

# County Kilkenny



For many, County Kilkenny is all that they hope for in Ireland. It's a place of rolling green hills where you'll soon run out of adjectives for green. Tiny roads wander the valleys beside swirling rivers and moss-covered stone walls. Relics of centuries of Irish religious history dot the landscape as if part of one great beautiful design.

Wanderers and ramblers are rewarded by characterful pubs and exquisite restaurants scattered across the countryside, seemingly placed to reward those willing to take the road less travelled. Shamrock-cute Inistioge may be star of many a movie, but it's the real deal, and you'll soon find your own rhythm among the tidy shop fronts, mannered square and surging River Nore.

Perhaps Kilkenny's beauty and its inherent reward of discovery is why so many artists and craftspeople make their home in the county. In towns like Bennettsbridge and Thomastown, you'll find wonderfully skilled people busy creating in their studios. Or maybe they're just inspired by Kilkenny's pride itself, its namesake city.

An enduring gift of the Normans, Kilkenny city lures visitors by the score who find it hard to escape its pleasures. Medieval alleys wind among its castle, cathedral and ruined abbeys. But it's no static postcard – an alluring mix of superb restaurants, beguiling pubs and artisan vendors keeps things dynamic.

From bucolic delights to citified fun, Kilkenny is a dream.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Consumption** Enjoying bounteous food and drink in medieval Kilkenny city (p330)
- **Creation** Admiring the creative arts found at the Kilkenny Design Centre (p332)
- **Erection** Discovering the moody Cistercian ruins of Jerpoint Abbey (p334)
- **Perambulation** Enjoying walks in and around cute little Inistioge (p335) and tongue-twisting Graigueanamagh (p336)
- **Predilection** Shopping for the crafts and produce of creative locals in Thomastown (p334) and Bennettsbridge (p333)



■ POPULATION: 75,500

■ AREA: 1274 SQ KM

## KILKENNY CITY

☎ 056 / pop 9100

Kilkenny figures high on many an itinerary to Ireland and for good reason: it's a fairly compact showplace with easily enjoyed heritage, a castle, interesting shops, a wide range of restaurants, lots of pubs and many inviting places to stay.

You can cover pretty much everything on foot in a couple of hours, but sampling the many delights will take much longer. There's an elegance and vibrancy that give the town (oops, locals insist on 'city') a timeless appeal.

Much of Kilkenny's architectural charm owes a huge debt to the Middle Ages, when the city was a seat of political power. But time has not passed the city by. Kilkenny remains a cultural centre, renowned for its devotion to the arts. Its cobbled pedestrian passageways and old-fashioned shop fronts may look like the way to a mysterious time-warp realm, but in reality they lead to cool bars, stylish boutiques and interesting restaurants. Kilkenny has plenty of modern allure, but it didn't sell out its traditional charms to get here.

Kilkenny's 60-odd licensed pubs and bars are a cheery mix of its gregarious citizens and the hordes of out-of-town merrymakers there for a fun-filled weekend. Along High St, every odd address appears to be a pub, and visitors staying near the centre can carouse from watering hole to watering hole.

Presiding over the town is a splendid medieval cathedral, named after St Canice (Cainneach or Kenneth), who founded a monastery here in the 6th century; hence the city's Irish name, Cill Chainnigh. The town's other 'must-see' attraction is its mighty castle (although it's more mansion than fortress), which sits majestically on a sweep in the River Nore.

As if being medieval isn't enough, Kilkenny is also sometimes called the 'marble city' because of the local black limestone, which resembles a slate-coloured marble. This attractive stone is seen to most striking effect in the cathedral, and is used on floors and in decorative trim all over town.

Kilkenny can get crowded. If possible, try for a weekday or sometime out of sea-

son, when you'll have more opportunity to appreciate the timeless charms.

## HISTORY

In the 5th century, St Kieran is said to have visited Kilkenny and, on the site of the present Kilkenny Castle, challenged the chieftains of Ossory to accept the Christian faith. Subsequently, St Canice established his monastery here. Kilkenny consolidated its importance in the 13th century under William Marshall, the earl of Pembroke and son-in-law of the Anglo-Norman conqueror Strongbow. Kilkenny Castle was built to secure a crossing point on the Nore.

During the Middle Ages, Kilkenny was intermittently the unofficial capital of Ireland, with its own Anglo-Norman parliament. In 1366 the parliament passed the so-called Statutes of Kilkenny, a set of Draconian laws aimed at preventing the assimilation of the increasingly assertive Anglo-Normans into Irish society. Anglo-Normans were prohibited from marrying the native Irish, taking part in Irish sports, speaking or dressing like the Irish or playing any Irish music. Any breach of the law was to result in the confiscation of Anglo-Norman property and death to the native Irish. Although the laws remained theoretically in force for more than 200 years, they were never enforced with any great effect and did little to halt the absorption of the Anglo-Normans into Irish culture.

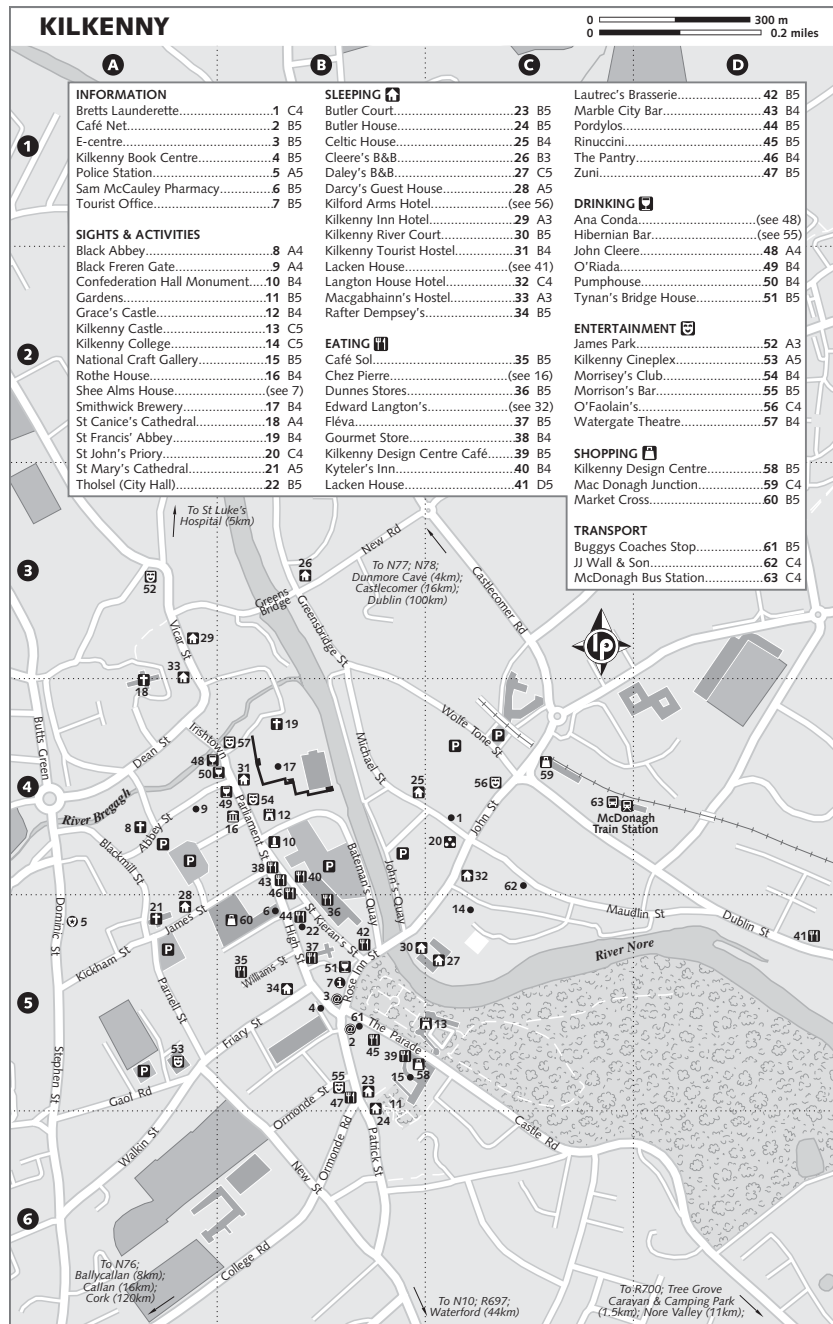
During the 1640s, Kilkenny sided with the Catholic royalists in the English Civil War. The 1641 Confederation of Kilkenny, an uneasy alliance of native Irish and Anglo-Normans, aimed to bring about the return of land and power to Catholics. After Charles I's execution, Cromwell besieged Kilkenny for five days, destroying much of the southern wall of the castle before Ormond surrendered. The defeat signalled a permanent end to Kilkenny's political influence over Irish affairs.

