballybunion daily, Monday to Saturday.

Carrigafoyle Castle

A fine location on the Shannon Estuary adds to the romantic drama of this late-medieval **castle** (☎ 43304; 9am-6pm May-Sep). Its name comes from Carragain Phoill (Rock of the Hole); it's built in a channel between the mainland and Carrig Island. Built by the O'Connors, who ruled most of northern Kerry, the castle was besieged by the English in 1580, retaken by O'Connor, and finally destroyed by Cromwell's forces in 1649. You can climb the spiral staircase to the top for a good view of the estuary.

The castle is 2km west of the village of Ballylongford (Bea Atha Longphuirt). On Tuesday and Thursday, between September and June, two buses link Ballylongford with Tralee via Listowel.

Tarbert

☎ 068 / pop 810

Tarbert is 16km north of Listowel on the N69. **Shannon Ferry Limited** (☎ 905 3124; one way/return bicycle & foot passengers €4/6, motorcycles €8/12, cars €15/25; ☎ 7am-9.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-9.30pm Sun Apr & Sep, 10.30am-6pm May-Sep, 7am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-7.30pm Sun Oct-Mar) runs a half-hourly ferry between Tarbert and Killimer in County Clare, useful if you want to avoid congested Limerick city. The ferry dock is 2.2km west of Tarbert and is clearly signposted.

If you have some time before you catch your ferry, you should visit the renovated **Tarbert Bridewell Jail & Courthouse** (☎ 36500; adult/child €5/2.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct), which has exhibits on the social and political conditions of the 19th century. From the jail, the 3.8km **John F Leslie Woodland Walk** runs along Tarbert Bay towards the mouth of the Shannon.

There are buses on Tuesday and Thursday mornings and Friday night to Tralee (one hour), and Sunday afternoon to Limerick (1¼ hours).

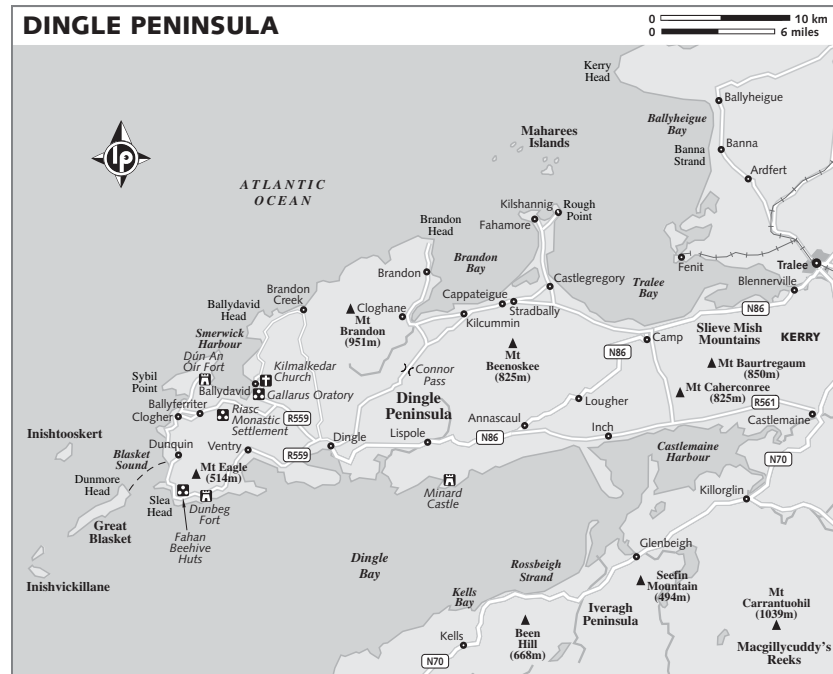
DINGLE PENINSULA

The northern-most promontory in Kerry and Cork's proud collection, the Dingle Peninsula also has the subtle charms. Its mellow landscape is one of green hills and golden sands, and culminates in Europe's most westerly point, gazing across the sound at the ghost town on Great Blasket Island. Of course, the friendly hills have their mountainous areas, such as Mt Brandon and the Connor Pass, but, on the whole, this is calming country.

Centred on pretty Dingle town, the peninsula has a high concentration of ring forts and other ancient ruins. Activities on offer range from diving to playing the bodhrán. There's an alternative way of life here in the craft shops and cultural centres, trad sessions and folkloric festivals found in the Dingle's tiny settlements.

Tours

A number of Killarney companies run daily day trips by bus around the Dingle Peninsula (€25). Alternatively, Dingle-based outfits operate guided two-hour minibus tours of the peninsula from €15 per person.



Moran's Sleat Head Tours (☎ 086-275 3333; Moran's Garage) leaves the pier at 10am and 2pm daily.

O'Connor's Sleat Head Tours (☎ 087-248 0008) Departs from Dingle pier at 11am and 2pm daily.

Sciúird (Map p287; ☎ 915 1606) Has 3½-hour archaeological tours leaving Dingle at 10.30am daily, with a minimum of six people. The tours explore the prehistoric sites, Ogham stones and monastic ruins in the western part of the peninsula. Check for departure point when booking.

DINGLE

☎ 066 / pop 1775

The peninsula's capital is a very special place indeed. It's one of Ireland's largest Gaeltacht towns and a friendly dolphin called Fungie has lived in the bay for 25 years. Many pubs double as shops, so you can enjoy Guinness and a sing-along among screws and nails, wellies and horseshoes. These charms have long drawn runaways from across the world, making the port town a surprisingly cosmopolitan, creative place. It's a popular stomping ground for stag and hen parties, as well as the Fungie-hunting hordes.

Information

The banks on Main St have ATMs and bureaux de change. The post office is off Lower Main St. Parking is free throughout town and €1 per hour in the car park at the harbour.

An Café Liteártha (☎ 915 2204; Dykegate Lane) Bookshop specialising in Irish history.

Dingle Bookshop (☎ 915 2433; Green St) Has a good collection of new and used books, including books on travel and local interest.

Dingle Cleaners (☎ 915 0680; Mail Rd; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat)

Dingle Internet Café (☎ 915 2478; Lower Main St; per hr €4; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Fri May-Sep, to 6pm rest of year)

The Old Forge (☎ 915 0523; Holyground; per hr €4; ☎ 10.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-10pm Jun-Aug, 12.30pm-7.30pm Sun) Internet café; also cheap international calls.

