

Sunday Mirror

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time to

EXPLORE



Rugged Ireland is known for its landscapes, unrefined hospitality, beauty, culture and a rich and complex history. And perhaps nowhere encompasses all four better than Boyne Valley – located in the north east of Ireland, just 20 minutes from Dublin airport.

Hidden gems may not be the appropriate term for Boyne Valley, which extends across all of County Meath and the southern region of Co Louth – because its charm, its port, and endless possibility for adventure and wonderment will not be lost on those familiar with it.

But like anywhere so close to a capital city, it may be considered as a holiday destination for those heading to Ireland, but it shouldn't be, especially as it is considered the birthplace of Ireland's Ancient East, and truly has something for everyone.

If you're interested in Irish history, the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne is the homeplace of Newgrange and Knowth passage tombs – or burial monuments – dating back to 3200 BC.

The best known on the site is Newgrange, built by Stone Age farmers and predating Stonehenge by 800 years. The passage tomb complex lies to the west of Newgrange, and the large mound has two graves surrounded by 127 massive boulders, as well as 18 small tombs.

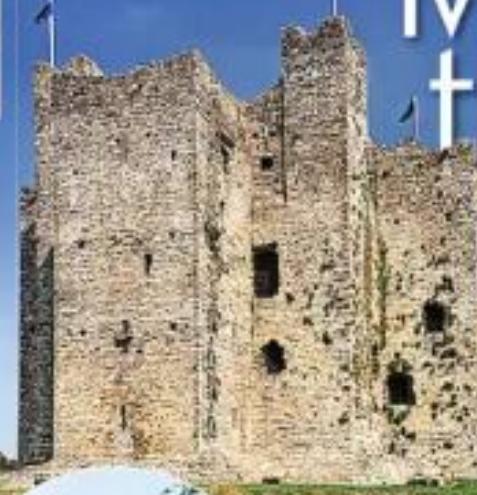
Step inside the ancient, dimly lit, mirrored at the neolithic art – drawings and inscriptions left by the Neolithic people 5200 years ago.

When you grade turns the spot-lights off, watch a single sliver of light flood the passageway. The passage and chamber are aligned with the rising sun on midwinter around the Winter Solstice which each year attracts hundreds to Newgrange.

Next, explore Loughcrew Cairns. The Loughcrew complex is a megalithic cemetery with around 30 passage tombs and is situated around the summit of those hills near the town of Collinstown.

One of the best-preserved and most accessible tombs at Loughcrew known as Cairn T, appears to be the central tomb of the whole complex. It faces the rising sun at the winter (December) and summer (September) equinoxes which allows through the passage to illuminate symbols carved onto the

OSCAR FAME Trim Castle was used as walled city of York in Branheart

SPECTACULAR
Kilkeel Castle

back

wall of the chamber. On a clear day visitors will be able to see over half of Ireland from the top of Sliebh an Caill (Hill of the Witch).

At the base of the hill is Nugent Henry's Cottage, a 1790s heritage museum where visitors can get a feel for what life was like in a traditional Irish home.

Those with a penchant for history's fortresses should make time for Kilim Castle, which boasts links to Sir Walter Raleigh and Lawrence of Arabia. The castle, which long lay in ruins, has been fully restored by Australian native Alan Sargeant-Kinsella and his wife, who actually live in the castle. They could be contacted with quite literally bringing the spectacular structure to life.

With guided tours available for the public, it boasts a collection of artwork and artifacts from the Medieval and early Renaissance

periods. And contrary to others of their kind, these walls are not covered behind red tape or glass.

This ability to step back in time while also seeing the castle through the eyes of the present day, makes Kilim Castle possibly one of the most authentic experiences you'll have inside the grounds of an ancient fortress.

Meathstown: the market town of Trim will impress like, buff, having

hosted in its O'Carroll's Oscar-winning epic, Branheart. Many set in Scotland, the 1995 movie was partly filmed in Ireland and Trim Castle played its part as the fortified city of York. The scenes set in London were filmed inside the castle walls.

Guided tours grant access to the keep, with its panoramic views of the surrounding countryside.

Walking around the castle grounds and along the River Boyne, it's easy to see why the filmmakers fell in love with the area.