Today Kilkenny enjoys a vibrant economy thanks to all those visitors crowding the streets. There's also a fair number of service industries about and it's the regional centre for more traditional pursuits like agriculture (you'll see farmers on tractors stoically dodging tour buses).

## ORIENTATION

At the junction of several major highways, Kilkenny straddles the River Nore, which





playground to the south. The castle's former stables are now home to the intriguing Kilkenny Design Centre (see p332).

### St Canice's Cathedral

Soaring over the north end of the centre is Ireland's second-largest medieval cathedral (after St Patrick's in Dublin), **St Canice's Cathedral** (☎ 776 4971; www.stcanicescathedral.ie; St Canice's Pl; adult/child €4/3; 🕒 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 2-6pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Sun Oct-Mar). This Gothic edifice with its iconic round tower has had a long and fascinating history. Legend has it that the first monastery was built here in the 6th century by St Canice, Kilkenny's patron saint. Records show that a wooden church on the site was burned down in 1087.

The existing structure was raised between 1202 and 1285, but then endured a series of catastrophes and resurrections. The first disaster, the collapse of the church tower in 1332, was the consequence of one of the city's more intriguing events. Dame Alice Kyteler, along with her maid, was convicted of witchcraft. Dame Alice's nephew, William Outlawe, also was implicated. The unfortunate maid was burned at the stake, but Dame Alice escaped to London and William spared himself by offering to re-roof part of St Canice's Cathedral with lead tiles. Town officials unwisely took him up on the offer and the new roof proved too heavy, bringing the church tower down with it.

In 1650 Cromwell's forces defaced and damaged the church, using it to stable their horses. Repairs began in 1661 and are still ongoing. The beautiful roof in the nave was completed in 1863. Also worth a look is a model of Kilkenny as it was in 1642 – things haven't changed that much.

Outside the cathedral, a 30m-high **round tower** (admission €3; 🕒 Apr-Oct) rises amid an odd array of ancient tombstones and is the oldest structure within the grounds. It was built sometime between AD 700 and 1000 on the site of an earlier Christian cemetery. Apart from missing its crown, the round tower is in excellent condition and those older than 12 can admire a fine view from the top. It's a tight squeeze and you'll need both hands to climb the 100 steps up steep ladders. The approach to the cathedral on foot from Parliament St leads you over Irishtown Bridge and up St Canice's Steps, which date from 1614; the wall at the top contains fragmen-

tary medieval carvings. On gloomy days the leaning tombstones scattered about the grounds prompt you to look at the very least for a black cat.

Inside, highly polished ancient **grave slabs** are set on the walls and the floor. On the northern wall, opposite the entrance, a slab inscribed in Norman French commemorates Jose de Keteller, who died in 1280; despite the difference in spelling he was probably the father of Alice Kyteler. The stone chair of St Kieran embedded in the wall dates from the 13th century. The fine 1596 monument to Honorina Grace at the western end of the southern aisle is made of beautiful local black limestone. In the southern transept, a handsome **black tomb** has effigies of Piers Butler, who died in 1539, and his wife, Margaret Fitzgerald. Tombs and monuments (listed on a board in the southern aisle) to other notable Butlers crowd this corner of the church.

### Rothe House

The best surviving example of a 16th-century merchant's house in Ireland is **Rothe House** (☎ 772 2893; www.rothehouse.com; Parliament St; adult/child €4/3, combo tickets with the cathedral are available; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 3-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, 10.30-4.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar). The fine Tudor house was built around a series of courtyards and now houses a museum with a sparse collection of local artefacts, including a well-used Viking sword found nearby and a grinning head sculpted from a stone by a Celtic artist. The fine king-post roof of the 2nd floor is a meticulous and impressive reconstruction. A costume exhibit on the 1st floor is primarily good for mild laughs, with its cordon of oddly shaped mannequins looking very uncomfortable in period attire. A re-created medieval garden is due to open in 2008.

In the 1640s, the wealthy Rothe family played a part in the Confederation of Kilkenny, and Peter Rothe, son of the original builder, had all his property confiscated. His sister was able to reclaim it, but just before the Battle of the Boyne (1690) the family supported James II and so lost the house permanently. In 1850 a Confederation banner was discovered in the house. It's now in the National Museum, Dublin.

There's an excellent range of books on the region for sale at the entrance.

## Black Abbey

This Dominican abbey on Abbey St was founded in 1225 by William Marshall and takes its name from the monks' black habits. In 1543, six years after Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, it was turned into a courthouse. Following Cromwell's visit in 1650, it remained a roofless ruin until restoration in 1866. Much of what survives dates from the 18th and 19th centuries, but pieces of more ancient archways are still evident within the newer stonework. Open for daily mass, look for the 13th-century coffins near the entrance.

