Ireland's Hidden HEARTLANDS

50 THINGS TO DO for kids

Looking for fun activities to do as a family?

Here's a selection of 50 fab things to do in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands!

Why not get off the beaten track and discover your inner explorer!

Get active in nature and immerse yourself in the Wonderful World of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands!

Print out these pages and have fun wherever you are in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands!

Don't forget to tag us in any photos @HeartlandsIRL #IrelandsHiddenHeartlands

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1. Scavenge with your senses

Touch, hear, see and smell the world around you when you go on the scavenger hunt for the senses at The Organic Centre, or simply stroll through the Centre's orchard and lovely garden down to the Ballagh River.

theorganiccentre.ie

2. Find the Giant's Leap Chasm

Explore Cavan Burren Park and find the spot where, folklore tells us two young giants, Lugh and Lag, challenged each other to jump a gorge to impress the female giant they admired.

cavanburrenpark.ie

3. Find the source of the River Shannon

Discover the pool where Ireland's longest river rises. Legend says that Sionnan, the daughter of Lodan (a son of the Celtic God of the Sea, Lír) came here in search of the great Salmon of Wisdom, angering the salmon into overflowing the pool and creating the river!

marblearchcavesgeopark.com/attraction/shannon-port/

4. Build your own bear

Choose, stuff and sew your bear at a family workshop with Bear Essentials, or call in to buy a kit so you can make your own teddy at home.

bearessentials.ie

5. Canoe like a Canadian

Set off on an expedition in a Canadian Canoe with Adventure Gently in northwest Leitrim, and discover a whole new world.

adventuregentlyireland.com

6. Step inside a mountain

Put on a hard hat, step into the heart of a Roscommon mountain and hear first-hand tales from former miners at the Arigna Mining Experience.

arignaminingexperience.ie

7. Become an explorer on the Drumshamazon

Join a SUP safari on the Shannon Blueway at Drumshanbo, along the Lough Allen Canal. Enveloped in a dense tree canopy that arches overhead like a cavern, you can imagine yourself in the Amazon Rain Forest. No wonder locals call it the Drumshamazon!

leitrimsurf.ie

8. Walk on water

Walk on water when you step out onto the amazing 600m floating walkway at Acres Lake.

bluewaysireland.org/trails/acres-lake-boardwalk-trail-walk

9. Experience the world from the treetops

Lough Key's tree canopy walk raises you up nine metres above the woodland floor to get a birds-eye view of the forest. If you're feeling brave make a swift descent from the trees on a zipline!

loughkey.ie/activities/lough-key-experience
zipit.ie/locations/lough-key

10. Swim on the wild side!

There's no better way to get under the surface of the wild landscape than to go wild swimming. But whether you run straight in or you inch gingerly into the water, Lough Keeldra, with its sandy floor, is ideal!

explore.outdoorswimming.ie

Key

- Greenway Cycling and Walking Route
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11. Cycle on water

Put your pedal power to use as you explore Carafin Lake on the upper reaches of the River Erne system on water bikes - the newest way to get active in the Marble Arch Geopark!

carafinlodge.ie

12. Discover why Cavan rocks

Go rock-climbing and abseiling in Cavan with Rural Adventure Tours and take in some fantastic views.

ruraladventure.ie/rock-climbing

13. Kayak to a deserted castle in a lake

Hire a kayak from Cavan Adventure Centre and paddle to the intriguing Clough Oughter Castle on a tiny island in the middle of Lough Oughter.

cavanadventure.com

14. Make a splash on the Shannon!

Make a splash on the Shannon when you take the plunge from a pier with Shannon River Adventure.

shannonriveradventure.com

15. Meet the Normans

Take on a Norman name before you come face to face with characters from Ireland's past at the interactive Knights & Conquests Heritage Centre in Granard.

knightsandconquests.ie

16. Find the gate to the Otherworld

Find out about the ancient origins of Halloween as you tread in the footsteps of the mythical warrior Queen Maeve.