Tourist office (☎ 915 1188; the Pier; ☎ 9am-7pm Jun-Sep, 9am-1pm & 2.15-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-May) Busy but helpful, this place has maps, guides and plenty of information on the entire peninsula. It books accommodation for a €4 fee.

KERRY'S UNASSUMING EXPLORER

County Kildare may boast the great polar explorer Ernest Shackleton as a native son, but Kerry has its own polar hero, Tom Crean, who was a key member of several early Antarctic expeditions.

Crean (1877–1938) came from Gurtacurran, near Annascaul on the Dingle Peninsula. At age 15 he joined the British Navy, and was later a member of three of the four British Antarctic expeditions in the vessels *Discovery* (1901–04), *Terra Nova* (1910–13) and *Endurance* (1914–16).

Robert Falcon Scott and Shackleton both saw Tom Crean as a crucial member of their rival expeditions. Shackleton's letters to Crean reflect immense warmth and liking for the Kerryman, whose physical and mental strengths were outstanding. When the *Endurance* was trapped and crushed in ice and the crew sailed in small boats to Elephant Island, Shackleton chose Crean as one of the small crew that continued on the epic 1300km sea voyage to South Georgia to get help.

Crean served in WWI and retired in 1920. Shackleton wanted his fellow countryman to accompany him on his final expedition on the *Quest* in 1921, but Crean declined, having spent more time in Antarctica than either Scott or Shackleton. He opened the South Pole Inn (p292) at Annascaul, married and had three daughters.

It wasn't until decades later that biographer Michael Smith shone some light on the quiet and unassuming explorer's extraordinary achievements. 'No one made much of a fuss about him locally,' says the current landlord of the South Pole Inn. 'He was just one of the lads who went away... and then came home.' His name lives on in South Georgia's Crean Glacier and Mt Crean in Victoria Land, Antarctica.

Sights

FUNGIE THE DOLPHIN

In the early 1980s, Dingle fishing crews began to notice a solitary bottlenose dolphin that followed their vessels, jumped about in the water and sometimes leapt over smaller boats. When an American tourist offered to pay a boatman to take him to visit the large, friendly dolphin, an industry was born. Eleven boats now go out every day in the summer, and the Dingle dolphin is an international celebrity.

Boats leave the pier daily for one-hour dolphin-spotting trips; call **Dingle Boatmen's Association** (☎ 915 2626; adult/child €16/8). It's free if Fungie doesn't show, but he usually does. The association also runs a daily two-hour boat trip for enthusiasts who want to **swim with Fungie** (per person €25, plus wetsuit hire adult €25, child €15–20; ☎ 8am Jun–Aug, 9am rest of the year). Organise it in advance through **Brosnan's** (☎ 915 1967; Coleen), where you can hire wetsuits and snorkelling gear.

DINGLE OCEANWORLD

This **aquarium** (☎ 915 2111; www.dingle-oceanworld.ie; Dingle Harbour; adult/child/family €11/6.50/30; ☎ 10am–8.30pm Jul & Aug, to 6pm rest of year) is a lot of fun. Psychedelic fish glide through tanks re-creating environments such as Lake Malwai, the River Congo and the piranha-filled Amazon.

Reef sharks and stingrays cruise the shark tank; water is pumped out of the harbour for the spectacularly ugly wreck fish. There's a walk-through tunnel and a touch pool.

OTHER SIGHTS

Next to **St Mary's Church** on Green St is the **Trinity Tree**, a sculpture representing the Holy Trinity, made from an unusual three-trunk sycamore. With its carved faces, it looks like something out of a fairy tale.

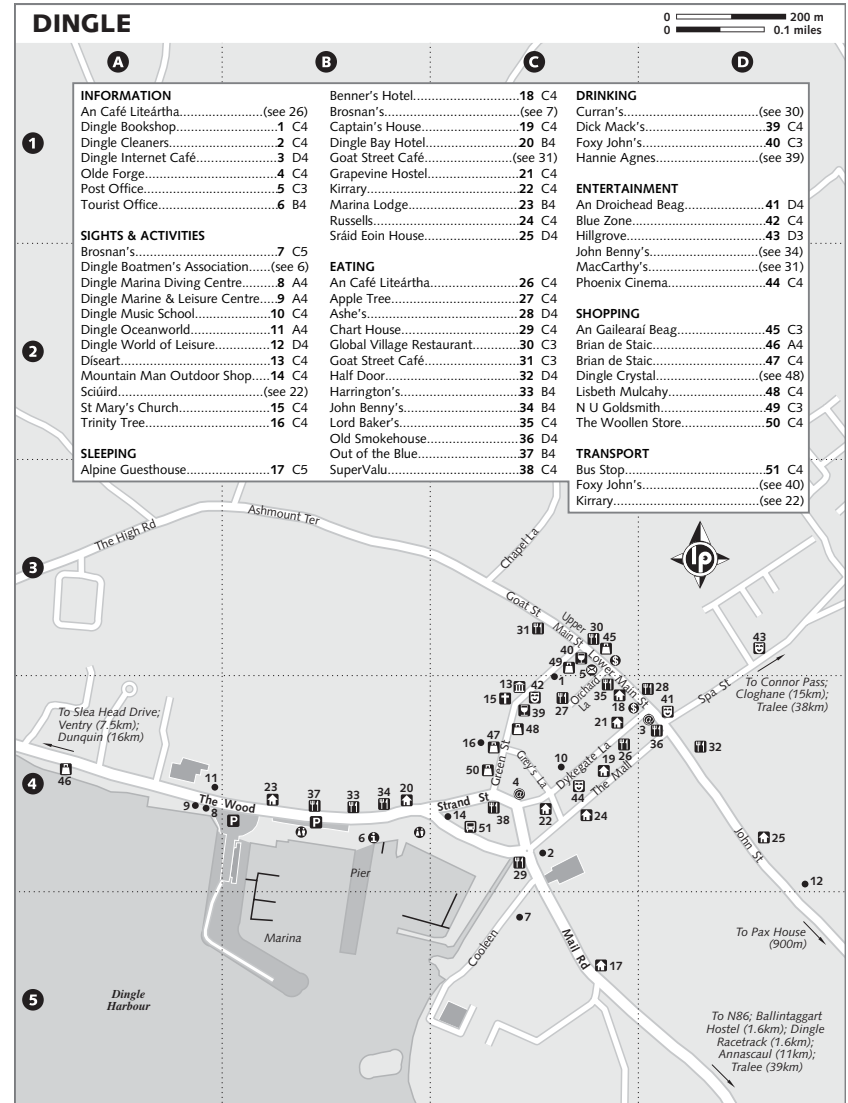
In the former convent, on the other side of the church, is the Celtic culture centre **Diseart** (☎ 915 2476; adult/child/family €3.50/2/10; ☎ 9am–1pm & 2–5pm), which has stained-glass windows by Harry Clarke (p249).