## National Craft Gallery

This gallery (☎ 776 1804; www.ccoi.ie; Castle Yard; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun), opposite Kilkenny Castle, showcases contemporary Irish crafts. It's part of the former stables that also house the Kilkenny Design Centre (see p332). The high-quality exhibitions highlight the diversity and imagination of crafts in contemporary Ireland. Ceramics dominate, but exhibits regularly feature furniture, jewellery and weaving from the members of the Crafts Council of Ireland. There are regular classes in pottery and jewellery-making.

Behind the complex, look for the walkway that extends into the beautiful gardens of Butler House, a hotel you can exit through to Patrick St. Look for the fountain made from remnants of the British-built Nelson Column, blown up by nationalists in Dublin almost 100 years ago.

## Other Sights

**Shee Alms House**, on Rose Inn St, was built in sturdy local stone in 1582 by local benefactor Sir Richard Shee and his wife to provide help for the poor. It continued as a hospital until 1740 but now houses the tourist office. The **Tholsel**, or City Hall, on High St was built in 1761 on the spot where Dame Alice Kyteler's maid, Petronella, was burned at the stake in 1324.

Next to the Tholsel is **Butter Slip**, a narrow and dark walkway that connects High St with Low Lane (now St Kieran's St). It was built in 1616 and once was lined with the stalls of butter vendors. With its arched entry and stone steps, Butter Slip is by far the most picturesque of Kilkenny's many narrow medieval corridors.

**Black Freren Gate** on Abbey St is the only gate from the old Norman city walls still standing, albeit with the help of metal bracing to ensure the safety of those who pass through. Crumbling sections of the old walls remain throughout the central city.

On the corner of Parliament St and the road leading down to Bateman's Quay, the **Confederation Hall monument** (really just a fragment) beside the Bank of Ireland marks the site where the national Parliament met from 1642 to 1649. Nearby is the ramshackle **Grace's Castle**, originally built in 1210, but lost to the family and converted into a prison in 1568, and then in 1794 into a courthouse, which it remains today. Rebels from the 1798 Rising were executed here.

The 19th-century **St Mary's Cathedral** is visible from most parts of town. A plaque at the entrance notes: 'The construction of the cathedral began in 1843 and continued during the famine years, the years of emigration, coffin ships, starvation, and even despair because of the many thousands of our people who died of hunger and disease...', before going on to list yet more tribulations.

Across the river stand the ruins of **St John's Priory**, which was founded in 1200 and was noted for its many beautiful windows until Cromwell's visit. Nearby **Kilkenny College**, on John St, dates from 1666. Its students included Jonathan Swift and the philosopher George Berkeley, but it now houses Kilkenny's county hall.

## TOURS

Central Kilkenny city is small and well suited to comprehensive walking tours.

**Tynan Tours** (☎ 087 265 1745; adult/student €6/5.50; ☎ numerous times daily mid-Mar–Oct) conducts hour-long walking tours that meander through Kilkenny's narrow lanes, steps and pedestrian passageways. Smart, witty guides recount the intriguing stories these buildings might tell if they could talk. Tours may also be offered in the off season; ask about a group rate if you're travelling with friends.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Kilkenny is rightly known as the festival capital of Ireland, with several world-class events throughout the year that attract thousands of people.

**Kilkenny Rhythm & Roots** (☎ 779 0057; www.kilkennyroots.com) In early May, more than 30 different

venues participate in hosting Ireland's biggest music festival, with country and 'old-timey' American roots music strongly emphasised.

**Cat Laughs Comedy Festival** (☎ 776 3416; www.thecatlaughs.com) Cat Laughs is a much-acclaimed gathering of world-class comics; late May to early June.

**Kilkenny Arts Festival** (☎ 775 2175; www.kilkennyarts.ie) The city comes alive with theatre, cinema, music, literature, visual arts, children's events and street spectacles for 10 action-packed days in mid-August. Accommodation at this time is like gold, and you're seriously advised to book well in advance.

**Kilkenny Celtic Festival** (www.celticfestival.ie) A celebration of all things trad Irish, especially the language. Performances, exhibits, seminars and more. Held in late September to early October.

## SLEEPING

If you're arriving in town with no room booked (an unwise move at weekends when rates soar and in summer), the tourist office runs an efficient accommodation booking service costing €4.

## Budget

**Tree Grove Caravan & Camping Park** (☎ 777 0302; www.treegrovecamping.com; New Ross Rd; camp sites per person from €7) This camping ground in a small park is 1.5km south of Kilkenny off the R700. Follow a river path there.

**Macgabhainn's Hostel** (www.hostelworld.com; 24 Vicar St; dm €15-18) This tidy little 16-bed hostel is truly a no-frills experience, although Tilda the dog is a real charmer. Breakfasts are cold and the back 'garden' is a work in progress, but it's friendly, there's a laundry and is usually quiet.

**Kilkenny Tourist Hostel** (☎ 776 3541; www.hostels-ireland.com; 35 Parliament St; dm €16-20; ☎) Inside the ivy-covered walls, you'll find things relaxed

and friendly at this IHH hostel. It's on the main street of Kilkenny, within a few steps of half a dozen clubs and several good restaurants. There's a large kitchen and an atmospheric dining room, while the sitting room is outfitted with couches and a fireplace. The 60 beds are mostly in four- to eight-bed rooms. There's free wi-fi.

**Daley's B&B** (☎ 776 2866; 82 John St; r €32-60; ☎) Hidden away behind a dense row of pubs and shops, Daley's is very basic and feels a bit motel-like. It's an adequate cheapie, with eight decent rooms and a convenient location.

## Midrange

**Cleere's B&B** (☎ 772 1210; cleere102@hotmail.com; New Rd; r €45-70; ☎) A short walk to town, this B&B is very straight-forward: the rooms are clean and comfy and have TVs.

**Rafter Dempsey's** (☎ 772 2970; www.accommodationkilkenny.com; 4 Friary St; r €45-130) There's basic B&B accommodation in 16 rooms above a simple pub of the same name just off High St. The colour scheme can best be described as 'dog's breakfast' but you may not notice as you squint to see the tiny ceiling-mounted TVs.

**Ourpick Celtic House** (☎ 776 2249; john376@gofree.indigo.ie; 18 Michael St; r €50-80; ☎) Angela Byrne is literally Ireland's goodwill ambassador to the world and she extends a wonderful welcome to guests at this clean-as-a-whistle B&B. Rooms are bright, some have sky-lit bathrooms, others have views of the castle. When not charming the masses, Angela is a landscape painter, her works adorn many a wall here.

**Darcy's Guest House** (☎ 777 0219, 777 0087; James St; r €50-90; ☎) This cheery, yellow stucco

## BAD BREW

If you smell something funny in the air, it may be the Budweiser being brewed under licence in the **Smithwick Brewery** (☎ 772 1014; Parliament St). Now owned by drinks giant Diageo (Guinness, Harp and lots of spirits), the brewery is no longer the civic icon it once was. The tours once – enjoyed by generations are now a thing of the past, in their place are sporadic summertime showings of a promotional video. Enjoy! What's worse is that right in the middle of the complex is **St Francis' Abbey**, which was founded by William Marshall in 1232, but desecrated first by Cromwell in 1650 and then by Diageo. It's an intriguing structure but it's now off limits. When we asked at the gate to see this amazing relic, the guard told us in no uncertain terms to 'go look at one of the other old places in town'.

