

FREE ATTRACTIONS IN COUNTY KILKENNY

KILKENNY CITY

Kilkenny Castle

Standing dramatically on a strategic height that commands a crossing on the River Nore and dominating the 'High Town' the city, Kilkenny Castle today is a complex structure of various architectural styles offering a range of cultural facilities and public amenities.

Castle Park and Gardens

Situated in the heart of the city, Kilkenny Castle Park offers a uniquely relaxing setting against the hustle and bustle of the city. The park consists of 50 acres of charming and extensive pleasure grounds featuring mature trees and shrubs with an ornamental lake numbered among the many items of interest. To the front of the castle is the Rose Garden which has been designed in the shape of a Celtic High Cross with the castle at its peak.

Children's Playground

Located within the park, the playground comprises a Corocord space net, supernova roundabout, a selection of swings and slides, spinner bowls, springers and play panels, one of which teaches the alphabet in brail. All of the equipment is suitable for a variety of ages ranging from 2-14. Wet pour safety surfacing in a variety of colours, shapes and incorporating the use of play elements was installed over the complete area of the playground making it a heaven for children.

The Parade Tower

Positioned at the base of the Parade tower is The Medieval Room. Features in the room include plunging arrow loops inserted in the massive walls that are indicative of the strongly defensive nature of the early castle. In the centre of the room is a stone pillar and re-used timbers dating from the later medieval period. During the nineteenth century remodeling of the castle the room was converted to use as a wine cellar. Today, this is where visitors can watch the free audio visual on Kilkenny Castle. This gives an extremely in-depth view into the history of the castle and the many important programmes of archaeological excavation, conservation, and restoration which has been carried out.

Butler Gallery

Sited with the castle itself is The Butler Gallery which exhibits the work of young and emerging artists alongside renowned international artists. They also manage and display the diverse Butler Collection so it can be exhibited and enjoyed by the public.

Further information is available on www.kilkennycastle.ie

The Canal Walk

Starting at the Canal Square on Rose Inn Street, the Canal walk begins with a new City pavilion with benches overlooking the Rivercourt hotel, in the shadow of the imposing Kilkenny Castle. This romantic walk takes you along the old canal, shaded by tall trees and old mills. The walk will eventually take you for miles into the countryside following the course of the River Nore towards the picturesque town of Inistioge.

Shee Alms House

The Shee Alms House is a Tudor building dating from 1582. It was originally used by the church before lawyer Richard Shee, a wealthy merchant, bought it as a home for the poor. Originally it cared for 12 homeless people and continued in this purpose for 150 years. Today it is the Kilkenny Tourist Office which provides detailed information on accommodation, places of interest, festivals, events and activities nationwide. The building by its own merits is an attraction in itself and is well worth a visit.

Black Abbey

One of the oldest churches in Kilkenny is the Black Abbey, which has served the community for the last 760 years. Formally known as the “Abbey of The Most Holy Trinity” its name alteration can be attributed to the Dominicans, who also became known as Black Friars, from the black cloak worn over the white habit, thus lending there name to the church. Items of interest at the church include a pre-reformation statue of St Dominic, a glass case beside the Altar with a sculpture in alabaster of the Most Holy Trinity, to whom the Abbey is consecrated, the great Rose window and 10 stone 13th or 14th century coffins found at the entrance way. The church is wheelchair accessible from the beautiful cobbled Abbey St laneway which borders the city wall and passes through the last remaining gateway.

The Famine Memorial and Good Shed Square

Located within the grounds of the newly developed Mac Donagh Junction

Newpark Fen

Newpark Marsh is a fen which was once a lake and became colonised by reeds and floating vegetation, such as pondweed. It is a diverse habitat with open water, tussocks of sedge and a rich variety of wild plants, including Ragged Robin, Lady's Smock, Yellow Iris, Yellow and Purple Loosestrife. The fen is situated about two kilometres north-east of Kilkenny, off the Castlecomer Road, a short distance from Newpark Hotel. It is classified as a valley fen and designated as an Area of Scientific Interest and a proposed Natural Heritage Area (NHA). Woodland adjoining the fen beside Kilkenny College is part of the wetland system and is included within the NHA.