Every second weekend in August the **Dingle Races** bring crowds from far and wide. The racetrack is 1.6km east of town on the N86.

The **Dingle Regatta**, a race in the harbour in traditional Irish *currach* (or *naomhóg*) canoes, is Kerry's largest such event, held at the end of August.

Activities

Mountain Man Outdoor Shop (☎ 915 2400; Strand St) is a shopfront for **Adventure Dingle** (www.adventuredingle.com), which offers all sorts of adventure packages including rock climbing, sailing, horse riding, multi-adventure and boat trips to the Blaskets. It also takes



bookings for **Dingle Horse Riding** (☎ 915 2199; Ballinaboola; 1hr €30), which organises mountain treks, beach rides and peninsula tours.

Snorkelling and scuba diving in Dingle Bay and around the Blasket Islands, courses and wreck dives can be arranged at **Dingle Marina Diving Centre** (☎ 915 2789; the Wood).

Dingle Marine & Leisure (☎ 915 1344; the Wood) runs full- and half-day deep-sea angling trips from €45.

In July and August, **Dingle Music School** (☎ 086-319 0438; Dykegate Lane) offers beginners' workshops in bodhrán (from €12; noon Tue, Wed & Thu, 11am Sat) and tin whistle (€25; 11am Mon). Bodhráns are supplied.

Dingle World of Leisure (☎ 915 660; John St) has a swimming pool and spa, ten-pin bowling, and a childrens' play area.

Walking Tours

Two-hour Dingle **walking tours** (☎ 9152476; Green St; €8) depart from Discart (see p286) at 11am, Monday to Friday.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Grapevine Hostel (☎ 915 1434; www.grapevinedingle.com; Dykegate Lane; dm €16-18, tw €21) Tucked away near the centre of town, this dinky hostel has blue linen on the wooden bunks, en-suite bathrooms with shoddy sliding doors and a fire-lit lounge.

Ballintaggart Hostel (☎ 915 1454; www.dingleaccommodation.com; Racecourse Rd; camp sites €18, dm €13.20-20, s €40-70, d €50-75; ☹ May-Sep; Ⓟ) This 120-bed hostel, housed in a 300-year-old hunting lodge off the N86 1.6km east of Dingle, has the delightful air of a storybook boarding school. There's a pool table in the stone-floored kitchen and a cobbled yard with giant urns, used when the building was a soup kitchen during the Famine. The en-suite dorms are spacious and there are laundry facilities.

Brosnan's (☎ 915 1146; Cooleen; s/d €40/70) Flowery décor is *de rigueur* in this friendly, great-value B&B.

There are a few basic rooms above **Goat Street Café** (☎ 915 2770; Goat St; r €20).

MIDRANGE

The tourist town has plenty of midrange B&Bs, many resting on their laurels. There are, however, some first-class places.

Kirrary (☎ 915 1606; Avondale; collinskirrary@eircom.net; s/d €45/76; Ⓟ) You'll get plenty of chat and info at this cheerful place. Rooms are a reasonable size and the breakfast is hefty. The proprietor (that's him in the photos with Tom Cruise and Neil Armstrong) offers bike hire and tours to Sleah Head.

Marina Lodge (☎ 915 0800; www.dinglemarina.lodge.com; the Wood; s/d €50-60/100-120; Ⓟ) A clean-cut building on the waterfront with a neat, modern interior. This is the sprightliest B&B in town.

Russells (☎ 915 1747; maryr@iol.ie; the Mall; s/d €50/80) The welcome is lukewarm in this lime-green B&B, but the modern rooms are tastefully decorated and the extensive

breakfast menu includes kippers, salmon and French toast.

Sráid Eoin House (☎ 915 1409; www.sraideoinnb.com; John St; s/d €55/70; ☹ Mar-Oct; Ⓟ) Above a travel agency at the quiet end of town, with a buffet breakfast bar to tuck into before plunging into the full Irish.

Alpine Guesthouse (☎ 915 1250; www.alpineguesthouse.com; Mail Rd; s/d €60/110; Ⓟ) This 45-year-old favourite has bright rooms and a good selection of breakfasts including scrambled eggs and oak-smoked salmon. Friendly owner Paul O'Shea is a mine of fungi trivia.

TOP END

Pax House (☎ 915 1518; www.pax-house.com; Upper John St; s €45-80, d €90-160; Ⓟ) From its highly individual décor (all bold colours and bright paintings), to the outstanding views over the estuary, Pax House is a treat. It's 1km from the town centre.

Captain's House (☎ 915 1531; captigh@eircom.net; the Mall; s/d €65/110; ☹ mid-Mar-mid-Nov; Ⓟ) A stream-side garden and beautiful interior furnishings make this handsome house a great choice.

Dingle Bay Hotel (☎ 915 1231; www.dinglebayhotel.com; Strand St; s €105-120, d €150-180; Ⓟ) It's business chic with flourishes in the 25 light, modern rooms, which are crammed with amenities. Prices fall significantly in the quieter months.

our pick Benner's Hotel (☎ 915 1638; www.dinglebenners.com; Main St; s€115-127, d€180-204; Ⓟ) A Dingle institution melding old-world elegance, local touches and modern comforts in the quiet rooms, lounge, library, bar and restaurant. Prices drop by 20% in spring and autumn, and by nearly half in winter.

Eating

For self-catering, there's a big SuperValu supermarket in Holyground. The garage just past the big roundabout on Mail Rd has a shop and sandwich bar.

The waterfront is lined with eateries specialising in seafood and tourists, among them the funky blue-and-yellow **Out of the Blue** (☎ 915 0811) and Apple Tree's sister establishment **Harrington's** (☎ 915 1985).

BUDGET

John Benny's (☎ 915 1215; Strand St; snacks €3-5, mains €10-17.50; ☹ 12.30pm-9.15pm) Friendly Benny's manages to not be too touristy despite its seafront location. The popular pub rolls out

stodgy classics including fillets, ribs, strip loins, curries, stews, bacon and cabbage, fish and chips, and sandwiches.