Note that Smithwick's Irish Ale is also known as Kilkenny Ale, the name it's sold under at scores of fake Irish bars in Europe. Locally, most people still drink its corporate cousin, Guinness.

house is right off High St. Flower boxes enliven the views from the 11 rooms, which have cable TV and a muted décor that complements the exterior.

**Kilford Arms Hotel** (☎ 776 1018; www.kilfordarms.ie; John St; r €60-160; (P) (A)) A stuffed and rather mangy 150-year-old Bengal tiger mounted in the lobby sets the tone at this slightly offbeat hotel. While the attitude and authority of the feline is faded, you'll find vibrant colour and flair in the 53 rooms.

**Butler Court** (☎ 776 1178; www.butlercourt.com; Patrick St; r €70-130; (A)) Where the locals stash their guests, this friendly guesthouse has 10 nicely appointed rooms opening onto a restful courtyard. Breakfasts are continental and there's a fridge in every room.

**Kilkenny Inn Hotel** (☎ 777 2828; www.kilkennyinn.com; 15-16 Vicar St; r €70-150; (P) (A)) A modern 30-room hotel right below the cathedral, this friendly place has broadband internet in the slightly small rooms. The décor is a stylish mix of light woods and pastels.

**Lacken House** (☎ 776 1085; www.lackenhouse.ie; Dublin Rd; r €95-170; (P) (A)) Just out of town, this beautiful 10-room, Victorian-era guesthouse exudes grace and charm. There's a superb breakfast and the restaurant is highly regarded. The ornate rooms have free wi-fi and its only a 10-minute walk to the centre.

## Top End

**Langton House Hotel** (☎ 776 5133; www.langtons.ie; 69 John St; r €80-200; (P) (A)) Perched atop the cavernous public spaces of this Kilkenny landmark are 30 rooms of varying standard. Although the building is dated, the décor has been updated with rather dark browns and beiges. The bathrooms are spotless and large, although the tubs have a podlike shower contraption that will recall the 'Rock 'n Roll Creation' routine from *This is Spinal Tap*.

**Kilkenny River Court** (☎ 772 3388; www.kilrivercourt.com; John St; r per person from €110; (P) (A)) Along the Nore, by the bridge, this hotel has 90 modern rooms in a purpose-built wing fronted by a courtyard. There's free wi-fi and decent views from some rooms. The riverside terrace is a choice spot for a drink when the weather's fine.

**Butler House** (☎ 772 2828; www.butler.ie; 16 Patrick St; r €125-250; (P) (A)) Once home of the earls of Ormonde (who built the nearby castle), this gracious townhouse is now a luxurious hotel with aristocratic trappings including

sweeping staircases, marble fireplaces, an art collection and impeccably trimmed gardens (see p328). The 13 generously sized rooms have new bathrooms and wi-fi.

## EATING

There's a good range of choices in Kilkenny but note that at quiet times, places often close by 8.30pm. Picnickers can pick up groceries from **Dunnes Stores** (☎ 776 1756; St Keiran's St; ☎ 24hr).

## Cafés

St Keiran's St has a number of continental-style cafés with outdoor tables.

**Gourmet Store** (☎ 777 1727; 56 High St; sandwiches €4; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) In this crowded little deli, takeaway sandwiches are assembled from choice, imported meats and cheeses (plus a few top-notch locals).

**Chez Pierre** (☎ 776 4655; 17 Parliament St; mains €3-8; ☎ 10am-5pm) It's all brightness and yellow skies at this sunny-sweet French café, next to Rothe House. The menu offers an assortment of sandwiches, soups and sweets you can enjoy at timeless, simple wooden tables.

**The Pantry** (☎ 776 2250; St Keiran's St; mains €6-12; ☎ 8am-6pm) Break soda bread (well at least butter it up) and sip a range of coffees at this old-fashioned bakery and tearoom. Those filling, hot meals of your youth are here, ready and waiting.

## Restaurants

**Ourpick Kilkenny Design Centre Café** (☎ 772 2118; Castle Yard; meals €6-12; ☎ 10am-7pm) Upstairs from the stylish shops is this equally stylish café. The food is artful, often organic and always healthful (OK, maybe not the sumptuous desserts but who wants healthy?). Bread is baked in-house and go well in sandwiches, with soups and alongside salads. The hot specials are superb.

**Marble City Bar** (☎ 776 1143; 66 High St; meals €6-15; ☎ food served 10am-9pm) This stylishly mod bar manages to stand out. Usual bar standards such as sausage with mash and fish and chips are elevated above the norm through the use of excellent ingredients. A lower-level café facing St Kieran's St has breakfasts, coffees and outdoor tables.

**Edward Langton's** (☎ 776 5133; 69 John St; mains €8-22; ☎ noon-10pm Mon-Sat, noon-9pm Sun) Langton's is an enormous, snazzy pub with a good restaurant that seems able to seat much of the town.

Certainly most everybody's here for Sunday lunch when tipsy blondes totter past gossiping grannies. The food is trad Irish; expect bowls of boiled potatoes and veg to come in never-ending supply.

**Fléva** (☎ 777 0021; 84 High St; meals €8-28; ☎ 12.30-2.30pm & 6-9.30pm Tue-Sat) Regional ingredients combine for a fusion of global flavours. There's a merry vibe about this somewhat formal (white tablecloths) yet quirky (eclectic local art on the walls) restaurant. Vegetarians will blossom after reading the many choices and anyone who likes wine will find much to sip.

**Kyteler's Inn** (☎ 772 1064; 27 St Kieran's St; mains €9-20; ☎ noon-10pm) Dame Alice Kyteler's old house, built in 1224, is one of the tourist magnets in town. The Dame had four husbands, all of whom died in suspicious circumstances. Having acquired some powerful enemies, she was charged with witchcraft in 1323. The food is pub-standard (the menu boasts a 'healthy' option: baked potato filled with baked beans), but tourists of all ages whoop it up in the dungeon-like basement.

**Lautrec's Brasserie** (☎ 776 2720; 9 St Kieran's St; mains €10-26; ☎ 5-10pm) The name should clue you right in – this is a lovely little romantic French bistro. Hold hands at the tiny tables in the tiny dining room and partake of the wine selections. Mains range from delicate pizzas to seafood to continental classics.

**Pordylos** (☎ 777 0660; Butter Slip; meals €10-30; ☎ 12.30-3pm & 5.30-10pm) You'll feel you've slipped into a French country home as you enter from shadowy Butter Slip. The seafood comes from Dunmore East and the excellent meats are sourced locally. Good French vintages soon loosen the spirits and you'll feel in the midst of a highly successful dinner party.