COUNTY KILKENNY

Castlecomer Demense

Castlecomer Discovery Park is situated on grounds that once formed part of the Wandesforde family estate. It comprises of 80 acres of mixed woodland in the south-east of Ireland, just 20km north of the medieval city of Kilkenny and 24km from Carlow town. Open all year round, it is an ideal location for a family day out or for bus tours and groups offering various attractions, many of which are free to the public.

Playground

Built from Robinia wood, a natural material chosen to reflect the wooded area in which it is located, the playground has proven very popular by parents and children alike. The theme of the design reflects Castlecomer's rich coal mining heritage with the equipment resembling a truck, tunnel conveyor belt and mine shaft. It also has timber framed prehistoric animal shaped into play areas to highlight the fossils found during the coal mining era. The surface of the playground is layered bark chip which is filtered daily to remove unsafe objects or debris and is an added source of safety and enjoyment for children under 14 years.

Woodlands

Visitors can explore 6km of woodland trails that have been colour coded into three looped walks. These trails extend into a number of interconnecting paths that play host to wooden sculptures which imitate the wild animals who live in the woods. These walkways are surrounded by two trout filled lakes with a picnic area, boat house and small animal sanctuary dotted around its edges. The looped walks are wheelchair friendly and suitable for buggies. Dogs are also permitted but must be kept on a leash.

Craft Yard

Formally stables and farmyard buildings of the estate, they are now home to a growing number of crafts people and artists who sell directly from their workshops. Crafts include pottery, jewellery, textiles, photography, painting and furniture

restoration. Opening times are varied and ringing ahead to avoid disappointment is advisable.

Visitor Centre

The visitor centre houses free facilities such as an exhibition area and toilets. It is also home to Jarrow Cafe which can cater for groups of 50 people and the “Footprints in Coal” experience which has a small admission fee. Further information is available on www.discoverypark.ie

James Hoban Memorial

Hoban Memorial was constructed in 2008 to honour the 250th Anniversary of the birth of James Hoban (1758 - 1831), architect of 'The White House'. Located at Desart, Cuffesgrange, close to the birthplace of James Hoban, the memorial arbour, which incorporates a 'Spirit of Place' was erected by architecture students from the Catholic University of Washington DC and local craftsmen. The structure is 30 meters long and 3 meters high, is impressive, modern and well worth a visit.

Kells Priory

Kells Priory is one of the largest and most impressive medieval monuments in County Kilkenny. It is an Augustine priory situated alongside King's River beside the village of Kells, about 15 km south of the medieval city of Kilkenny. The priory is a National Monument and is in the guardianship of the Office of Public Works. One of its most striking features is a collection of medieval tower houses spaced at intervals along and within walls which enclose a site of just over 3 acres. These give the priory the appearance more of a fortress than of a place of worship and make it a truly distinctive site. There is unlimited access to the public on the site, it is also important to note that as the site is not manned there are no tours or public toilets.

Woodstock Garden & Arboretum

Woodstock Gardens are located in the south east of Kilkenny just outside the picturesque village of Inistioge overlooking the River Nore Valley. The gardens are home to a mix of formal and informal gardens with an arboretum, walled garden, terraced garden, yew walk and rose garden providing the main interest. Also of significance are two stunning avenues, the Monkey Puzzle Avenue and Noble Fir Avenue. Recently added are a rustic summer house, constructed from materials from the gardens and a fountain to replace the original fountain. The arboretum is home to many fine specimen trees from Asia and South America in particular are recognised as champion trees due to their size. On site facilities include toilets, children's playground, limited wheelchair access (mobility buggy available at quieter times) and tea rooms.

St Mary's Church

Located in the centre of Gowran town, the church was built in the late 13th century on the site of an earlier monastery, St Mary's Church was served by a "college" - clerics who lived in a community but who did not submit to the rule of a monastery. The church was a large and elaborate structure, with an aisled nave (the main part of the

church where the congregation sat) and a long chancel (the section of the church where the altar was placed) and has high quality architectural sculpture used throughout. In the late middle ages a massive tower was inserted between the nave and chancel, and in the 19th century this tower was incorporated into the parish church which was built in place of the chancel and which now takes up about half of the building. There were also several other changes made to the church at various