An Café Liteártha (☎ 915 2204; Dykegate Lane; snacks €3-6; ☹ 9am-6pm) Prices don't change much at this delightful spot where you can relax at the back of a bookshop, engulfed in the spirit of literary Dingle.

Goat Street Café (☎ 915 2770; Goat St; snacks & mains €4-11; ☹ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) This cheerful little café struggles when busy, but is a popular pit stop for soups and salads, tarts and tagine.

Apple Tree (☎ 915 0804; Orchard Lane; mains €7-10; ☹ 9am-6pm) Homemade chips and desserts, including deep-fried Mars Bars, make this a top-notch no-frills café.

MIDRANGE

Old Smokehouse (☎ 915 1061; Lower Main St; lunch €6-10, dinner €15-23; ☹ 6.30pm-10pm Apr-May & Sep-Oct, 12.30pm-10pm Jun-Aug) The food, like the décor and service, is unfussily pleasant. Meat dishes, such as local lamb with sage and mustard dumplings, outnumber the seafood choices. Get there early to grab a table in the conservatory overlooking the stream.

Ashe's (☎ 915 0989; Main St; mains €16-29; ☹ noon-3pm & 6-9pm Mon-Sat) Owned by a distant relation of Gregory Peck, this gastro-pub serves modern cuisine in old-fashioned surrounds. The universally recommended food ranges from beef and Guinness stew to Spanish fish stew. Vegetarians and seafood-lovers will be happy.

Lord Baker's (☎ 915 1277; Lower Main St; bar menu €7-24, mains €17-30; ☹ 6-10pm Fri-Wed) Established as a pub in 1890 by its namesake, this Dingle institution has a cheerful turf fire and a splendid menu that wastes no energy on purple prose. The excellent choice includes brill, salmon and lobster, Kerry lamb, steak and poultry.

our pick Global Village Restaurant (☎ 915 2325; Main St; mains €18-24, early bird €21-23; ☹ 6-9.30pm Mar-May, 5-10pm Jun-Sep) With the sophisticated feel of a continental bistro, this restaurant offers a fusion of global recipes gathered by the well-travelled owner-chef, whose CD and art collections are also eclectic. Vegetarians are well catered for. Try the Glenbeigh oysters starter.

The Chart House (☎ 915 2255; Mail Rd; mains €19-29; ☹ 6.30-10pm Wed-Sun, closed Jan) This low-lying stone building near the roundabout is regarded locally as the place to spoil yourself. Book ahead to ensure you don't miss out on

dishes such as Basket Islands lamb, tartlet of wild mushroom and tarragon, turbot, sea bass and skate.

Half Door (☎ 915 1600; John St; mains €22-50, set menu €25; ☹ 12.30-2.30pm Mon-Sat, 5.30-10pm Mon-Sun) Fish and shellfish are superbly presented at this outstanding seafood restaurant, which is among a cluster of quality eateries. Spoil yourself and go for lobster thermidor, or mussels in a garlic and wine sauce. There are meat and duck dishes too, and the surroundings are suitably cosy.

Drinking

Dingle has over 50 pubs, many of them mongrel affairs that double as shops. Two wonderful examples of this on Main Street are **Foxy John's** (☎ 915 1316) and **Curran's** (☎ 915 1110), which respectively sell hardware and outdoor clothing. At night, you can sit behind the shop counters.

Dick Mack's (☎ 915 1960; Green St) Announced by stars in the pavement bearing the names of its celebrity customers from Robert Mitchum to Julia Roberts, this lively pub and leather shop sees impromptu sessions.

Hannie Agnes (☎ 087-949 0832; Green St) Local haunt that's known for its smooth Guinness and, during the summer, trad sessions and Irish coffee. It used to be the coffin-maker's shop; the coffins are reinstalled for the Halloween party.

Entertainment

MacCarthy's (☎ 915 1205; www.maccarthyspub.com; Goat St) Popular bar containing one of Ireland's smallest venues. There is music at the weekends - check the website.

John Benny's (☎ 915 1215; Strand St) Lively trad, set dancing and signing are on offer from 9.30pm Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.

An Droichead Beag (Small Bridge Bar; ☎ 915 1723; Lower Main St) Traditional music kicks off at 9.30pm nightly at this raucous pub by the bridge.

Blue Zone (☎ 915 0303; Green St; ☹ 6pm-1am Tue-Thu, 6pm-2am Fri & Sat, 6pm-12.30am Sun) Late-night hangout with Coronoa, San Miguel and pizzas on the menu, and live music on Tuesday and Thursday.

Hillgrove (☎ 915 1131; Spa St) There's a break from traditional Dingle at nightclub Hillgrove, where chart sounds rule nightly

in summer, and at weekends the rest of the year.

CINEMAS

Phoenix Cinema (☎ 915 1222; Dykegate Lane; ticket €6.50) Screens Hollywood films.

Shopping

The Woolen Store (☎ 915 0692; Green St) Has a great selection of hats, jumpers, hooded tops and shawls, some with fleece linings to prevent that wool itch.

Lisbeth Mulcahy (☎ 915 1688; Green St) Beautiful scarves, rugs and wall hangings are created on a 150-year-old loom by this long-established designer. Also sold here are ceramics by her husband, who has a workshop at Louis Mulcahy Pottery (p295), west of Dingle.

An Gailearaí Beag (☎ 915 2976; Main St) A showcase for the work of the West Kerry Craft Guild, selling ceramics, paintings, wood carvings, photography, batik, jewellery, stained glass and much more.

N U Goldsmith (☎ 915 2217; Green St) Original jewellery by Niamh Utsch is on display at this stylish little gallery. Individual pieces start at €40 and keep rising.

Brian de Staic (☎ 915 1298; www.briandestaic.com; Green St) This local jewellery designer's exquisite modern Celtic work includes symbols, crosses and standing stones. The company also has a shop on the Wood.

Dingle Crystal (☎ 915 1550; Green St) Biker-cum-master craftsman Seán Daly worked at Waterford Crystal for 15 years before setting up here 10 years ago. There are demonstrations on the premises and tours of the nearby workshop.