**Ourpick Café Sol** (☎ 776 4987; William St; dinner mains €16-28; ☎ noon-3pm & 6-9pm Mon-Sat) Noel McCarron, the proprietor, lists the local sources for many of the foods used on the seasonally changing menu. The bold and edgy artwork on the walls, like the food, shows surprising combinations. There are more flavours and elements than you might expect but it all works together in symphonic harmony. Three-course set menus (€23) are great value.

**Rinuocini** (☎ 776 1575; 1 The Parade; mains €16-28; ☎ noon-2pm & 6-9pm) Enjoy gracious dining in the shadow of the castle at this lower-level restaurant in an elegant townhouse. The menu is classic Italian and everything from

minestrone to pastas to fine veal and seafood, is just so.

**Zuni** (☎ 772 3999; www.zuni.ie; 26 Patrick St; dinner €19-30; ☎ 12.30-2.30pm Tue-Sat, 6.30-10pm Mon-Sat, 1-3pm & 6-9pm Sun) Among Kilkenny's most stylish and busy restaurants, Zuni manages to stay at the cutting edge it pioneered when it opened just before the Millennium. Dark leathers and fabrics on the seating contrasts with lighter natural materials on the tables and walls.

**Lacken House** (☎ 776 1085; www.lackenhouse.ie; Dublin Rd; set 4 courses €43, set 5 courses €59; ☎ 6-9.30pm Tue-Sat) In the gracious guesthouse of the same name, this candlelit, intimate dining room is one of the most romantic spots in town. Foods are sourced locally and are organic when possible. Preparations are traditional with modern, creative touches. The wine list is extensive.

## DRINKING

There are a few places that do after-hours lock-ins on weekends.

**Tynan's Bridge House** (☎ 772 1291; St John's Bridge) Conversation is generally audible in this grand old Georgian pub, the best trad bar in town. The 300-year-old building has settled a bit over the years, but then so have many of the customers. Survey the craic from the tables in front or settle out back in the – of all things – olive-tree festooned patio.

**O'Riada** (27 Parliament St) The lowest-key bar in Kilkenny. The only dashes of flash are an electric light and a TV set. The joint fills up and gets pretty lively when there's a game on the tube, but most of the time you can ponder your pint and strike up a conversation with anyone – including yourself.

**Pumphouse** (☎ 776 3924; 26 Parliament St) With live rock groups like Kopek many nights a week, the Pumphouse is one of Kilkenny's livelier bars. When there's no band, music comes from a free jukebox that doesn't have a bad song on it. It's a large place with pool tables and big TVs. Smokers hang out on the roof.

**Ana Conda** (☎ 777 1657; Parliament St) A frequent winner in local polls, locals enjoy the tiled floors, comfy banquettes, Friday night céilidh sessions and Saturday night rock shows. The covered beer garden is popular among smokers.

**John Cleere** (☎ 776 2573; 22 Parliament St) One of Kilkenny's best venues for live music, this long bar has blues, jazz and rock, including local

## CRAFTY KILKENNY

Across The Parade from Kilkenny Castle are the elegant former castle stables (1760), which have been extensively renovated. Besides the National Craft Gallery (p328), the buildings are home to a number of local craftspeople, such as the voluble A Byrne, a silversmith.

The front building holds gallerylike shops of the **Kilkenny Design Centre** (☎ 772 2118; www.kilkennydesign.com; Castle Yard), where you can find all manner of top-end Irish crafts and artwork for sale. From County Kilkenny, look for the spongware pottery of Nicholas Moss, the handblown crystal of Jerpoint Glass, the luscious leather bags of Chesneau Leathers and the handmade beads of All That Glistens. Overall there are at least 130 fulltime craftspeople and artists working commercially in the county, one of the highest concentrations in Ireland. Reasons for this vary, but the nexus of culture afforded by high-brow Kilkenny is a major factor. Bennettsbridge and Thomastown are two other good places for top quality crafts.

favourites Bone. Especially in the summer, this is the place to look for trad music sessions.

**Hibernian Bar** (☎ 777 1888; Hibernian Hotel, Patrick St) There may come a time when having yet another pint in an atmospheric pub might be just one too many. Take refuge here at this swanky hotel bar with deep, comfy leather banquettes and a long list of proper cocktails.

## ENTERTAINMENT

For information on local events, check out the weekly *Kilkenny People* newspaper. A good website is www.whazon.com.

## Cinema & Theatre

**Kilkenny Cineplex** (☎ 772 3111; Fair Green, Gaol Rd) Four screens here blare with the latest Hollywood releases.

**Watergate Theatre** (☎ 776 1674; www.watergatekilkenny.com; Parliament St) Recently spiffed up, this theatre hosts drama, comedy and musical performances. Why is it that intermissions seem to last 18 minutes?

## Nightclubs

Kilkenny is the regional hub of clubbing; check to see what's hot now.

**O'Faolain's** (☎ 776 1018; Kilford Arms Hotel, John St; admission €8-12) The club itself is an attraction: it's built on three levels around an old stone church that was brought over from Wales. There are live DJs most nights, starting around 10.30pm and weekend club nights.

**Morrison's Bar** (☎ 777 1888; 1 Ormonde St; ☎ 5pm-1am) In the cellar of the Hibernian Hotel there's this stylish hideaway, with its atmospheric lighting and snazzy *belle époque* décor. DJs spin an eclectic mix for an up-market crowd that actually cares about getting spilled on.

**Morrisey's Club** (☎ 777 0555; 40 Parliament St; admission €8; ☎ 8pm-late Thu-Sun) In a basement a few doors from the Kilkenny Tourist Hostel, this club usually doesn't really get cranking until around 10pm (those who show up earlier get in free). DJs rule but there are also live acts many nights. Sunday nights get a barely-18 crowd.

## Sport

Locals drool over the results of the regular dog races at **James Park** (☎ 772 1214; Freshford Rd; ☎ 8pm Wed & Fri).

## SHOPPING

Kilkenny is the regional centre for shopping. You'll find an interesting mix of chain and local stores along High St, and in **Market Cross**, a multilevel mall behind a row of High St shops. Opening by 2008, a flashy new shopping mall, **MacDonagh Junction**, will be the largest in the region.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Driving from Dublin is easy: take the M7 motorway to the M9 and head south. Work is ongoing to extend the M9 all the way south past Carlow, which will greatly relieve the busy parallel N9. At Paulstown, the N10 branches off for the 17km run west to Kilkenny. When road work is done, the city will be well under two hours from Dublin.

## Bus

**Bus Éireann** (☎ 776 4933; www.buseireann.ie) operates from a shelter about 200m east of John St adjacent to the train station – which also sells tickets. Bus Éireann also picks up and drops off passengers at the very central Café Net on St Patrick's St. There are services to

Carlow (€6.30, one hour, 12 daily), Clonmel (€6.80, one hour, 12 daily), Cork (€14.90, three hours, two daily), Dublin (€9.80, 2¼ hours, five daily) and Waterford (€8.40, one hour, two daily).