Duiske Abbey & High Crosses, Graiguenamanagh

Located within the centre of Graiguenamanagh at the foot of Brandon Hill is Duiske Abbey, the largest and perhaps the finest of the thirty-four medieval Cistercian abbeys in Ireland. The abbey, which takes its name from the little river Duiske (Blackwater) which joins the Barrow here, was founded by William Marshall in 1204 and was suppressed by Henry VIII in 1536. The abbey's large "Early English" Gothic Church, was magnificently restored in the 1970s and in its northern aisle a model of the monastery shows the abbey as it was in the fourteenth century. Original medieval floor tiles from the building can be seen in the abbey along with the beautiful "Early English" gothic and Romanesque architecture. Some of the thirteenth-century stonework is still obvious; including still-leaf foliage carved into the capitals, dog-tooth ornaments and banded shafts. It also contains many Lancet windows and an effigy of a 13th century Norman knight found in the ruins which is currently installed by the main entrance. The Abbey is open to visitors but opening times may vary seasonally. Explanation plaques are at various points throughout the Abbey. Toilets are available in the nearby Abbey Centre.

Also of interest on the site are two granite high crosses in the graveyard to the south of the church dating to the 8th century, both of these crosses were brought here from elsewhere. The North Cross, came from Ballyogan, the iconography and design of this particular cross are clearly similar to the other crosses of the Barrow valley although slightly more primitive. The South Cross came from Aghakiltawn. Both crosses have a crucifixion scene on the west face. The North cross bears figure sculpture on the shaft, below the crucifixion is Adam and Eve below that is the sacrifice of Isaac and at the bottom of the shaft David with a harp. Geometric designs are featured on the north and south sides. Built into the wall of the Abbey is a Cross Slab, also in the abbey grounds is the base of a third cross.

Trail Kilkenny Walks

There is a number of walking trails looped walks around County Kilkenny. They are largely divided into two main sections - **Hiking** and **Strolling**. Hiking means that the walk is over 2 hours and generally for a more experience walker, strolling is a gentler walk up to 1 and a half hours and not too difficult.

Castlemorris Walk
The Islands Walk, Urlingford Walk
Castlecomer Estate
Kilmacoliver Walk
Callan Abbey Meadow
Tory Hill
Mountain Grove
Jenkintown Walk

Further information on these and also new cycling routes can be found on www.trailkilkenny.ie

MADE in Kilkenny Craft Trail

Kilkenny, has long had the reputation for being a hub of creativity, and has earned the name “The Creative Heart of Ireland”. MADE in Kilkenny was formed to foster this excellence in crafts, to encourage the growth of the professional craft industry and to promote the county as a shopping destination for authentic, handmade craft in Ireland. It also aims to encourage a pleasant day out visiting the various craft shops amongst Kilkenny’s scenic countryside and historical city. A brochure has been specifically designed to with this purpose in mind, it highlights various designer-makers, and a map to help you find them. Further information is also available on www.madeinkilkenny.ie

National Craft Gallery

Located in the former Kilkenny castle stable courtyard, the opening of the National Craft Gallery in 2000 marked a new era for the Crafts Council of Ireland, providing a new and permanent exhibition space for craft in Kilkenny. Over the years the gallery has evolved and grown to meet the needs of the craft industry and to ensure its continued growth and development. It has a dynamic exhibition programme and practical training programme on site that are open daily free to the public.

Gairdin na Ghorta, The Garden of Remembrance

Located in the beautiful village of Newmarket near Knocktopher, the 150th Anniversary Famine Commemorative Garden is open all year round with free admission to the public. The area in front of the Thatched Heritage House is known as Garraí na bPrátaí (The Potato Garden). It also doubles up as a picnic area and is a very popular venue for photographs, group photos and personal ones. For a conducted

tour of the Gáirdín please contact Willie Barron 086-8394349 or visit www.faminegarden.com

Ahenny and Kilkieran High Crosses (Kilkenny/Tipperary border)

A high cross is a free-standing Christian cross made of stone and often richly decorated. They were raised primarily in Ireland during the Early Middle Ages. They often, though not always, feature a stone ring around the intersection, forming a Celtic Christian cross. High Crosses exist from the 7th century with the Ahenny and Kilkieran High Cross been some of the finest examples in the country. From Carrick-on-Suir take the R 697 north approximately six kilometres, then take the next right. Travel about two kilometres down this road to just past the church. Park at the church and the crosses (well sign-posted) are in a walled churchyard across a field. A couple of kilometres here are Kilkieran crosses which are well signposted.