But the Boyne Valley isn't just all history, though. Food, drink, and relaxation play a huge part in the region's offerings. At the Twelve Points Restaurant,

a posh eatery in the grounds of Kilkeel Castle, you can tuck into enoteca, Kilkeel venison and other culinary delights.

While in the town of Trim, stop off at Stonewall Coffee to enjoy brunch made with the finest local ingredients while taking in a view of the castle.

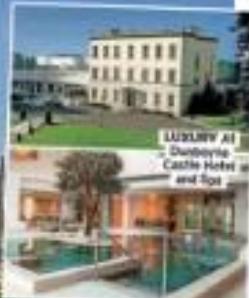
In the heart of the seaside village of Bettystown, you can enjoy afternoon tea at the Mary Bettystown cafe whilst overlooking the Irish Sea before admiring the beautiful coastline with a walk along the popular seaside prom.

If looking for somewhere to stay, Trim Castle Hotel offers 61 elegant bedrooms and is an ideal location for exploring the region. You'll dine in The Bailey Restaurant with its seasonal Irish home cooking, with flavours inspired by Asia and Europe.

Alternatively, a spa, drives and overnight at Domboyle Castle Hotel is a popular choice.

Spread over 21 acres of lush green country roads, the hotel offers thermal access at The Spa with the crystal stone rooms, herb sauna, hammam, hot infrared room. You'll dine in The Ivy Restaurant, which has two AA Rosettes with menus inspired by the finest seasonal produce.

Outdoors, the hotel offers a

LUXURY AT
Domboyle Castle Hotel is and Spa

GET THERE

Fly to Dublin airport from a wide choice of UK airports with airlines including Aer Lingus, Ryanair and British Airways.

BOOK IT

Rooms at Domboyle Castle Hotel and Spa in Dunboyne, Co Meath, start at €120 a night, domboylecastlehotel.com

Breakfast from €20 per person in Trim, Co Meath, start at €120 a night, theivytrim.com

MORE INFO

discoverboynevalley.com

Boyne Valley highlights include the Poppy Gardens, a cottage garden full of gazing stations and whimsical touches owned by passionate gardener Edna Purcell, who opened it up to the public in 2013. You'll also have fine views of the Loughcrew Hills. Extend your pamper session with a visit to Beehive Mill House and The Hot Box sauna – an outdoor sauna experience on the bank of the river Boyne at Beehive Mill House, a wellness and glamping retreat.

For a go-at-bread-making? Chris and Sam at Biscuit with Benefits turn visitors into their home for a hands-on baking session.

You'll craft your own sourdough bread while exploring the deep connections between bread, gut health, and well-being with the couple who are a former baker and local GP.

At every turn, Boyne Valley takes into a side of Ireland – and history – that visitors may never have experienced or even considered before.

But you'll be glad of it, and all the better for it.

SCENE
Bettystown
beach, MeathINTRODUCING
monument, and exhibition, left

Mad about the Boyne

Fionnuala Boyle journeys deep into the historic heart of Ireland

Rugged Ireland is famous for its landscapes, unrivalled hospitality, hearty cuisine and a rich and complex history. And perhaps nowhere encompasses all four better than Boyne Valley – located in the north east of Ireland, just 20 minutes from Dublin airport.

‘Hidden gem’ is maybe not the appropriate term for Boyne Valley, which extends across all of County Meath and the southern region of Co Louth – because its charm, its past, and endless possibility for adventure and wonderment will not be lost on those familiar with it.

But like anywhere so close to a capital city, it may be overlooked as a holiday destination for those heading to Ireland. But it shouldn’t be, especially as it is considered the birthplace of Ireland’s Ancient East, and truly has something for everyone.

If you’re interested in Irish history, the Unesco World Heritage Site of Bru na Boinne is the homeplace of Knowth and Newgrange ‘passage tombs’ – or burial monuments – dating back to 3200 BC.

The best-known on the site is Newgrange, built by Stone Age farmers and predating Stonehenge by 400 years. The passage tomb complex lies to the west of Newgrange and the large mound has two graves surrounded by 127 massive kerbstones as well as 18 small tombs.

Step inside the ancient tomb and marvel at the megalithic art – drawings and inscriptions left by the Neolithic people 5,000 years ago.