rathcroghan.ie

17. Play like the Victorians

See the toys children played with in Victorian times in the historic children's playroom in Strokestown Park House, and visit their schoolroom too before exploring woodland walks and the walled garden.

strokestownpark.ie/famine/museum

18. Roar from the ramparts of a castle

Visit Roscommon's imposing castle and learn about its storied past. Explore the surrounding Loughnaneane Park and playground and take a seat in one of the many nature chairs.

visitroscommon.ie/roscommon-castle/
visitroscommon.ie/loughnaneane-sculpture-trail

19. Walk the route of an Iron Age road

Walk the route of an ancient road way and discover the archaeological and mythological theories about why it was built across the bog over 2,000 years ago.

heritageireland.ie/visit/places-to-visit/corlea-trackway-visitor-centre/

20. Make the perfect cake

Collect freshly laid eggs from the hens at Cloughan Farm and mix them with other ingredients to make your own velvety sponge cake that you can decorate with ripened fruits and freshly whipped Irish cream. Enjoy your delicious cake with a refreshing fruit cordial in the farm's outdoor picnic area!

fionaegan.com/family-baking-from-the-nest-box-to-the-plate/

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21. Set sail as a Viking!

Release your inner Viking and wield your sword and shield as you sail along the River Shannon with Viking Mike of Viking Tours Ireland.

vikingtoursireland.ie

22. Take on a record-breaking inflatable slide

Let the whole family loose on Baysport's inflatable waterpark which is packed with fun and challenges for kids of all ages at Hodson Bay. Take on the world's largest inflatable slide or enjoy the gentle pleasures of a pedal boat!

baysports.ie

23. Paddle a Blueway

Choose from any number of Blueway paddling trails along the River Shannon - from Leitrim to Lough Derg. Take your own kayak or hire one locally.

blueweysireland.org/destinations/lough-derg

24. Defend the walls of a castle under siege!

Walk in the steps of monks, kings, soldiers and generals at Athlone Castle, which was built to defend the Shannon. Discover tales of bitter battles fought, territories won and lost and hear stories of bravery.

athlonecastle.ie

25. Skate or cycle the Old Rail trail

Trace the old railway line from Athlone to Mullingar and "choo choo" as you scoot or peddle past restored station houses and under old arched bridges

athlone.ie/visit/old-rail-trail-athlone-mullingar-greenway

26. Take a multi-sensory trip through five millennia

Relive the music, sights, and smells of Ireland's past at Dún na Sí amenity and heritage park

dunnasi.ie

27. Tell a secret to the Whispering Arch

Whisper into one side of the carved doorway of Clonmacnoise Cathedral and your friend standing at the other side will be able to hear your secret but no one else will! Was this how the monks used to confess their sins?

heritageireland.ie/visit/places-to-visit/clonmacnoise

28. Watch a boat navigate a lock

See cruisers move through the lock and watch the water levels change in the heart of Athlone town as boats navigate their way along the River Shannon.

29. Go on an eco-safari

Sail a paddleboard to Bullock Island on an eco SUP safari with Mid-Ireland Adventure. You'll get to know some of the wildlife at the nature reserve and play some great games on the island before heading back for shore.

midirelandadventure.ie

30. Meet the fairies who share nature's stories

Meet the fairies of Lough Boora and discover the talents they bring to the park. Then follow the sculpture trail made of the locomotives, railway line, timber and stone that were once used to work the bog.

loughboora.com/things-to-do/fairy-avenue

31. Learn to skim a stone

There is no shortage of places to practise skimming stones, bouncing in perfect arcs across the surface of still lakes in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. But do be careful not to disturb any wildlife!

