

Ireland's 30 best beaches

Fran Power, Irish Independent PUBLISHED 19/07/2015



Dog's Bay beach Galway

Get the wind in your hair and sand in your toes with our pick of Ireland's best beaches!

Best for beauty

1. Dog's bay, Co Galway

Not so much a beach as a long crescent of sand back-to-back with another beaut of a silvery bay, Gurteen. Both have white sand made of tiny particles of seashell and between them you'll always find shelter from the summer breeze.

Après beach: Rent kayaks at Gurteen beach by the car park.

Eat: Drive to Roundstone House Hotel for a pint and slice of banoffee pie.
pie.roundstonehousehotel.com

2. Inchavore, Lough Dan, Co. Wicklow

Cling to the side, alright, it's a lakeside beach, and you have to clamber down to it, but with the steep sides of Inchavore valley rising around you, the lake stretching before you, birch trees behind you, this is a fantastic beach for a picnic and chilly swim - and chances are you'll have it all to yourself.

Getting there: Follow the instructions for Inchavore Valley Short Hike on loughdan.com.

Après beach: Warm up by going trekking with Wicklow Equestrian. wicklowequestrian.ie.

Eat: Roundwood Inn for pints and toasties, (01) 281-8107.

3. Inchdoney, Co. Cork



Follow the road from Cork to Clonakilty and just beyond you'll find Inchdoney Island, a blob of land surrounded by crystal clear Blue-Flagged waters. Sheltered by land on three sides, it has views out over Clonakilty Bay to the south and here you can walk the sandy shore and watch the long rollers come in from the Atlantic.

Après beach: Boyne organise a sea-foraging-kayak trip with Atlantic Sea Kayaking from Union Hall, Cork city or Skibbereen. atlanticseakayaking.com

Eat: You're in foodie country so enjoy toast with quail eggs or brill with asparagus bisque at Deasy's Harbour Bar in Clonakilty, (023) 883-5741.

4. Keem Bay, Co. Mayo

For sheer drop-dead beauty, Keem beach on Achill Island is the landscape queen. Scraped out of the cliffs of Benmore to the west and Croaghaun on the east, it is a little handkerchief of a beach that was once a basking shark fishery and holds a Blue Flag.

Après beach: Go off track to explore Achill's mountains and sea cliffs with expert guides at Achill Surf. achillsurf.com

Eat: Pure Magic Lodge for pizza. puremagic.ie

5. Trá an Doilín, Co. Galway

Look closely and you'll see that the beach at Trá an Doilín in the heart of the Connemara Gaeltacht is made of tiny shards of coral in different pastel shades. Crystal clear water for snorkelling, seaweed drifts for foragers, large stones for sunbathers to stretch out on, rock pools for young fisherfolk. Perfect.

Après beach: Visit Mungo Murphy Seaweed in Rossaveal for a seafoodie tour. mungomurphyseaweed.com

Eat: Mulberrys in Barna does a tempura battered fish 'n' chips. mulberrys.ie

Read more: [Ireland's 30 best family days out](#)

Best for families



6. Fanore, Co. Clare

If the grey limestone flags of the Burren begin to pall, make a break for the black and golden shores of Fanore beach (above). The gold, says one theory, comes from iron oxide coating the minuscule shell fragments that make up the beach - it's all about geology in this part of the world - and get a fresh perspective on the unique landscape.

Après beach: Visit Craggy Island and Father Ted's house - in real life it's a farm serving a fine brew. Ah, go on, go on. fathertedshouse.com

Eat: Don't hesitate, book in at Lisdoonvarna's Wild Honey Inn. wildhoneyinn.com

7. Tyrella, Co. Down

Laden with awards - Blue Flag, Green Coast and more - Tyrella beach is heavenly for kids, with enough sand to build a military complex, bury dad or sculpt animals, and shallow

warm(ish) water good for paddlers. And then there's that view of the Mourne Mountains in the distance.

Après beach Visit Inch Abbey, an 8th-century ruin, perfect for picnics.

Eat Get your sandwiches at The Daily Grind in Downpatrick, there's a very good reason why locals queue. *dailygrind.ie*

8. Brittas Bay, Co. Wicklow

Scene of many a Dubliner's golden summer memories, Brittas Bay is a 5km stretch of silvery beach backed by grassy dunes. Head for south Brittas, it has a Blue Flag. Even in a heatwave, you'll still find plenty of towel room and the rollers are gentle and kid-friendly.

Parking: €4; as well as roadside parking if you don't mind a walk

Eat: It's got to be a hummer sambo at Bay Café, 2 Bayview, Brittas Bay, (0404 47965).