When your guide turns the spotlights off, watch a single slither of light flood the passageway. The passage and chamber are aligned with the rising sun on mornings around the Winter Solstice which each year attracts hundreds to Newgrange.

Next, explore Loughcrew Cairns. The Loughcrew complex is a megalithic cemetery with around 30 passage tombs and is situated around the summit of three hills near the town of Oldcastle.

One of the best-preserved and most accessible tombs at Loughcrew, known as Cairn T, appears to be the central tomb of the whole complex. It faces the rising sun at the vernal (March) and autumnal (September) equinoxes which shines through the passage to illuminate symbols carved onto the back wall of the chamber. On a clear day visitors will be able to see over half of Ireland from the top of Sliabh na Cailli (Hill of the Witch).

At the base of the hill is Maggie Heaney's Cottage, a 1700s heritage museum where visitors can get a feel for what life was like in a traditional Irish home.

Those with a penchant for historic fortresses should make time for Killua Castle, which boasts links to Sir Walter Raleigh and Lawrence of Arabia. The castle, which long lay in ruins, has been fully restored by Austrian native Allen Sangines - Krause and his wife, who actually live in the castle. They could be credited with quite literally bringing the spectacular structure to life.

With guided tours available for the public, it boasts a collection of artwork and artefacts from the Medieval and early Renaissance periods. And contrary to others of their kind, these works are not concealed behind red rope or glass.

This ability to step back in time while also seeing the castle through the eyes of the present day, makes Killua Castle possibly one of the most authentic experiences you'll have inside the grounds of an ancient fortress.

Elsewhere, the market town of Trim will impress film buffs having featured in Mel Gibson's Oscarwinning epic *Braveheart*. Mainly set in Scotland, the 1995 movie was partly filmed in Ireland and Trim Castle played its part as the fortified city of York. The scenes set in London were filmed inside the castle walls.

Guided tours grant access to the keep, with its panoramic views of the surrounding countryside.

Walking around the castle grounds and along the River Boyne, it's easy to see why the filmmakers fell in love with the area.

But the Boyne Valley isn't just all activity, though. Food, drink, and relaxation play a huge part in the region's offerings. At the Twelve Points Restaurant, a gourmet eatery in the grounds of Killua Castle, you can tuck into exclusive Killua venison and other culinary delights.

While in the town of Trim, stop off at Stonewall Coffee to enjoy brunch made with the finest local ingredients while taking in a view of the castle.

In the heart of the seaside village of Bettystown, you can enjoy afternoon tea at the Navy Bettystown cafe whilst overlooking the Irish Sea before admiring the beautiful coastline with a walk along the popular seaside resort.

If looking for somewhere to stay, Trim Castle Hotel offers 68 elegant bedrooms and is an ideal location for exploring the region. You'll dine in The Bailey Brasserie with its seasonal Irish home cooking, with flavours inspired by Asia and Europe.

Alternatively, a spa, dinner, and overnight at Dunboyne Castle Hotel is a popular choice too.

Nestled in 21 acres of lush green countryside, the hotel offers thermal access at The Spa with the crystal steam room, herb sauna, laconium, hot tub and more. You'll dine in The Ivy Restaurant, which has two AA Rosettes with menus inspired by the finest seasonal produce.

Other Boyne Valley highlights include the Poppy Garden, a cottage garden full of quirky features and whimsical touches owned by passionate gardener Ealma Purcell, who opened it up to the public in 2023. You'll also have fine views of the Loughcrew Hills.

Extend your pamper session with a visit to Bective Mill House and The Hot Box Sauna – an outdoor sauna experience on the bank of the river Boyne at Bective Mill House, a wellness and glamping centre.

Fancy a go at bread-making? Chris and Sara at Bread with Benefits invite visitors into their home for a handson baking experience.

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Get there

Fly to Dublin from a wide choice of UK airports with airlines including Aer Lingus, Ryanair and British Airways.

Book it

Rooms at Dunboyne Castle Hotel and Spa, Co. Meath start from £156 a night room-only. dunboynecastlehotel.com

Rooms at Trim Castle Hotel in Trim, Co. Meath, start at £121 a night room-only. trimcastlehotel.com

More info

discoverboynevalley.ie