**JJ Kavanagh & Sons** (☎ 883 1106; www.jjkavanagh.ie) has two buses per day Monday to Saturday to Carlow city (€5, 50 minutes) in County Carlow and Portlaoise (€7, 1½ hours).

## Train

The train station (☎ 772 2024) has been shoved 200m back from John St to make way for the vast new mall. Kilkenny sees five trains daily for Dublin (€22, 1¼ hours) and Waterford (€9.80, 50 minutes).

## GETTING AROUND

There are large parking lots and garages off both sides of High St. Other lots are scattered in all areas.

**JJ Wall & Son** (☎ 772 1236; 86 Maudlin St) rents out bikes at €20 per day. The circuit around Kells, Inistioge, Jerpoint Abbey and Kilfane makes a fine day's ride. It also sells lawn mowers if you've finally had enough of all that green.

For a cab, call **Danny's Taxis** (☎ 223 8887).

# CENTRAL KILKENNY

The area south – and most notably southeast – of Kilkenny city is laced with country roads and dotted with cute villages overlooking the rich, green Barrow and Nore valleys. Riverside towns like Graiguenamanagh and Inistioge have superb scenery. This is prime walking country, with beautiful trails running alongside the rivers and between the towns. And in places like Bennettsbridge, you can visit the workshops of some of the county's most notable craftspeople.

## KELLS & AROUND

Kells (not to be confused with Kells in County Meath) is a mere widening of the road, a hamlet with a fine stone bridge on a tributary of the Nore. However, in Kells Priory, the village has one of Ireland's most impressive and romantic monastic sites. The village is 13km south of Kilkenny city on the R697.

## Kells Priory

This is the best sort of ruin, where visitors can amble about as they like, whenever they like, with no tour guides, tours, ropes or restrictions. With no hours or fees, it's almost a religious experience. At dusk on a vaguely sunny day the old priory is simply beautiful. Most days you stand a chance of exploring the site alone, with only the company of bleating sheep.

The earliest remains of this gorgeous monastic site date from the late 12th century, while the bulk of the present ruins are from the 15th century. In a sea of rich farmland, a carefully restored protective wall connects seven dwelling towers. Inside the walls are the remains of an **Augustinian abbey** and the foundations of some chapels and houses. It's unusually well fortified for a monastery and the heavy curtain walls hint at a troubled history. Indeed, within a single century from 1250, the abbey was twice fought over and burned down by squabbling warlords. It went into permanent decline beginning when it was suppressed in 1540.

The ruins are 800m east of Kells on the Stonyford road.

## Kilree Round Tower & High Cross

About 2km south of Kells (signposted from the priory car park) there's a 29m-high round tower and a simple early high cross, which is said to mark the grave of a 9th-century Irish high king, Niall Caille. He's supposed to have drowned in the King's River at Callan some time in the 840s while attempting to save a servant, and his body washed up near Kells. His final resting place lies beyond the church grounds because he wasn't a Christian.

## Callan Famine Graveyard

West of Kilree, and signposted off the main road 2km south of Callan, is a **cemetery** where the local victims of the Great Famine (p46) are buried. It isn't much to look at, but the unmarked graves are a poignant reminder of the anonymity of starvation.

## BENNETTSBRIDGE & AROUND

☎ 056 / pop 950

In a scenic setting on the River Nore 7km south of Kilkenny city on the R700, Bennettsbridge is an arts and crafts treasure chest. The multi-arched stone bridge is a work of art itself.

In a big mill by the river west of town is **Nicholas Mosse Irish Country Shop** (☎ 772-7105; www.nicholasmosse.com; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-5pm Sun), a pottery shop that specialises in handmade spongeware – creamy-brown pottery that's covered with sponged patterns. It also sells linens and other handmade craft items (although some hail from lands of cheap labour far from Ireland). A seconds shop yields huge savings. Upstairs, the **café** is the best choice locally for lunch, with a creative line-up of soups, sandwiches, hot dishes etc. It's renowned for its scones.

Just up the road, **Keith Mosse Wood Working** (☎ 772 7948; www.keithmosse.com) is home to the eponymous craftsman, who takes fine woods from five continents and turns them into simply elegant furniture and decorator items.

Yet another few hundred metres away, by the bridge, **Moth to a Flame** (☎ 772 7826) is in an old garage after its old factory went up in smoke. The air is redolent with the wax used in creating elaborate candles; hundreds line tables throughout the workshop.

For fine leather, check out the factory boutique of **Chesneau** (☎ 772 7456; www.chesneau.design.com), near the village centre. Stylish bags and accessories are on offer in a rainbow of colours – emerald-green numbers are big sellers. Most of the designs are created locally and sold internationally.

On a small road above Nicholas Mosse, the **Nore View Folk Museum** (☎ 27749; Danesfort Rd; admission free) is a privately owned folk museum displaying local items of interest, including old farming tools and other bric-a-brac.

**Nore Valley Camping & Caravan Park** (☎ 772 7229; http://norevalleypark.tripod.com; Annamult; day admission €4; camp sites from €8; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep) is a 2-hectare farm that suits kids and campers. Kids can caress goats, cuddle rabbits, navigate a maze and jump on a straw bounce. There is a tearoom and picnic area. If you're coming into Bennettsbridge from Kilkenny along the R700, turn right just before the bridge; the park is signposted.

Besides the café at Nicholas Mosse, the central **Italian Affair** (☎ 770 0988; 4 Chapel St; mains €8-25; ☎ noon-3pm & 5-9pm Tue-Sun) has a good menu of pizza, pasta and more. The coffee bar is always popular.

## THOMASTOWN & AROUND

☎ 056 / pop 1750

Thomastown is a small market town known for its crafts. Nicely situated by the Nore, the Dublin–Waterford road (N9) runs right through the centre and the traffic can be awful. Named after Welsh mercenary Thomas de Cantwell, Thomastown has some fragments of a medieval wall and the partly ruined 13th-century **Church of St Mary**. Down by the bridge, **Mullin's Castle** is the sole survivor of the 14 castles that were originally here.

Ignore the traffic and explore the compact centre, which has a surprising assortment of intriguing shops and cafés. **Clay Creations** (☎ 772 4977; lowSt) displays the works of local artist Brid Lyons. Her whimsical ceramics and sculptures include an iconic dog captured mid-snarl.

**Food For Thought** (☎ 779 3297; Market St) is a shrine to Irish artisan foods. Some of the local products carried include G's Preserves (made from their own organic raspberries), Knockdrinna Farmhouse Cheese (fresh goat-milk cheese), Carlow Cheese (an amazing hard cheese made with nettles) and chocolates from the Truffle Fairy.

