

Facts about Ireland's County Donegal

County Donegal was named after the town of Donegal (from the Irish Dún na nGall or "fort of the foreigners") in the south of the county.

Approximately 167,000 people live in Donegal, making it the 13th most populous out of 32 counties in the Republic of Ireland. In physical area, County Donegal is the fourth largest county in all of Ireland—but its population density is the 5th lowest.

Letterkenny is by far the largest settlement in Donegal, with just under 20,000 people.

Located on the northwest coast of the island, the county shares 131 kilometers of its 140-kilometer border with Northern Ireland and only 9 kilometers with the Republic of Ireland.



Historically part of the northern province of Ulster, Donegal was not made part of Northern Ireland in 1921 because of its high Catholic population. The British government wanted Northern Ireland, which stayed in the UK, to be primarily Protestant.

This partitioning had serious consequences for the county. It cut the county off, economically and administratively, from Derry, also known as Londonderry, which had acted for centuries as the county's main port, transport hub and financial center. (Derry is just 5.4 miles, or 9 kilometers, from the town of Killea in County Donegal.) Additionally, in the late 20th century, County Donegal was adversely affected by The Troubles in Northern Ireland, suffering several bombings and assassinations. It's been dubbed "the forgotten county" by its own politicians, based on the perception that it's been ignored by the government of the Republic of Ireland.

On the other hand, this isolation from the rest of Ireland has permitted the people of Donegal to maintain a distinct cultural identity. One of its marketing slogans has been "Up here it's different."

One of the county's most notable features is its mountains, including the Slieve League Cliffs in southern Donegal. Nearly three times the height of the Cliffs of Moher, they are also some of Europe's highest sea cliffs. The county is also fringed by one of Ireland's three glacial fjords, Lough Swilly in northern Donegal.

Owing to its scenic landscape and "world-class wilderness," Donegal was named National Geographic's "Coolest Place on the Planet" in 2017.

No part of Donegal is far from the ocean, giving it a generally cooler climate than the rest of Ireland.

The Donegal Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking area) is the second-largest in Ireland, embracing about 24,000 people. Ulster Irish is the version of the Irish language spoken there.

Like other areas on the western seaboard of Ireland, parts of County Donegal have a distinctive fiddle tradition, known worldwide. Among famous musicians hailing from Donegal is the singer-songwriter Enya.

County Donegal is also known for its textiles, including the world-renowned donegal tweeds, particularly from the heritage town of Ardara.

Among the county's popular tourist destinations are the Slieve League Cliffs, Glenveagh Castle, Donegal Castle (in Donegal Town), Glenveagh National Park, Doagh Famine village, Fanad Head Lighthouse, Maghera Beach and Caves, Mount Errigal and Assaranca Waterfall. You'll find many more at <https://www.govisitdonegal.com/things-to-do/places-to-see> and <https://www.theirishroadtrip.com/the-best-things-to-do-in-donegal/>.

The Best Things to do in Donegal

- Key attractions
- Hikes/walking trails
- Beaches

The map displays various locations in Donegal, Ireland, categorized by type of attraction. Key attractions (yellow dots) include Malin Head, Fanad Lighthouse, Famine Village, Boyeagher Bay, Horn Head, Carrickfinn Beach, Ards Forest, Portsalon, Mamore Gap, Grianán of Aileach, Errigal Mtn, Assaranca Wfall, Donegal Castle, Silver Strand, Secret Wfall, and Sliabh Liag Cliffs. Hikes/walking trails (purple dots) include Ards Forest, Errigal Mtn, and Rougey Walk. Beaches (green dots) include Carrickfinn Beach, Dooley Beach, Narin Beach, and Rossnowlagh Beach. The map also shows major roads (N13, N14, N15, N56, A2, A5, A6, A32, A46, A505) and nearby towns like Dungloe, Letterkenny, Strabane, and Dromore.

Looking for things to do in Donegal or Donegal itineraries? Click the 'Counties' link at the top of this page and then select 'Donegal' to discover the best of the capital.

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CelticMKE in Wauwatosa offers a nine-day trip to County Donegal and Dublin every January called The Calling. The 2025 Music & Cultural Tour of Ireland is scheduled for January 16-26. Booking by Aug. 30, 2024 knocks \$500 off the cost of the trip. For more information, visit <https://www.findmyireland.com/the-calling.html>.