10 Top-Rated Tourist Attractions in Northern Ireland

Eschewed by visitors for years, Northern Ireland has made a comeback following The Good Friday Agreement of 1998, a power-sharing contract seeking to promote peace. Since then, Ulster (as Northern Ireland is also known) has rebounded both economically and culturally and is one of the world's must-see destinations.

Most recently, Northern Ireland's role as the filming location for *Game of Thrones* has brought another wave of tourists. For those in the know, even during the bad times, this corner of Ireland was always high on the sightseeing agenda. Legendary natural attractions, such as the mystical **Giant's Causeway**, join newer arrivals, such as **Belfast Titanic,** as top things to do.

There's great shopping, world-class restaurants, a remarkable history and culture, outstanding golf, and a lively music scene. These add up to plenty of places to visit in Northern Ireland for families, couples, and solo travellers, all of whom can be assured of a warm and friendly welcome.

If visiting from the Irish Republic, . Here, you'll need pound sterling, not the Euro as used in the south.

Learn more about the best places to visit with our list of the top attractions in Northern Ireland.

1. The Giant's Causeway

Famed around the world for its columns of layered basalt, the Giant's Causeway is Northern Ireland's only **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. These polygonal-shaped natural features (there are around 40,000 of them) were created by a volcanic eruption 60 million years ago. Today, they are the prime focus of a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Three different periods of volcanic action birthed the Lower, Middle, and Upper Basalts. The Middle Basalt rock forms the famous amphitheaters of columns shaped like hexagons. That's the science. However according to legend it was carved out by the mighty giant Finn McCool who left behind his ancient home to do battle with his foe Benandonner across the water in Scotland.

: The Giant's Boot, The Wishing Chair, The Camel, The Giant's Granny, and The Organ high up on the cliffs. Weather permitting, you might even see Scotland in the distance.

Be sure to pop into the modern-looking Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre, too. This state-of-the-art facility is not only architecturally stunning, boasting a design that reflects the area's unique topography, but also provides a fascinating insight into the history of the area (audio guides are provided).

LIVEWORKSHEETS

2. The Causeway Coast and Dunluce Castle

Naturally, most visitors' first stop along this scenic coast is the World Heritage-listed **Giant's Causeway**. The surrounding coastline, however, is magnificent and shouldn't be bypassed. Many treats await, including the beautiful beaches, dunes, and rolling waves at **Portrush** (where there's a world-class golf course) and **Portstewart**. If you're feeling brave enough, either is perfect for a bracing dip.

An easy 10-minute drive west, through the picturesque village of Bushmills, brings you to ruined medieval **Dunluce Castle** (Dún Libhse). It's impossible to miss, perched precipitously on the cliff edge, the kitchen having plunged into the thrashing waves below one terrible night many centuries ago.

[ ]. Exterior shots of the castle were used in *Game of Thrones*.

3. Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge

An easterly drive from the Giant's Causeway of around 15 minutes brings you to another of Ulster's must-sees, the vertigo-inducing **Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge**. Located near the beautiful coastal village of Ballintoy, [ ].

The vertiginous rope bridge joins to a tiny island, where fishermen would catch salmon. While access to the grounds is free, if you dare to cross the bridge itself, a fee is required.

4. The Titanic Belfast

A striking landmark, this star-shaped building representing the White Star Line logo traces Belfast's maritime history and honors the story of the *RMS Titanic*. [ ], a fact that can't be missed in this part of the city.

There are nine interactive exhibitions on this spot where the infamously ill-fated ocean liner *Titanic* was built. Enjoy a guided tour around the slipway and dry dock and, for an additional fee, visit the ***SS Nomadic***. Built in 1911, this tender would carry passengers from shore to their waiting ocean liners.

There's a restaurant, café, and gift shop located on-site, too. This truly is a world-class tourist attraction.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

5. The Glens of Antrim

It's not just the North Antrim coastline that beguiles. Inland are the nine Glens of Antrim - usually referred to simply as "the Glens" - each exuding its own charm. Drive from Ballycastle towards Larne along the main A2 coast road, and serene lakes, tumbling waterfalls, forest trails, and rolling hills await. **Glenariff**, the "Queen of the Glens," is the most famous of the nine.

Along the way, notice the Glendun Bridge, **Ballypatrick Forest Park** has a 10-kilometer loop drive around Carneighaneigh Mountain, which is especially scenic.

The small seaside resort town of **Portrush**, on the County Londonderry border, is also worth a visit. It's home to the Royal Portrush Golf Club and one of the world's most challenging links golf courses, the Dunluce Links.