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Portumna
Lorrha
Woodford
Terryglass
Shanaglish
Lough Graney
N65
Borrisokane
N52
Whitegate
Mountshannon
Dromineer
Feakle
Scarriff
HOLY ISLAND
Garrykennedy
Ballycommon
Castlelough
County Clare
Tulla
Nenagh
M7
Quin
Ballina
Killaloe
Birdhill
Bridgetown
O'Briensbridge
Castleconnell
River Shannon
LIMERICK
Clare Glens

32 33 34 36 38 40

32. Find your way through a maze

Explore 9,000 years of Irish spirituality as you wander through Mountshannon's maze. A children's playground is also located within the park.

clare.ie/do/aistear-park

33. Visit a chocolate factory

Learn how chocolate is made when you visit the Wilde Irish Chocolate factory in Tuamgraney, where chocolatey magic takes place on a daily basis!

https://wildeirishchocolates.com/chocolate-factory/

34. Climb the castle with 101 steps

Climb the spiral staircase of Nenagh's limestone castle to take in 360-degree views across the town and Lough Derg.

nenagh.ie/places-of-interest/details/nenagh-castle

35. Cast a rod in pristine waters

Try your hand at angling on one of the many lakes and rivers in the Heartlands, and learn a skill for life.

fisheriesireland.ie

36. See four counties from 'the hill of the waves'

When the great floods came, the only people who survived were said to have stayed safe on Tountinna hill. Today, safe from the water, hike up to the picnic area at its top to take in stunning views across four counties.

discoverloughderg.ie/tountinna-graves-leinstermen

37. Reach for the stars

Make the most of the dark skies and open spaces of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands where there are lots of spots to lie back and stargaze. Use one of the many free apps around to help you pick out the constellations.

38. Have a watery adventure on Lough Derg

There are so many ways to take to the waters of Lough Derg. Try a family adventure session at UL Sport Adventure Centre or take a trip with My Next Adventure.

ulac.ie and mynextadventure.ie

39. Make your mark with a fern

Bring a fern leaf home, and paint the back before pressing it on to thick paper to reveal nature's intricate patterns.

40. Reach the summit of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands

Climb Keeper Hill to reach the highest point in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. Take a picnic, fly a kite and watch out for the hen harriers swooping through the sky.

coillte.ie/site/doonaneballyhourigan

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41. Search for hidden treasure

Use your detective skills to track down modern treasure in the form of geocaches. A perfect place to start is the area of North Galway-west Roscommon which has a particularly high concentration of geo-treasure troves!

geocachingireland.com/interactive-map

42. Experience Ireland's bygone days

Take a step back in time with a visit to the Derryglad Folk and Heritage Museum with its huge collection, or walk through a full 1930s street scene including a grocer's shop and a blacksmith's workshop at Glenview Folk Museum

derrygladfolkmuseum.com and *glenviewmuseum.ie*

43. Take a walk on the wild side

See if you can find the tiny fly-eating Sundew - one of Ireland's three carnivorous plants – at Clara Bog or indeed at any of the rewilded 'living bogs' across the Hidden Heartlands. See overleaf for details

raisedbogs.ie

44. Go go-karting

Pump up the adrenaline when you try go-karting at Loughrea's Pallas Karting or Action Sports in Edgeworthstown.

actionsports.ie
www.pallaskarting.com

45. Marvel at a murmuration

On late autumn and winter evenings on Lough Derg, and at many other places in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, look up to watch starlings gather in a flight display that's called a murmuration. The sight of hundreds, sometimes thousands, of birds flying in harmony will take your breath away.

46. Meet the animals!

Feed and cuddle the animals at Turoe and Glendeer Pet Farms. Venture into the 'inflatable city', one of Europe's largest indoor bouncing castles at Turoe, and explore the fairy trail and playgrounds at Glendeer.

turoepetfarm.com
glendeerpetfarm.ie

47. Bee crazy

Discover all about the life of bees on a tour of Leahy's farm in the Slieve Aughty and find out how to make a bee-friendly garden. Or take a tour of the bee paradise that is Brookfield Farm on the shores of Lough Derg. At either, you will be able to taste the honey from different flora and find out how important bees are in our ecosystem.

leahybeekeeping.com
brookfield.farm

48. See an eagle soar

Catch a glimpse of white-tailed sea eagles on Lough Derg from the hides in Mountshannon or Portumna Forest Park.

discoverloughderg.ie/spot-white-tailed-eagles-mount-shannon-bird-hide/ and *coillte.ie/site/portumna-forest-park/*

49. Build a den in the woods

Find a hiding hole, lean branches against a fallen tree, or let your inner architect get to work as you craft a den from branches and leaves in the forests of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands.