9. Sandycove, Co. Dublin



Within a beach ball's throw of each other are two much-loved Dublin waterholes, Sandycove Beach and the Forty Foot. Families flock to Sandycove for its gently sloping beach and calm waters, while sunbathers spread their towels on the grassy banks above. Around the corner, the Forty Foot is a rocky cove where teenagers dare each other to leap off the high rock into the water below, and hardy swimmers do laps to Dalkey Island and back.

Après beach: Wear the kids out with a run around the People's Park in Dun Laoghaire, 10 minutes walk, and a clamber in the playground.

Eat: Cavistons in Glasthule for a plate of fresh seafood. *cavistons.com*

10. Velvet Strand, Portmarnock, Co. Dublin

Dublin's northside is spoilt for choice when it comes to beaches. The vast flats of Dollymount Strand are beautiful but very exposed, which is why kite-riders flock there. For a day's sunshine and splashing, try Portmarnock's 5km sandy shoreline instead and position the deckchair for knockout views of Howth Head and Ireland's Eye. Park at the South Beach car park and follow the path through the dunes to avoid the jams.

Après beach: Go straight to the picturesque fishing village of Howth to pick up catch of the day fresh off the boats at Dorans on the Pier. *dorans.ie*

Eat: If you prefer it served up to you, pop in next door to The Oar House Restaurant. *oarhouse.ie*

11. Barleycove, Co Cork

Childhood memories are made of long summer days on beaches like Barleycove and when the sun shines this stunner rivals any Caribbean beach for turquoise waters and golden sands. A floating bridge from the car park to the beach leapfrogs the delicate dune's eco-system and is a thrill for kids. Unpack the cooler, set up the deckchair and relax, the gently shelving beach makes this a safe spot for kids to paddle and splash.

Après beach: Visit Mizen Head Signal Station on the southernmost tip of the peninsula for the thrill of pretending to be radio hams. *mizenhead.net*

Eat: Al fresco overlooking the wee harbour at Heron's Cove restaurant and B&B in Goleen. *heronscove.com*

12. Ballycastle, Co. Antrim

Get the sand between your toes at Ballycastle, an old-style bucket-and-spade beach at the northern end of the Glens of Antrim. Stroll towards brooding Fairhead and you come to Pans Rocks, old iron salt pans that jut into the sea. Spot the carved face on one lump of rock or follow the steps chiselled out of the rock into the Devil's Churn, an underwater tunnel. Very Famous Five.

Après beach: Take a full-day or half-day expedition with Ballycastle Charters. (048) 2076-2074.

Eat: It's hard to beat family-run Morton's Fish & Chip Shop, who catch their own the fish daily, 048 2076 1100.

13 Garrettstown, Co Cork

A family favourite, Garrettstown has sand for digging holes, rock pools for shrimping, dunes for exploring and views of the Old Head of Kinsale to add a splash of drama to a day's beachcombing.

Après beach: Inject some thrill into the day, coasteering with Garrettstown Surf School & Coasteering. *surfgstown.com*

Eat: No shortage of good nosh in Kinsale, try the ex-Ely Winebar crew at The Black Pig Winebar & Café, 021 477-4101.

14. Portstewart, Co. Derry

Ever since Victorian times, Portstewart has been a genteel seaside resort, with holiday makers drawn no doubt to the three kilometres of sandy beach that make up Portstewart Strand and the bracing water. Nowadays, though, it's a big draw for surfers and nature lovers.

Après beach: Sway across Carrick-a-rede rope bridge (nationaltrust.org.uk) which connects the mainland to an island, or cycle along the path to sister seaside town of Portrush for an ice cream.

Eat: Try Harry's Shack on the beach.

Best for island lovers



Great Blasket Island. Photo: Raymond Fogarty

15. Trá Bán, Great Blasket, Co Kerry

Don't let reading Peig at school put you off visiting the island she married onto. Now uninhabited, the Great Blasket is a lovely wilderness to explore, take a dip, picnic and enjoy the views back to Dún Chaoin on the mainland (where the Blasket Centre is located), from lovely sandy Trá Bán. heritageireland.ie

Après beach: Explore the island and then the teeming waters around it with Marine Tours (marinetours.ie).

Eat: Drive the lovely Dingle peninsula back to Idás in Dingle town for farmed, foraged, pickled and landed local foods, 066 915-0885.

16. East End Beach, Inishbofin

Travel back in time with a trip to Inishbofin. Make for East End, a sheltered beach in a horseshoe bay with views back to Mayo and Galway. Its clear calm waters are great for kids to practice the doggy paddle, puttering about in a kayak with a mackerel line, or just floating on your back and counting the clouds.

Getting there Three ferries leave from Cleggan daily in summer. (095 45819 / 086 171 8829). inishbofinislanddiscovery.com

Parking: At Cleggan harbour.

Après beach : Sit and drink in the scenery.

Eat: Crab claws at Dolphin Hotel & Restaurant. dolphinshotel.ie

17. Cartystown beach, Coney Island, Co. Sligo

Between Rosses Point and buzzing Strandhill (whose own beach is surf heaven) lies the original Coney Island, with a lovely bather's beach, Cartystown. The island is tidal, so you can drive or walk via Cummeen Strand at low tide, or take a boat trip from the pier at Rosses Point. Check the tidal tables first though. tidetimes.org.uk

Après beach: Have a pint at the island's only bar, McGowans, or take a surf lesson at Strandhill with iSurfIreland. isurfireland.com

Eat: Shells Seaside Bakery & Café (shellscafe.com) with a trip down Shore Road to Mammy Johnston's for ice cream afters.

Read more: [TripAdvisor reveals its Top 10 Irish beaches](#)

Best for swimmers

18. Badger's Cove, Dunmore East, Co. Waterford

Twisting steps lead down to a small sandy cove, backed by a cave and cliffs where kittiwakes nest and the water calls to swimmers. And if that's not to your liking, this pretty village has plenty more bathing coves to choose from - ladies' cove, men's cove, and if you're going the full-back crawl, the Blue-Flagged Counsellor's Strand by the golf course.

Après beach: Rent a kayak at Dunmore East Adventure Centre. dunmoreadventure.com

Eat: Rehydrate at ye olde Spinnaker Bar (thespinnakerbar.com) and eat at Strand Inn. thestrandin.com

19. Killiney Beach, Co. Dublin

On a hot summer's evening, with towel and togs tucked under your arm, Killiney beach is the place to head for a dip post-work. Admittedly, it's stony, but that great sweep of bay is just a 30-minute Dart journey from the city centre. The sweet spot is White Rock, at the Dublin end of the crescent, at high tide a rocky outcrop cuts it off from the rest of the beach.

Après beach: Cross Vico Road and climb up to the top of Killiney Hill, the views will feed the soul.

Eat Locals crowd into Regazzi in Dalkey for simple Italian food served with plenty of sauce; book ahead. regazzi.ie

Best for Surfers



Lahinch, Co. Clare

20. Rosstown, Co Donegal

Facing westward into the Atlantic, Rosstown Beach has seen waves up to 7m high. No surprise then, that surfers love it and it's a good spot for beginners (try Fin McCool Surf School; donegalsurfing.com). But so do families who can drive cars laden with buggies, windbreaks and deckchairs on to the beach and set up picnic blankets nearby to break sandcastle-building records or dabble in the water.

Après beach: Walk the Creevy Coastal Path running from Rosstown to Ballyshannon, about 16km, along the clifftops, stop at Creevy Pier Hotel for refuelling.

21. Magheroarty, Co. Donegal

Magheroarty is the poster girl for beaches in a county where they would be storybook perfect if only the weather would oblige. Surfers heart its big breakers and empty waters, walkers love the views of Inishbofin and Tory islands.

Après beach: Drive to Falcarragh or Marble Hill for a surf lesson with Narosa.narosalife.com

Eat. Join the locals at Starfish Café, in Dunfanaghy, 074 910-0676.

22. Lahinch, Co. Clare

Lahinch has a few claims to fame. On land, the world-class links course is a hit with golfers, while along the shoreline, neoprene-coated surfers carve up the waves no matter what the weather. Yet another fine reason to visit this part of the world comes out of the sea - fantastic fish. Visit Vaughan's Anchor Inn up the road for a plate of locally caught seafood served up just fine.

Après beach: Round of golf? Book a game at Lahinch Golf Club. lahinchgolf.com

Eat: Vaughan's Anchor Inn in Liscannor. vaughans.ie

Best for film buffs



23. Coomeenole Strand, Co Kerry

Back in 1975 when David Lean shot the epic *Ryan's Daughter*, this was the beach he chose for his location. In a bite of sandy land between the headlands of Dunmore and Sleahills, Coomeenole (above) looks across to the Great Blasket island.