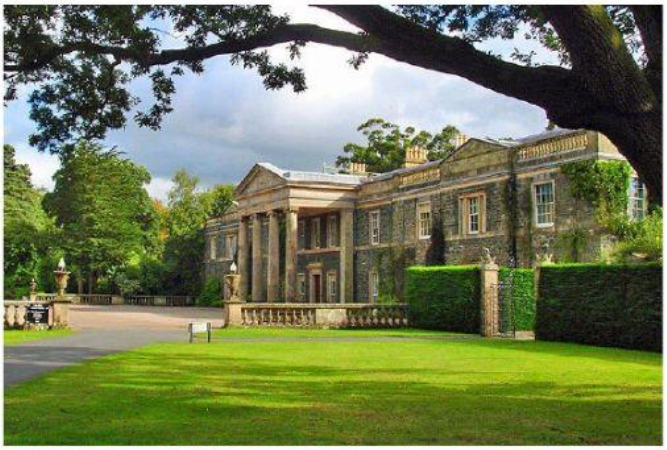
6. Carrickfergus Castle

Around 20 minutes' drive from Belfast is the substantial town and port of Carrickfergus, home to imposing Carrickfergus Castle. One of the best-preserved medieval structures in Ireland, this Norman castle has seen off foes over eight centuries.

Perched near the shore and dominating the town, the fortress is still intact and the recreated banqueting hall is a particular treat, especially for kids. You can pick up an audio guide at the visitor center and .

Nearby is the **Andrew Jackson Centre**, the reimagined ancestral home of the 7th president of the USA.

7. Ards Peninsula



South of Bangor, at Donaghadee, is the start of the 32-kilometer-long picturesque Ards Peninsula. From Donaghadee, a road runs along the Irish Sea coast to Ballywalter with its beautiful beach, Ballyhalbert, and finally Cloughy, .

Serene 18th century **Mount Stewart House and Gardens** is well worth stopping off to admire and it's only a 10-minute drive or so from Ballywalter. On the west shore of the **Strangford Lough** is the resort of **Killyleagh**, with **Hilltop Castle** overlooking the town. On a good day, you'll see the famous Mourne Mountains shimmering in the distance.

Portaferry is on the peninsula's southern tip where there's a ferry link to Strangford. Either that or make the drive, which skirts the west side of the peninsula by the shores of **Strangford Lough**.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

8. The Ulster Folk and Transport Museum

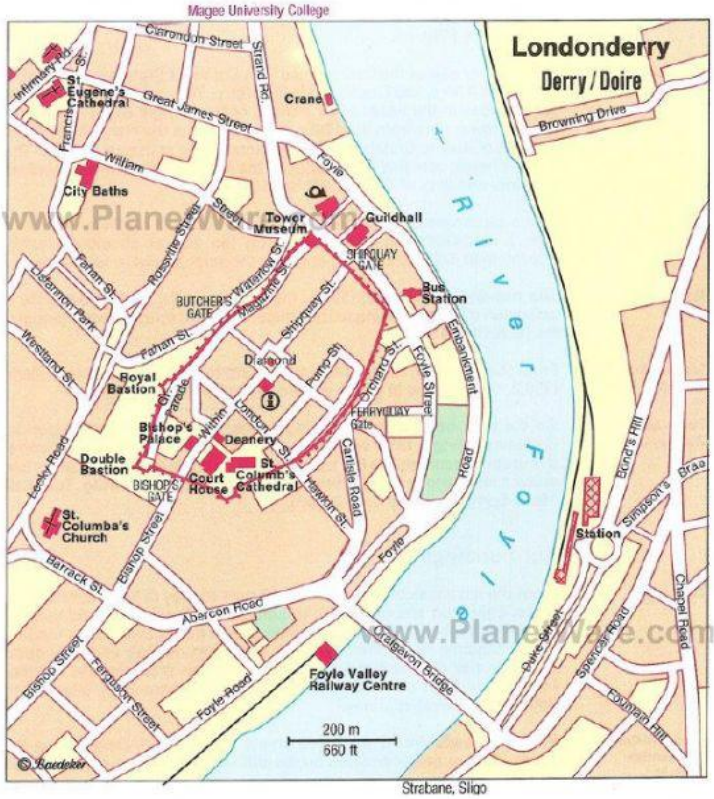
Around 15 minutes' drive from Belfast city center brings you to this "living" museum designed to show Ulster life more than 100 years ago. , as well as 170 acres of parkland to explore. Visitor guides demonstrate traditional crafts around the various locations.

You can clamber aboard steam locomotives and explore the Transport Museum with its impressive collections of electric trams, fire engines, motorbikes, beautiful vintage cars, and horse drawn carriages. A visit here is a day out in itself.

9. Londonderry (Derry)

The second city of Northern Ireland, Londonderry - or Derry, as it's more commonly known locally - lies where the River Foyle opens out into the sea-lough of the same name. The town has been robbed of part of its natural hinterland of **Donegal** by the division of Ireland, yet remains an important port and industrial center .