50. Make a Heartlands home for minibeasts

When you visit any of the many forest parks in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, find a nice safe spot to build a home for some of the smallest creatures in our woodlands. Plant a circle of sticks in the ground and fill it with small twigs laid flat or stack some logs and stuff dead leaves and grass into the holes between them.

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Amazing Nature

Watch out for the whoopers!

When we think of our native birds flying south for the winter, our minds often turn to the mass exodus of swallows, martins, swifts, warblers and, of course, terns.

But the same change in the seasons also brings many birds back to Ireland to over-winter, including our true native whooper swans, who return to Ireland's Hidden Heartlands from their sub-artic nesting sites.

From mid-September onwards, reports start to filter in of our wintering geese and swan populations arriving. The polar winds that carry our summer migrants south bring an influx of over 50 waterbird species to us from northerly latitudes. As we start to fuss about the wind and the rain, they are coming to escape the snow-clad, frozen north!

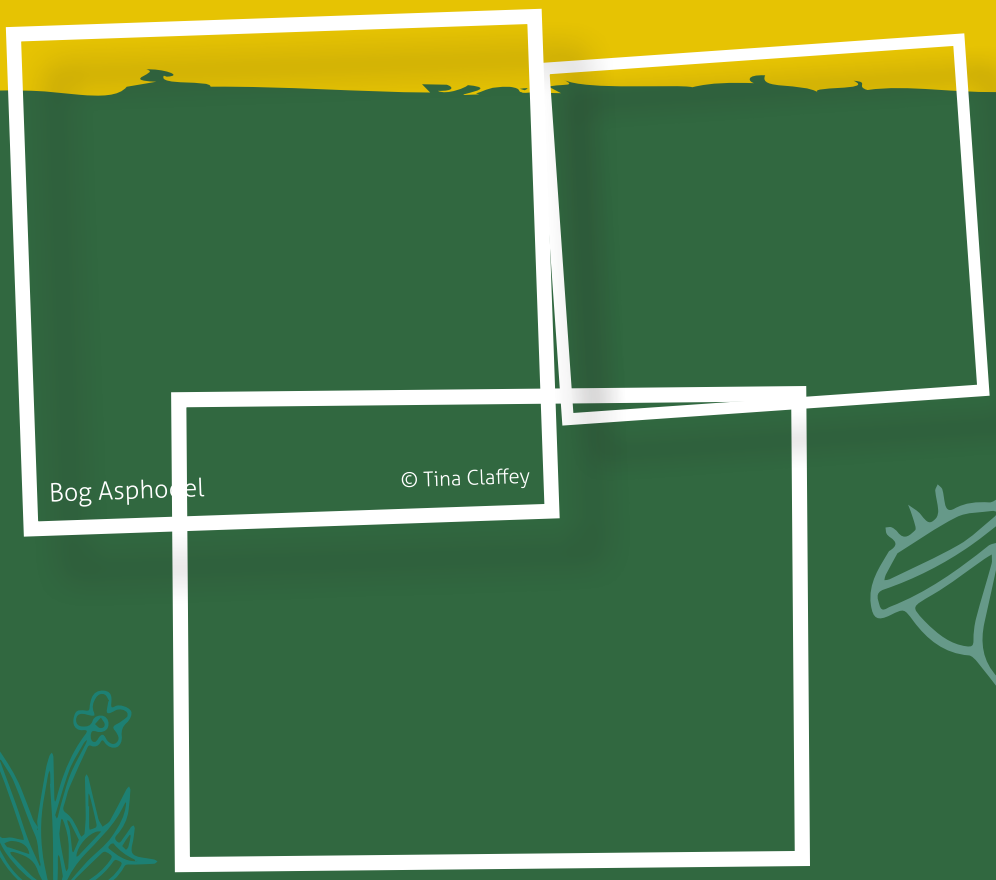
Listen out for the evocative call of the whooper swans that spend their winter at many midland loughs. Listen too for the endangered curlews that choose bogs and wetlands as their winter home.