Après beach: Check out the prehistoric beehive huts at Fahan, along the stretch of coast which appeared in *Far and Away*

Eat: Make for Out of the Blue in Dingle for the best seafood (outoftheblue.ie). And for dessert it's got to be Murphys Ice Cream in Dingle. murphysicecream.ie

24. Curraclloe, Co. Wexford

Remember that harrowing 20-minute sequence of the D-Day landings in *Saving Private Ryan*? It was shot, not in northern France, but at Ballinesker Beach, Curraclloe Strand. Those extras? Yep, Irish Defence Forces. Off screen, it's a long stretch of Blue Flag beach with dunes, known for its rich shellfish and bird life.

Après beach: Go birdwatching and keep an eye out for oysters, mussels, scallops, cockles and starfish.

Eat: Pop into Wexford Arts Centre and D'Lush Café for the best coffee and crepes in town, 053 912-3795.

25. Inch Beach, Co. Kerry

While Inch Beach sticks a sandy finger into the Atlantic on the Dingle peninsula, its counterpart Rossbeigh Strand juts a flipper out from the Iveragh Peninsula opposite. It's a toss up as to which is more beautiful, but movie-makers seem to favour Inch - David Lean chose it as the beach locations for *Ryan's Daughter* while the 1962 film of *Playboy of the Western World* was entirely shot here.

Après beach: After a walk along Inch strand, take a canter along Rossbeigh and decide which you prefer. *beachtrek.ie*

Eat: Down your oysters at Sammy's overlooking Inch beach, 066 915-8118.

26. Clogherhead, Co. Louth

The fishing village of Clogherhead is a bit of a movie star, having played the backdrop to a number of films, most recently the 2009 Irish crime thriller *Perrier's Bounty* with Cillian Murphy and Brendan Gleeson and, back in 1997, *The Devil's Own* with Brad Pitt as a gun-smuggling Irishman. Port beach a few miles north makes a good spot for a dip and towel dry as you admire the Mourne Mountains northwards.

Après beach: Book a class with Cordon Bleu-trained chef Tara Walker, aka The Tasty Tart, using fish fresh off Clogherhead's fishing boats. *thetastytart.ie*

Eat: Imaginative salads, soups and sandwiches at Relish in Bettystown. *relish.ie*

Best for nature lovers



Mulranny Park Hotel

27. Five Finger Strand, Co. Donegal

A long golden beach where rocky outcrops or, yes, fingers stick into the sea, and the Knockameny Bens form a steep backdrop. Five Finger Strand is at the beginning of the Wild Atlantic Way near Malin Head. The shifting currents mean it's not ideal for swimmers, but great for wind in the hair, romps with the kids and dog walking.

Après beach: Bring the binocs and look out for choughs and other wildlife.

Eat: Chase down Kevin Pykes food truck MOE @Pykes'N'Pommes in Derry for a legendary burger

28. Mulranny, Co. Mayo

The tiny village of Mulranny wakes up every morning to one of the best views in the country. It sits on the edge of Clew Bay with its sprinkling of islands, while to the south, Croagh Patrick pokes skywards. A causeway leads from the village over saltmarsh and Machaire to a steep shingled beach, heaven for nature lovers, birdwatchers and walkers.

Après beach: Cycle the Greenway. clewbaybikeshire.ie

Eat Start with a cool beer at a table in front of the Mulranny Park Hotel (mulrannyparkhotel.ie. above), follow with a seriously good dinner at Knockranny House Hotel (knockrannyhousehotel.ie) in Westport.

Best For horse fans



29. Laytown Strand, Co. Meath

Ah, there's nothing like the thudding of horses' hooves on wet sand for drama. You'll find the traditional sport of racing on beaches in a few places, including Glenbeigh in Kerry (August) and at the Geesala Festival in Doolough in Co Mayo (August), but Laytown Strand (above) is the only place where the races are run under Turf Club rules.

Après beach: Try your hand at the lordly art of falconry in Balbriggan. dublinfalconry.ie

Eat: The Eastern Seaboard Bar & Grill in Drogheda, 041 980-2570.

Best For foodies

30. Goats Island, Co. Waterford

Locals ignore the hard sandy beach at pretty Ardmore for a sheltered cove further along the coast called Goats Island where a hardy few swim year-round. A sprinkling of rocky outcrops makes for good castles for kids to defend, or to jump off into the incoming tide. And after all that sun, sea and sandiness, Martin Kajüter at Cliff House Hotel awaits with platefuls of exquisite food. cliffhousehotel.com

Getting there: Head for Ardginna, five kilometres beyond Ardmore, and look for the signpost for Goat Island down a winding lane.

Après beach: Sit on the bluff at Ram's Head a short walk from Ardmore beach, and watch for dolphins and whales

Eat: Still hungry? The Tannery in Dungarvan will sort that. tannery.ie