Getting There & Away

Bus Éireann (☎ 712 3566) buses stop outside the car park behind the supermarket. There are four buses daily Monday to Saturday from Dingle to Tralee, and three on Sunday (€9). Between Monday and Saturday, June to September, four daily services link Dingle and Killarney (€11) via Inch. Otherwise, change in Tralee.

There are eight buses a week to Dunquin and Ballydavid, on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

Getting Around

Dingle is easily navigated on foot. For a taxi call **Dingle Co-op Cabs** (☎ 087-2225777), which can also give private tours of the peninsula.

Bike-hire places include **Kirrany** (☎ 915 1606; Avondale; per day €8) and **Foxy John's** (☎ 915 1316; Main St; per day €10).

NORTHSIDE OF THE PENINSULA

There are two routes from Tralee to Dingle, both following the same road out of Tralee past the Blennerville Windmill. Near the village of Camp, a right fork heads to the Connor Pass, while the N86 via Annascaul takes you to Dingle more quickly. The Connor Pass route is much more beautiful. At Kilcummin, a road heads west to the quiet villages of Cloghane and Brandon, and finally to Brandon Point and its fine views of Brandon Bay.

Castlegregory

☎ 066 / pop 940

Castlegregory (Caislean an Ghriare), which once rivalled Tralee as a busy local centre, is a quiet village enlivened only by the occasional souped-up car, driven by young men desperately searching for kicks among the hedgerows. However, things change when you drive up the sandstrewn road along the Rough Point peninsula, the broad spit of land between Tralee Bay and Brandon Bay. Up here, it's a playground. Not content with being a prime windsurfing location, the peninsula sees strange new sports like wavesailing and kitesurfing. Divers can glimpse pilot whales, orcas, sunfish and dolphins. In the pub, the many-accented babble tells of a community of people who came for a day and couldn't face leaving the playground.

Jamie Knox Watersports (☎ 713 9411; www.jamieknox.com; Brandon Bay) offers surf, windsurf, kitesurf, canoe and pedalo hire and lessons. Halfway along the peninsula, the centre runs a B&B (s/d €48/76) between Easter and November.

Beyond Rough Point are the seven **Maharees Islands**. The largest of the 'hogs', as the islands are known locally, is Illauntannig. The remains of a 6th-century monastic settlement there include a stone cross, a church and beehive huts. Two small adjoining islands can be reached on foot from Illauntannig at low tide, but make sure you know exactly what the tide is doing. The islands are privately owned, but trips (taking about 10 minutes) can be arranged through Castle House (opposite), or through Har-

bour House (below) in conjunction with a **scuba diving** trip. There is great underwater visibility, making this one of Ireland's best diving areas.

SLEEPING & EATING

Anchor Caravan Park (☎ 713 9157; www.caravanparksireland.net; camp sites €16-18; ☎ Easter-Sep) A park with well-kept facilities. Set in a sheltered wooded area near the beach, it's signposted from the R560 southeast of Castlegregory.

Castle House (☎ 713 9183; www.castlehouse-bnb.com; s/d €50/75; ☎) Located at the start of the road along the Rough Point peninsula, this handsome house has six rooms with antique dressers, comfortable chairs and sparkling bathrooms. The beach is minutes away on a path through the fields.

Harbour House (☎ 713 9292; www.maharees.ie; Scraggane Pier; s/d €57/94; ☎) This busy B&B and its attached restaurant are in a great position overlooking the Maharees Islands, 5km north of Castlegregory near the end of the peninsula. It's also a diving centre, running PADI courses, and has excellent facilities, including an indoor pool and fitness room.

Spillane's (☎ 713 9125; Fahamore; bar meals €6-23, mains €11-22; ☎ 4pm-9pm Apr & May, Sep & Oct, 1pm-9pm Jun-Aug, 6pm-9pm Nov-Mar) Outside tables overlook the beach, bay and mountains; inside, the usual bar-propping Guinness-swillers look on as feral children tear past waitresses serving scampi, burgers and all the pub stalwarts. You have to shout to get served in this place.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

On Fridays, the Tralee-Cloghane bus stops in Castlegregory, leaving at 8.55am and 2pm. In the other direction, it stops in Castlegregory at 10.35am. More services pass through Camp, 10km southeast on the N86.

Cloghane

☎ 066 / pop 275

Cloghane (An Clochán) is another little piece of utopia hiding on the Dingle Peninsula. The village's friendly pubs and accommodation nestle between Mount Brandon and Brandon Bay, with views across the water to the Stradbally mountains. If you don't fancy scaling Mount Brandon, there are plenty of coastal strolls.

On the last weekend in July, Cloghane celebrates the ancient Celtic harvest festival **Lughnasa** (☎ 713 8277; www.irishceltifest.com), with

events both in the village and atop Mount Brandon. In late August, the Brandon Regatta is a race in traditional *currach* canoes.

Cloghane has a **tourist office** (☎ 713 8137; ☎ May-Sep) opposite the church. Its roof had blown off at the time of research, but the villagers were fixing it. You can buy the *Cloghane and Brandon Walking Guide* (€4), with details of the trails you'll see signposted, and *Loch a'Dúin Archaeological and Nature Trail* (€4) at the tourist office, or at accommodation in the village.

There is a post office in the village shop, attached to Mount Brandon Hostel.

The vacuum-silent **St Brendan's Church** has a stained-glass window showing the Gallarus Oratory and Ardfert Cathedral.

SLEEPING & EATING

Mount Brandon Hostel (☎ 713 8299; www.mountbrandonhostel.com; dm/s/tw €18/25/40; ☎ Mar-Jan ☎) A small, simple hostel with scrubbed wooden floors and furniture, and a patio overlooking the bay. Treatments such as Shiatsu massage are available.

Benagh (☎ 713 8142; mcmorran@eircom.net; s/d €35/70; ☎) At the foot of Mt Brandon, 500m northeast of the village, this purpose-built B&B has four breezy rooms with skylights in the low pine ceilings and sweeping bay views. The friendly owners have great knowledge of local archaeology and ecology, and can organise guided walks.

O'Connors (☎ 713 8113; www.cloghane.com; s €40-50, d €70-90; meals €14-17; ☎) Book ahead to bag a room or a table in this welcoming village pub, which serves evening meals made with local produce from salmon to steak between 7pm and 9.30pm. Landlord Michael is an opencast mine of local information. There is also a camp site with pressurised showers (€7 per person).