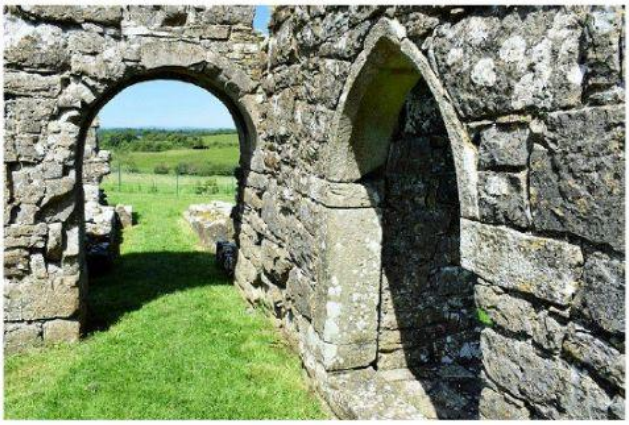
With its attractive surroundings it's a popular tourist center and a good base for trips into the **Inishowen Peninsula** and Donegal in the Republic of Ireland. The town itself has an almost completely preserved circuit of medieval walls and a number of interesting old buildings.



LIVEWORKSHEETS

10. Lough Erne

Two connected lakes combine to form Lough Erne, in County Fermanagh, . Castles and manor houses dot its banks, and its islands are a main attraction.



A **12th-century round tower** dominates Devenish Island's ruined Augustinian priory, and **mysterious carved stone figures** on White Island and Boa Island were the work of Celts between AD 400 and 800. The 39-mile **Shannon Erne Waterway** connects Lough Erne to the River Shannon in Ireland.

More Must-See Destinations near Northern Ireland

Once you have seen the highlights of Northern Ireland, you may want to cross into the Republic of Ireland and explore its capital, Dublin. Or you might consider the options available by ferry from Belfast. Two ferry routes connect Northern Ireland to Scotland, one from Belfast and the other from Larne, each about a two-hour trip. Ferries also depart Belfast for Liverpool, in England, and twice a week ferries travel to the Isle of Man, in the Irish Sea, halfway between England and Ireland.

Glossary

- **Eschew: avoid something intentionally**
- **Basalt: a type of black rock that comes from a volcano**
- **Bracing: making you feel full of energy because it is done outside when the weather is cold and perhaps windy**
- **Dip: immerse**
- **Perched: placed or sitting near the edge of something**
- **Battlements: a wall around the top of a castle, with regular spaces in it through which the people inside the castle can**
- **Thrashing: hitting, beating**
- **Trace: find out what the origin or cause of something was**
- **Slipway: a sloping track used to move boats into or out of the water**
- **Dry dock: an area of water that can be emptied and used for repairing ships**
- **Tender: a small boat that is used for transporting people or goods from the land to a larger boat or from the larger boat to the land**
- **Beguile: attract or interest someone**
- **Shimmer: shine in such a way that the light seems to shake slightly and quickly**
- **Clamber: climb up or into somewhere**
- **Hinterland: the land behind the coast or the banks of a river**
- **Priory: a building where monks or nuns live, work, and pray**

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Some sentences have been removed from the text. Write the corresponding letter in the boxes.

A explore the interior and battlements at your leisure

B this spectacular attraction, though, is not one for the faint-hearted.

C with a traditional textile industry, chemical and mechanical engineering plants, and ceramics factories

D The only survivor, apparently, was the kitchen boy who was perched on the windowsill and had to be rescued.

E The power-sharing government has invested massively in making Ulster attractive to visitors.

F a favourite for fishing, kayaking, or exploring on a day cruise

G Belfast was once the powerhouse of British Empire shipbuilding

H where it turns inland to Portaferry.

I Various names bear testament to this engaging myth

J an excellent example of innovative design and construction.

K remember you're crossing the border into a separate sovereign country

L There are rebuilt labourers' cottages, working farms, rural schools, and village shops as they once were

Match the statements with the correct extract. Write the extract number in the boxes.

- [ ] There are interactive exhibitions and a guided tour.
- [ ] There are Celtic carvings dating back to the first century.
- [ ] If the weather is clear, you can see the mountains far away.
- [ ] It links the mainland to an island.
- [ ] It is close to the border with Ireland.
- [ ] There are beautiful beaches, dunes, and rolling waves.
- [ ] It portrays life as it was over a century ago.
- [ ] You can enjoy a scenic drive around a mountain.
- [ ] There are two explanations of its formation: a scientific one and one based on folklore.
- [ ] It stands near the coast and is not in ruins, like others are.

LIVEWORKSHEETS