### Jerpoint Abbey

One of Ireland's finest Cistercian ruins, **Jerpoint Abbey** (☎ 24623; www.heritageireland.ie; Hwy N9; adult/child €2.90/1.30; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Jun-Sep, 10am-4pm Oct-May) is about 2.5km southwest of Thomastown on the N9. It was established in the 12th century and has been partially restored. The fine tower and cloister are late 14th or early 15th century. The roofless outline of the cloisters are perfectly atmospheric; look for the series of often amusing figures carved on the pillars, including a knight. There are also stone carvings on the church walls and in the tombs of members of the Butler and Walshe families. Faint traces of a 15th- or 16th-century painting remain on the northern wall of the church. This chancel area also contains a tomb thought to be that of the hardheaded Felix O'Dullany, Jerpoint's first abbot and bishop of Ossory, who died back in 1202. Ask for a free guided tour; there is a small exhibit on other historic ruins in the region.

According to local legend, St Nicholas (or Santa Claus) is buried near the abbey. While retreating in the Crusades, the knights of Jerpoint removed his body from Myra in modern-day Turkey and reburied him in the **Church of St Nicholas** to the west of the abbey.

The grave is marked by a broken slab decorated with a carving of a monk.

### Stonyford

On the N10, a few kilometres northwest of the abbey and Thomastown, is the small village of Stonyford. The local highlight, the nationally renowned **Jerpoint Glass Studio** (☎ 24350; www.jerpointglass.com), is housed here in an old stone-walled farm building. Most days, you can watch workers craft molten glass into exquisite artistic and practical items.

### Kilfane

The village of Kilfane, 3km north of Thomastown on the N9 (Dublin road), has a small, ruined **13th-century church** and **Norman tower**, 50m off the road and signposted. The church has a remarkable stone carving of Thomas de Cantwell called the Cantwell Fada or Long Cantwell. It depicts a tall, thin knight in detailed chain-mail armour brandishing a shield decorated with the Cantwell coat of arms.

**Kilfane Glen & Waterfall** (☎ 24558) is a pretty spot with wooded paths winding through its wild 6-hectare gardens, which date from the 1790s. An elaborately decorated thatched cottage is worth hiking to. Note it was closed in 2007; check for its reopening. Kilfane Glen is 2km north of town along the N9.

### Gowran

Some 14km northeast of Thomastown on the N9 (and 14km east of Kilkenny), the small village of Gowran is notable for the Heritage Service-run **St Mary's Church** (☎ 772 6894; www.heritageireland.ie; adult/child €1.60/1; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Jun-mid-Sep), a 13th-century house of worship for clerics living in a loose community. Much modified through the years, a 19th-century church grafted onto one side.

### Sleeping & Eating

In an idyllic location 7km southeast of Thomastown off the R700, **Ballyduff House** (☎ 775 8488; www.ballyduffhouse.com; s/d €55/90; ☎) overlooks the River Nore. There are three large rooms in the 18th-century mansion; common rooms are welcoming with a range of timeless overstuffed furniture to welcome weary souls.

**Ethos Bistro** (☎ 775 4945; lowSt, Thomastown; meals €6-22; ☎ noon-8pm Wed-Sat, noon-3pm Sun) is a new place winning plaudits for its creative, natural fare. As you'd expect, local ingredients star and the eclectic menu changes often. It's al-

ways busy, so you should book for dinner. There are tables on a back patio.

**Hudsons** (☎ 779 3900; Station Rd, Thomastown; set dinner €28; ☎ 6-9pm Wed-Sun) Overlooking an intricate garden, Hudsons mixes frill with a stylish, modern dining room. Popular classics, such as grilled meats, seared salmon and Caesar salad, make regular appearances on a daily menu that emphasises fresh local ingredients.

### Getting There & Away

**Bus Éireann** (☎ 64933) runs two buses daily linking Thomastown to Bennettsbridge (€4, 10 minutes) and Kilkenny (€6, 20 minutes). There are also numerous services to Dublin and Waterford. Buses stop outside O'Keefe's supermarket on Main St in Thomastown.

The train station is 1km west of town past Kavanagh's supermarket. Five trains daily stop on the Dublin–Waterford route via Kilkenny.

## INISTIÖGE

☎ 056 / pop 714

The little village of Inistioge (in-ish-teeg) is picture-perfect. It has an 18th-century, 10-arch stone bridge spanning the River Nore and vintage shops facing a tranquil square. Somewhere so inviting could hardly hope to escape the attention of movie-location scouts: Inistioge's film credits include *Widow's Peak* (1993), *Circle of Friends* (1994) and *Where the Sun Is King* (1996). There are picnic tables on the river.

With a scenic stretch of the South Leinster Way coursing through town, this is a good base for exploring the region. The R700 from Thomastown makes for a lovely **scenic drive** through the river valley. For variety, try some of the small roads that lead off this into the verdant countryside – you can't get lost for long. Better yet, try the **hiking trails** that follow the river. Side trails lead up into the hills.

Approximately 1km south, on Mt Alto, is **Woodstock Gardens** (☎ 779 4000; parking €4; ☎ 9am-8pm Apr-Sep, 9am-4pm Oct-Mar). The hike up is well worth the effort for the panorama of the valley below, and the heavily forested park itself is a beauty, with expanses of gardens, picnic areas and trails.

Like many neighbouring places, the **Woodstock Arms** (☎ 775 8440; www.woodstockarms.com; Inistioge; s/d €40/70) has tables outside overlooking the square. The interior of this pub has been rather plainly remodelled, but the

seven simple rooms upstairs are unfussy and sparkly clean.

Just north of town, **Motte Restaurant** (☎ 775 8655; Plas Newydd Lodge; set menu €35; ☎ 7-9.30pm Wed-Sat) has a delightful contemporary Irish menu that features a nightly menu that takes global inspiration. It's welcoming and relaxed, and diners can linger over cordials and conversation long after supper is over.

Just outside Woodstock Gardens, John Bassett has turned his family home into an exciting dining experience. Where once was his teenage bedroom there now sits a keg. The restaurant, **our pick Bassetts at Woodstock** (☎ 775 8820; www.bassetts.ie; mains €25-28; ☎ noon-2pm Wed-Sun, 6-10pm Wed-Sat), is a constantly evolving creative experience. Lunches may feature tapas (€10 each) and Saturday nights various tasting menus paired with wines. The food is fresh, local and inventive. Future meals graze right outside the door.

### Getting There & Away

This is car, bike or hike country. Weekly (!) buses operate to New Ross and Kilkenny.

### GRAIGUENAMANAGH

☎ 059 / pop 1700

Graiguenamanagh (pronounced 'greg-namama') is a pretty little riverside town on the Barrow, 23km southeast of Kilkenny. The town's best feature is its six-arch stone bridge that is illuminated at night. Along the river there's a serene wooded walk, of about 1½ hours, to St Mullins, just a few kilometres downstream from town, and another up Brandon Hill (516m), about 6km away.