Forage for fun!

Late summer is a great time to go foraging for food like wild blackberries, elderberries and hazelnuts in our hedgerows and woodlands. Don't forget to gather horse chestnuts for epic conker battles in autumn, and make sure you forage only your fair share, leaving lots of berries and other tasty morsels for the birds and wildlife in the Hidden Heartlands to enjoy.

Watch night-time acrobatics

Throughout the Hidden Heartlands, on any calm and dry evening, you should find good numbers of bats along woodland trails, over lakes and canals and in or around old buildings. As Halloween approaches, why not set out after dark to watch these gentle creatures glide and swoop as they feed on up to 3,500 moths and midges each a night?



Bog Asphodel © Tina Claffey

top tips

Stop and listen
Birdsong, the gentle splash of waves on the lakeshore, and laughter are all part of the Heartlands experience. Don't forget to stop and take them in.

Pass it on!
Send a postcard from your travels telling a friend about a great experience that you've loved and they shouldn't miss out on!

Bogs

Ireland's amazing bogs are home to thousands of rare species, including the flesh-eating sundews which trap and kill insects for food. Our bogs get their superpowers, and the bounce they give you underfoot, from super-absorbent sphagnum mosses – there are dozens of them, each with their own character. Scientists have counted 50,000 sphagnum plants in a hummock measuring just one square metre!

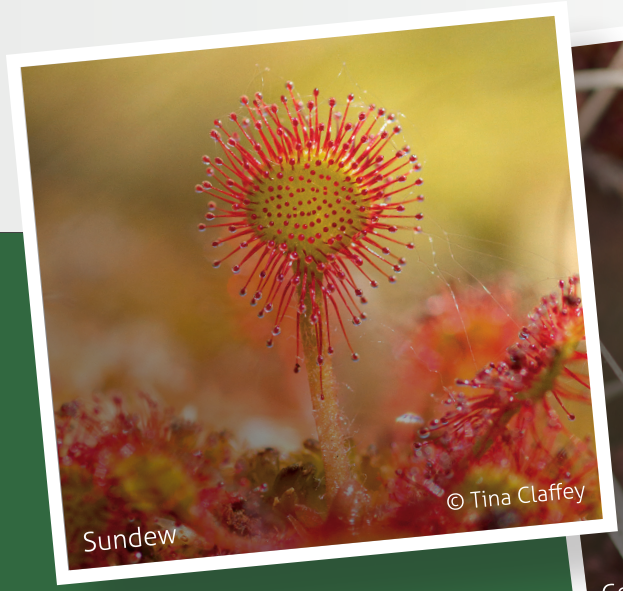
Our bogs are home to a dazzling array of wildlife, from frogs and giant water-walking spiders to rare birds, including the beautiful curve-beaked curlew. And, when bogs are wet, they are a powerful weapon against climate change.

Did you know bogs trap and store more carbon and other gases than all of Ireland's other ecosystems combined?

Today, healthy bogs are quite rare. That's because, for many years, they were drained and their turf was used for fuel and garden compost. Of Ireland's original boglands (once covering 310,000 hectares), just one per cent remain active, growing and living as they should. You'll find most of those living bogs here in the Hidden Heartlands where lots is being done to restore these fascinating places. Why not visit one to find out what you can do to help our bogs (and our planet) survive and thrive!