Crutch's Hillville House Hotel (☎ 713 8118; www.irishcountryhotels.com; Connor Pass Rd, Kilcummin; s/d €50/100; mains €17-23; ☎) Built in 1833 by alcoholic aristocracy and later tinkered with by a retired army captain who used railway tracks for beams, this blue-and-white, creeper-covered hotel is a bastion of upper-crust eccentricity. Many of the modern rooms have four-poster beds. Breakfast is included in the room rate; dinner is available in the restaurant overlooking the sycamore-ringed lawn.

WALK: MT BRANDON

At 951m, **Mt Brandon** (Cnoc Bhréannain) is Ireland's 8th highest peak. It's made up of a beautiful series of high summits that lie along the edge of a spectacular series of east-facing cliffs and steep ridges above a rocky lake-filled valley. An ascent of the mountain is a serious all-day trip. You should be well-equipped with weatherproof clothing and mountain boots, even in summer. Above all you should be experienced in the use of a map (Ordnance Survey Map No 70) and compass because thick mist can develop quickly, as can wind and rain. Allow at least six to seven hours return.

A popular route from the west is the Saint's Rd, which starts at Kilmalkedar Church (p296). To avoid 274m-high Reenconnell, start the trail at the large Mt Brandon car park, signposted from the Dingle-Feohanagh road. It's a straightforward 6km slog there and back, well marked with 14 crosses interspersed with white markers, and takes five hours return.

The classic way up Mt Brandon starts from Faha (OS reference 493120) above Cloghane. (You can drive there. If you walk, the steep 2km adds a couple of hours onto the six-hour there-and-back climb from Faha.) To reach Faha, take the turn left (signposted 'Cnoc Bhréannain'), about 200m northeast of Cloghane school, and follow the narrow lane to a T-junction. Turn left again and carry on until you reach the Faha road-end parking area. From here, it's a fairly tough 7km to the summit and back.

Walk left up the track above the car park and follow the obvious path past a grotto onto the open mountain. The rocky path is very clear. Occasional guide poles mark the way along a rising grassy ridge, with a magnificent line of cliffs and ridges ahead. The path contours around rocky slopes before descending into the glaciated wilderness at the valley head, from where it winds between great boulders and slabs. Yellow arrows on the rocks point the way.

When the back wall is reached, the path zigzags very steeply to the rim of the great cliffs. Turn left at the top and head for the summit of Mt Brandon, marked by a trigonometry point or pillar, a wooden cross, and the remains of Teampaillín Breanainn (St Brendan's Oratory). The views in clear weather from the summit are reverie-inducing, but be alert to the sudden edge of the cliffs. You can continue along the cliffs' edge to the subsidiary summits and Brandon Peak, 2km south, but this will add a couple of hours. Retracing your steps requires care and concentration on the initial steep zigzags. The rest of the way back to Faha is freewheeling.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

On Friday, bus 273 leaves Tralee at 8.55am and 2pm for Cloghane (1¼ hours). Returning, it leaves Cloghane at 10.05am and 3.10pm.

CONNOR PASS

At 456m, the Connor (or Conor) Pass is the highest in Ireland and offers spectacular views of Dingle Harbour to the south and Mt Brandon to the north. On a foggy day you'll see nothing but the road just in front of you. When visibility is good, the 10-minute climb from the car park near the summit is well worthwhile to see the tip of the peninsula spread out below you. The road has been improved on the south side but drivers should still take great care, particularly when descending.

TRALEE TO DINGLE VIA ANNASCAUL

For drivers, the N86 has little to recommend it other than being faster than the Connor Pass

route. By bike it's less demanding. On foot, the Dingle Way (p699) runs near the road for the first three days.

The main reason to pause in Annascaul (Abhainn an Scáil), also spelled Anascaul, is to visit the **South Pole Inn** (☎ 066-915 7388; Main St; bar meals €8-20; ☎ noon-8pm). Antarctic explorer Tom Crean (p286) ran the pub in his retirement. Now it's a regular Crean museum and giftshop, as well as a cracking pub serving hearty mains, puddings and a respectable Irish coffee. Ask to have the 'polar experience'.

Monday to Saturday, eight daily buses stop in Annascaul en route to Tralee or Dingle (six on Sunday).

KILLARNEY TO DINGLE VIA CASTLEMAINE

☎ 066

The quickest route from Killarney to Dingle passes through Killorglin and Castlemaine. At

Castlemaine, head west on the R561. You'll soon meet the coast, then go through Inch before joining the N86 to Dingle.

Castlemaine is well connected with Tralee, Killorglin, and Limerick via Killarney, but there are no buses from Castlemaine to Annascaul via Inch.

Mt Caherconree

About 11km west of Castlemaine is the turn-off for Mt Caherconree (825m), signposted as the scenic drive to Camp. About 4km along this road coming from the south is an Iron Age promontory fort that may have been built by Cúroir MacDáine, king of Munster. Whichever direction you come from, there are stunning views of Caherconree's sweeping slopes and the surrounding countryside. The narrow, exposed road demands concentration from drivers, so pull over if you want to take in the views.

Phoenix Vegetarian Restaurant & Accommodation (☎ 976 6284; www.thephoenixorganic.com; Shanahill East, Castlemaine; camp sites incl shower €14, r with/without bathroom €28/35, gypsy caravan €30; lunch €4-10, dinner €10-20; ☎ Easter-Oct; P) is a centre for all things creative and quirky, announced by a colourful mural overlooking the R561. The dance-teaching owner Lorna runs a dance centre here and there's a film club. The restaurant, open all year, specialises in vegetarian dishes using produce from the organic gardens. The rooms are delightful; sadly, the gypsy caravans and outside toilets were in an appalling state when we visited, though there were plans to do them up.

Inch

Inch's 5km-long **sand spit** was a location for both the leprechaunish *Ryan's Daughter* and more muscular *Playboy of the Western World*. Sarah Miles, love interest in the former film, described her stay here as 'brief but bonny'.

The dunes are certainly bonny, scattered with the remains of shipwrecks and Stone Age and Iron Age settlements. The west-facing beach is also a hot surfing spot; waves average 1m to 3m. **Westcoast Surf School** (☎ 086-306 7053) offers lessons and five-day kids' camps.

Cars are allowed on the beach, but be careful because vehicles regularly get stuck in the wet sand.

Sammy's (☎ 915 8118), at the entrance to the beach, is the nerve centre of the vil-

lage. The beach-facing bar/restaurant serves tucker from sandwiches and pasta to fresh oysters and mussels. There's a shop, tourist information, internet access (per hour €5), and trad sessions during the summer. The Pakistani-Irish proprietor's real name is Mahmood Hussein.

Camping (camp sites from €10) is possible in a field above the beach - ask at Sammy's. You can also camp in the dunes, which provide excellent shelter.

Moan Laur (☎ 915 8957; www.moanlaur-bnb.com; Slieve East; s/d €35/60), on the N86 to Camp, is a whitewashed, modernised cottage with views of the Slieve Mish Mountains, run by a friendly English couple.

Inch Beach Guest House (☎ 915 8333; www.inchbeachguesthouse.com; s €47-67, d €70-110) is all skylights, sea views and *Ryan's Daughter* memorabilia. The general breeziness is completed by attractive modern fittings.

Foley's (☎ 915 8117) is a popular watering hole overlooking grassy dunes.

WEST OF DINGLE

☎ 066

At the tip of the peninsula is the Slea Head drive along the R559. It has the greatest concentration of ancient sites in Kerry, if not the whole of Ireland. Specialist guides on sale in An Café Liteártha (p285) and the tourist office (p285) in Dingle list the most interesting and accessible sites.

This part of the peninsula is a Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking) area. The landscape is dramatic, especially in shifting mist, although full-on sea fog obliterates everything. For the best views, it's best to follow the Slea Head drive in a clockwise direction. Cross the bridge west of Dingle and keep straight on to Ventry (p294). Beyond Ventry the road hugs the coast past Dunbeg Fort (p294), then rou nd the rocky outposts of Slea Head (p294) and Dunmore Head (p294). Continuing along the coast to Dunquin (p294), then turning east to Ballyferriter (p295), the views of the Blasket Islands (p294) give way to views of 951m-high Mt Brandon (opposite) and its neighbours. Beyond Ballyferriter is the Gallarus Oratory (p296) and numerous other historic sites, not to mention a confusing clutter of lanes. From Gallarus, the R599 circles back to Dingle.

Ventry

pop 410

The village of Ventry (Ceann Trá) is next to a wide sandy bay.

A great base for exploring the area is **Ceann Trá Heights** (☎ 915 9866; www.iol.ie/~ventry; s/d €50/72; ☹ Mar-Nov), a comfortable, modern guesthouse overlooking Ventry Harbour.

Near Ceann Trá Heights is **Long's Riding Stables** (☎ 915 9723; 1hr/day €30/125), which offers mountain and beach treks.

Slea Head & Dunmore Head

Overlooking the mouth of Dingle Bay, Slea Head has fine beaches, good walks, and views of Mount Eagle and the Blasket Islands. It's understandably popular with coach parties.

Dunmore Head is the western-most point on the Irish mainland and the site of the wreckage in 1588 of two Spanish Armada ships.

About 7km southwest of Ventry on the road to Slea Head is the Iron Age **Dunbeg Fort**, a dramatic example of a promontory fortification, perched atop a sheer sea cliff. The fort has four outer walls of stone. Inside are the remains of a house and a beehive hut, as well as an underground passage.

On the inland side of the road is a car park and the **Stonehouse Restaurant** (☎ 915 9970; lunch €5-10, dinner €16-23), built in the Gallarus Oratory style. It has a good choice of coffee and cake, cream tea, and more substantial dishes.

The Slea Head area is dotted with **beehive huts, forts, inscribed stones and church sites**. The **Fahan huts**, including two fully intact huts, are 500m west of Dunbeg Fort on the inland side of the road.

When the kiosks are open, you'll be charged about €2 to €3 for entrance to the sights.

Dunquin

The main reason to come to Dunquin, a scattered village beneath Mount Eagle and Croaghmarhin, is to visit the Blasket Centre or catch a boat to the islands. A scenic road climbs through the mountains from Dunquin to Ventry.

The Blasket Centre (Ionad an Bhlascaoid Mhóir; ☎ 915 6444; adult/child €3.70/1.30; ☹ 10am-6pm Easter-Jun, Sep & Oct, 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, last admission 45 min before closing) is a wonderful interpretive centre in a long, white hall ending in a wall-to-ceiling window overlooking the islands. Great Blasket's rich community of storytellers and

musicians is profiled along with its literary visitors like John Millington Synge, writer of *Playboy of the Western World*. The more prosaic practicalities of island life are covered by exhibits on shipbuilding and fishing. There's a café with Blasket views, and a small bookshop.

Dunquin Hostel (☎ 915 6121; oigedun@eircom.net; dm €16; ☹ Feb-Nov; Ⓟ) has a terrific location, near the Blasket Centre and not too far from Dunquin Pier. There are stunning views. The An Óige member closes between 10am and 5pm.

Mustard-coloured **De Mórdha** (☎ 915 6276; ardaingeal@hotmail.com; s/d €40/60; ☹ Easter-Oct; Ⓟ) is a pleasant little B&B with all mod cons and great views.

An Portán (☎ 915 6212; www.anportan.com; lunch from €12, dinner €15-25; ☹ Easter-Sep; Ⓟ) serves traditional Irish meals with an international flavour. It has rooms in a complex separate from the restaurant.

Blasket Islands

The Blasket Islands (Na Blascaodaí), 5km out into the Atlantic, are the most westerly islands in Europe. At 6km by 1.2km, Great Blasket (An Blascaod Mór) is the largest and most visited, and is mountainous enough for strenuous walks, including a good one detailed in Kevin Corcoran's *Kerry Walks*. All of the Basketts were inhabited at one time or another; there is evidence of Great Blasket being inhabited during the Iron Age and early Christian times. The last islanders left for the mainland in 1953 after the government and the remaining inhabitants agreed that it was no longer feasible to live in such remote and harsh conditions.

You could camp on the islands, but there are no facilities. There's accommodation in Dunquin.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Weather permitting, ferries to Great Blasket operate Easter to September (return adult/child €30/15, 20 minutes). Boats leave Dunquin every 30 minutes, 9.55am to 6pm. **Dingle Marine & Leisure** (☎ 915 1344) operates ferries from Dingle (return adult/child €35/25, 35 minutes). Check on arrival when the last boat back is expected to leave.

Dingle Marine & Leisure, **Blasket Islands Eco Ventures** (☎ 915 6422) and **Blasket Islands Tours** (☎ 915 4864) offer 2½ hour cruises around the

THE BASKET WEAVER

The deserted village on Great Blasket might not look like the most inviting place to live, but for some 20 years Welsh immigrant Sue Redican has occupied one of the cottages between April and October.

Europe's most western resident has no electricity or phone line, but has candles for light, gas for cooking, and a mobile phone and VHF radio for communication. She stays there for as much of the year as she can, and once stayed for 10 months, although bad weather can cut her off from the mainland. 'I'd rather get stuck in than stuck out,' she says. Blasket inhabitants traditionally speak of going 'out' to the mainland and coming 'in' to the island.

'I feel alone rather than lonely here,' she says. 'You can have 400 seals on the beach sitting up and watching you, and in the past few weeks we've seen basking sharks and killer whales.' Sue also gets plenty of human company during the summer, when she sells her weaving to day-trippers and delivers her scones to the Blasket Islands Eco Ventures boat.

archipelago (adult/child €40/25), departing from Dunquin.

Ballyferriter

Continuing north from Dunquin, you pass the tiny settlement of Clogher, where the road turns inland to reach the Ballyferriter (Baile an Fheirtearaigh). It's named after Piaras Ferriter, a poet and soldier who emerged as a local leader in the 1641 rebellion and was the last Kerry commander to submit to Cromwell's army.

One of the most interesting potteries on the peninsula, **Louis Mulcahy Pottery** (☎ 915 6229; Clogher; ☹ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5.30pm Sat, 11am-5.30pm Sun Nov-Easter) has all sorts of pots, jugs, plates and some handsome clocks. Pieces have been sold or given to the likes of Bill Clinton and the Pope. Opening hours are longer in summer and autumn.

Just before Ballyferriter proper, a sign points to **Ceann Sibéal Golf Links** (☎ 915 6255; Jun-Sep €65, Oct-May €45, plus club hire year round €25), a wild and windy course adjoining **Ferriter's Cove**.

About 2.5km northeast of Ferriter's Cove is **Dún an Óir Fort** (Fort of Gold), the scene of a hideous massacre during the 1580 Irish rebellion against English rule. The fort was held by Sir James Fitzmaurice, who commanded an international brigade of Italians, Spaniards and Basques. On 7 November, English troops under Lord Grey attacked the fort; within three days the defenders surrendered. 'Then putt I in certeyn bandes who straight fell to execution. There were 600 slayne', said the poet Edmund Spenser, who was secretary to Lord Grey and patently not in a lyrical mood at the time.

All that remains of the fort is a network of grassy mounds, but it's a pretty spot overlooking Smerwick Harbour. About 2.5km north of Ballyferriter, near the golden Beal Bán beach, it's reasonably signposted from the main road. In the car park, opened in the 1980s by then-President Charles Haughey, there's a handsome memorial sculpture by Cliodna Cussen.

Dingle Peninsula Museum (Músaem Chorca Dhuibhne; ☎ 915 6100; adult/child €2.50/1.50; ☹ 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, by appointment rest of year) is housed in the 19th-century schoolhouse. It has displays on the archaeology and ecology of the peninsula.

Friendly **Ferriter's Cove** (☎ 915 6295; ferriterscove@eircom.net; Ballyyoughtra; s/d €40/70; Ⓟ) has sunny rooms with cheerful bedspreads and bay views. To get there, follow the signs to the golf club.

Free camping is possible near Ferriter's Cove but there are no facilities; ask locally before pitching.

In **Murphy's Bar** (Tigh Uí Mhurchú; ☎ 915 6224; snacks & mains €4-11; ☹), a stuffed fox with a pheasant in its jaws looks down on Gaeilge-speaking locals of all ages tucking into basic pub grub.

Riasec Monastic Settlement

The remains of this 5th- or 6th-century monastic settlement are one of the peninsula's more impressive and haunting sites, particularly the pillar with beautiful Celtic designs. Excavations have also revealed the foundations of an oratory first built with wood and later stone, a kiln for drying corn and a cemetery. The ruins are signposted as 'Mainistir Riasec' along a narrow lane off the R559, about 2km east of Ballyferriter.

Gallarus Oratory

This dry-stone oratory is quite a sight, standing in its lonely spot beneath the brown hills as it has done for some 1200 years. It has withstood the elements perfectly, apart from a slight sagging in the roof. Traces of mortar suggest that the interior and exterior walls may have been plastered. Shaped like an upturned boat, it has a doorway on the western side and a round-headed window on the eastern side. Inside the doorway are two projecting stones with holes that once supported the door.

The oratory is signposted off the R559, about 2km further on from the Riasc Monastic Settlement turn-off. The community-run **visitor centre** (☎ 915 5333; adult/child €3/2.50; 🕒 9am-8pm) charges for access to the oratory, car park and a 15-minute audio-visual display. It has a shop and seasonal café.

You can access the oratory for free by continuing uphill to a small parking area on the left. However, in the summer it's worth noting that this parking space is limited and congestion caused by cars in the lane is a problem.

Europe's most westerly camp site, **Oratory House Camping** (Campail Teach An Aragail; ☎ 915 5143; www.dingleactivities.com; Gallarus; camp sites from €17; 🕒 Apr-Sep), is 300m from the Gallarus Oratory. It's a source of much local information on a mass of activities, especially walking.

Bus 277 leaves Dingle at 9am and drops off at Gallarus 10 minutes later on Tuesday and Friday only. From Gallarus it leaves at 1.25pm.

Kilmalkedar Church

This 12th-century church was once part of a complex of religious buildings. The characteristic Romanesque doorway has a tympanum with a head in the centre. There is an Ogham stone, pierced by a hole, in the grounds, as well as a very early sundial. Nearby is a restored two-storey building known as **St Brendan's House**, which is believed to have been the residence of the medieval clergy. The track to the right of this is the **Saint's Rd**, the traditional approach to Mt Brandon (p292). Parking is limited.

From Gallarus Oratory, the R559 goes north to the little village of Murreagh. The church is about 2km east of the village.

Following the R559 southeast for 8km from Kilmalkedar takes you back to Dingle.

Getting There & Away

Two Buses leave Dingle on Monday and Thursday for Dunquin via Ballyferriter. One of them also stops in Ventry. There are two buses on Tuesday and Friday to Ballydavid, one via Gallarus. The services return the same day. For more details contact **Bus Éireann** (☎ 716 4700) in Tralee.