Dating back to 1204, **Duiske Abbey** (☎ 24238; ☎ 8am-6pm) was once Ireland's largest Cistercian abbey. What you see today is the result of 800 years of additions and changes and it is very much a working parish (come at the right time and you'll interrupt the kids' choir practice, much to their delight). The simple exterior and whitewashed interior only hint at its long history. To the right of the entrance look for the Knight of Duiske, a 14th-century, high-relief carving of a knight in chain mail who's reaching for his sword. On the floor nearby, a glass panel reveals some of the original 13th-century floor tiles, now 2m below the present floor level. In the grounds stand two early high crosses, brought here for protection in the last century. The smaller Ballyogan Cross has panels on the eastern side depicting the crucifixion, Adam and Eve, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, and David playing the harp. The western side shows the massacre of the innocents.

Around the corner, the **Abbey Centre** (☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri, some days longer) houses a small exhibition of Christian art, plus pictures of the abbey in its unrestored state.

Down by the boats tied up along the river, the **Waterside** (☎ 792 4246; www.watersideguesthouse.com; Quay Graiguenamanagh; set dinner €36; ☎ restaurant 6.30-9.30pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-2.30pm Sun, weekends only Oct-Apr) is a popular guesthouse housed in an impressive 19th-century corn warehouse. Built solidly of stone, it has 10 modest rooms (€57 to €110) and received a refurbishment in 2007. The restaurant is well-regarded for its interesting modern Irish menu. Look for the local speciality smoked eel paired with horseradish. There are tables outside in summer.

For fishing tackle, baked beans and a pint of stout, head to **Mick Doyle's** or **Mick Ryan's**, two old pubs on Abbey St that admirably attempt to address their customers' basic needs. There's a good used bookstore in between.

### ST MULLINS

A tranquil spot about 6km downstream from Graiguenamanagh, St Mullins (on the County Carlow line) is good for a relaxing getaway, a picnic, or as rewarding destination on a long walk from Graigue. The river snakes through here in the shadow of Brandon Hill, and from it a trail winds uphill to the ruined hulk of an old monastery surrounded by the graves of 1798 rebels. A 9th-century Celtic cross, badly worn down over the centuries, still stands beside the monastery. Nearby, St Moling's Well is a holy well that seems to attract spare change.

**Mulvarra House** (☎ 051-424 936; www.mulvarra.com; s/d €50/80; ☎) is a B&B just up the hill from the river. It's modern and comfortable, a good base for exploring the area and you can partake of the body treatment centre.

## NORTHERN KILKENNY

The rolling green hills of northern County Kilkenny are perfect for leisurely drives with the makings of a picnic stowed away in the boot. There's not a whole lot going on in this part of the county, but the picturesque towns of Ballyragget and Castlecomer are sure to tempt the traveller to pull over for a brief stroll. Dunmore Cave is the most frequently visited sight in these parts, but you'll enjoy the region best by taking the smallest roads you can find and making your own discoveries.

### CASTLECOMER & AROUND

☎ 056 / pop 2400

Castlecomer is on the gentle River Dinin, some 18km north of Kilkenny. The town became a centre for anthracite mining after the fuel was discovered nearby in 1636; the mines closed for good in the mid-1960s. The anthracite, very hard form of coal, was widely regarded as being Europe's best, containing very little sulphur and producing almost no smoke.

Local fossil fuels are celebrated in the new **Castlecomer Discovery Park** (☎ 444 0707), set to open by the end of 2007. It will have an exhibition on coal mining set among lush woodlands.

You can best enjoy the area by just wandering about. Drive the back roads, enjoying the scenery and discovering little villages like **Clogh**, which has a lovely country pub, **Joyce's**, run by the charming John Coffey.

About 8km west of Castlecomer is Ballyragget, with an almost-intact square tower in the 16th-century **Butler Castle** (closed to the public).

Almost 2km south of Ballyragget is **Swift's Heath**, home to Jonathan Swift during his school years in Kilkenny. The 'e' was evidently dropped from the name before the satirist gained notoriety as the author of *Gulliver's Travels* and *A Modest Proposal*.

**Foulksrath Castle Hostel** (☎ 67674; www.anoige.ie; Ballyragget; dm €12-15; ☎) is a busy An Óige hostel near Ballyragget with a superb setting, and surely rates among Ireland's best budget accommodation. The 44 beds are in a 16th-century Norman tower that's reputed to be haunted by more than tales of blown travel budgets.

### Getting There & Away

**Bus Éireann** (☎ 64933) has five buses daily to Kilkenny (€4.30, 20 minutes). **Buggys Coaches** (☎ 444 1264) has three to four buses daily (€3.50) to a stop in Kilkenny outside the castle and to a stop 300m from Foulksrath Castle Hostel.

### DUNMORE CAVE

Striking calcite formations enliven **Dunmore Cave** (☎ 056-67726; www.heritageireland.ie; Ballyroye; adult/child €2.90/1.30; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Jun-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-May), some 6km north of Kilkenny on the Castlecomer road (N78). According to sources, marauding Vikings killed 1000 people at two ring forts near here in 928. When survivors hid in the caverns, the Vikings tried to smoke them out by lighting fires at the entrance. It's thought that they then dragged off the men as slaves and left the women and children to suffocate. Excavations in 1973 uncovered the skeletons of at least 44 people, mostly women and children. They also found coins dating from the 920s, but none from a later date. One theory suggests that the coins were dropped by the Vikings (who

#### WALK: COUNTY KILKENNY

**South Leinster Way** slices through the hilly southern part of County Kilkenny, from Graiguenamanagh through Inistioge, down to Mullinavat and westward to Piltown. It looks attractive on the map, but in reality much of it is paved highway, and not particularly good for walking. Stick with the prettiest part, a stretch of some 13km, beginning on the River Barrow. It links Graigue and Inistioge, two charming villages with amenities for travellers. In either village you can reward yourself with a top-notch meal.

Alternatively, along this path branch off onto **Brandon Way** (4km south of Graigue), which scales **Brandon Hill** (516m). The broad moorland summit is easily reached and affords a lovely view of the Blackstairs Mountains and Mt Leinster to the east. A return trip from Graigue is a fairly relaxed 12km walk.

The trail down **River Barrow** from Graigue to St Mullins is equally beautiful, with a firm path wending past canals and through some wooded country and pleasant grassy picnic areas. **St Mullins** itself is an interesting destination).



often carried them in their armpits, secured with wax) while enthusiastically engaged in the slaughter. However, there are few marks of violence on the skeletons, lending weight to the theory that suffocation was the cause of death.

The cave is well lit and spacious although, like so many caves, damp and cold. After a

steep descent you enter caverns full of stalactites, stalagmites and columns, including the 7m Market Cross, Europe's largest freestanding stalagmite. The compulsory guided tours are worthwhile.

**Buggys Coaches** (☎ 056-444 1264) runs three to four buses daily (€3.50) from a stop in Kilkenny outside the castle.