Bogs to visit:

- Corlea Bog and Trackway Visitor Centre, Kenagh, Co Longford
- Carrowbehy Bog SAC, Gorthaganny, Co Roscommon
- 'Galway's Living Bog', Carrownagappul Bog SAC, Mountbellew, Co Galway
- Clara Bog and Visitor Centre, Clara, Co Offaly
- Mongan Bog SAC, Clonmacnoise, Co Westmeath
- Lough Boora, Co Offaly



Sundew © Tina Claffey

Common Frog on Red Sphagnum © Tina Claffey

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Water Safety

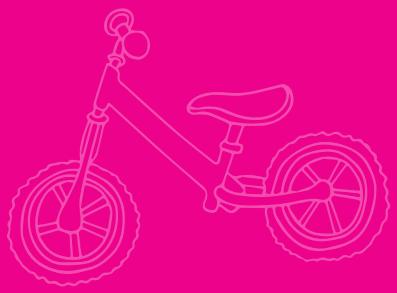
Follow the advice of Water Safety Ireland:

1. Beware of submerged objects.
2. Always enter the water feet first.
3. Cold water in lakes can be dangerous – it is often
   much colder beneath the surface than you think.
4. Do not play near the edge of riverbanks – they can crumble away suddenly.
5. Do not retrieve model boats by wading in
6. Never walk on ice covered waterways.
7. Reeds and grass often obscure the edge of the pond.
8. The banks of a pond may be weak and give way under your weight.

Leave no trace

Follow seven simple principles to make sure you leave the landscape as you found it with no trace of your visit:

1. Plan ahead and prepare.
2. Be considerate of others.
3. Respect farm animals and wildlife.
4. Travel and camp on durable ground.
5. Leave what you find.
6. Dispose of waste properly.
7. Minimise the effects of fire.



Accessibility Notice

While we have indicated the places which are accessible to the widest possible number of visitors, do check individual websites or contact businesses and attractions directly to find out whether the accessibility arrangements at each site are suitable for you.

NB

Due to Covid-19 protocols, many of the attractions and businesses now require pre -booking. Be sure to check availability and opening hours before setting off!

Waterways Wonders Wordsearch

Waterways Ireland
Uiscebhealaí Éireann Watterweys Airlann

Check out learning.waterwaysireland.org/resources/2/nature for more fun resources

L	O	C	K	B	N	M	E	R	N	E	L	J	K	G
X	B	I	R	D	S	Q	A	C	W	Y	O	C	R	R
L	A	N	E	M	H	P	M	N	L	W	W	A	M	A
H	R	S	H	E	A	F	I	S	H	S	E	N	I	N
V	R	E	M	I	N	S	A	B	K	X	R	O	S	D
P	O	C	Q	T	N	R	H	V	J	C	B	E	K	C
L	W	T	D	T	O	B	S	A	H	D	A	B	C	A
A	F	S	V	O	N	E	O	C	N	E	N	Y	U	N
N	J	Y	L	L	E	W	D	A	F	N	N	H	D	A
T	S	P	O	Y	R	Q	F	X	T	R	O	N	K	L
S	K	G	N	U	N	L	H	Z	D	F	G	N	O	R
L	C	J	T	I	E	K	J	Q	S	L	U	C	A	S
T	R	O	Y	A	L	C	A	N	A	L	T	U	L	F
Q	B	U	B	I	O	D	I	V	E	R	S	I	T	Y
H	L	I	F	E	J	A	C	K	E	T	V	J	P	L

- Barrow
- Biodiversity
- Birds
- Boat
- Canoe
- Ducks
- Erne
- Fish
- Grand Canal
- Insects
- Life Jacket
- Lock
- Lottie
- Lower Bann
- Lucas
- Plants
- Royal Canal
- Shannon
- Shannon Erne

Design your own creepy crawlies!

Decorate these beautiful bugs with some patterns and drawings from your adventures in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands!