

FOCUS ON... COUNTY DONEGAL



As Rob Smith discovers, one of the most scenic counties in Ireland is home to some amazing golf...

1 BALLYLIFFIN

Ballyliffin is quite simply a wonderful golfing destination, boasting not one but two excellent courses.

The first of these was opened after the war as a nine-holer but remodelled and expanded into a full 18 in 1973. The Old Links is therefore not really very old, but it has benefited from a more recent upgrade by Nick Faldo. On its own, this excellent course would be a major draw, but the addition

of the Glashedy Links in 1995 raised the bar higher still.

This fabulous modern links has grown and matured, and will receive the ultimate accolade in July when it hosts the Irish Open for the first time. This is a true championship test, packed with perfectly placed and challenging

Ballyliffin boasts two glorious courses

The Glashedy will host this year's Irish Open

bunkers as well as large, testing greens. It is also a complete joy to play with some very demanding two-shotters, just three short holes but each very memorable and as good a closing hole as you will find.

Some consider the Old to be a little more fun as it's not quite so demanding, and it makes for the perfect counterbalance, full of allure and character while still a proper test.

Stats: Glashedy: par 72, 6,722 yards; Old: par 71, 6,450 yards

W: ballyliffingolfclub.com

GF: Round: €140-€160; Day: €240



FROM
€140

2 ROSAPENNA

Opened in 2003, the Sandy Hills course at Rosapenna is, like the Glashedy, a firm favourite in the *Golf Monthly* Top 100. Designed by Pat Ruddy, it could not be better named as it runs over and through some glorious and towering dunes. When the wind is up, it is also a severe test, though any pain felt will be alleviated by the fabulous setting.

Unusually for a modern course, there is only one starting point, but this means that once you are away

you can lose yourself (and a few Titleists) in the twisting, turning design. There are elevated tees and greens, marram-shrouded mounds and excellent views over the bay and mountains beyond.

Rosapenna is also home to the Old Tom Morris course – a very enjoyable contrast – and the hotel is one of my favourites.

Stats: Sandy Hills: par 72, 6,404 yards; Old Tom Morris: par 71, 6,283 yards

W: rosapenna.ie

GF: Round: €85–€110, discounts for hotel residents



Glorious views at Rosapenna

3 NARIN & PORTNOO

One of the great joys of golf is anticipation, and you certainly have plenty of time for this on the off-the-beaten-track drive

to lovely Narin & Portnoo. The approach also puts into context the wonderful feeling of space you feel when playing at this idyllic location overlooking Gweebarra Bay.

While the opening holes are all perfectly decent, they don't really hint at the tremendous stretch coming up from the 6th to the 15th. The 7th is a fabulous short hole, the course's very own Postage Stamp, and the next few head round the wild promontory where the views make it difficult to concentrate on your game.

Unusually, there is a hat-trick of par 5s from the 13th, with the latter two both absolute stunners along the dunes and then following the sandy beach.

Stats: par 73, 6,578 yards

W: narinportnoogolfclub.ie

GF: Round: €80; Day: €100.

Check website for offers



Narin & Portnoo overlooks Gweebarra Bay

4 DONEGAL

Donegal Golf Club, also known as Murvagh, enjoys a fabulously scenic setting with panoramic views both out to sea and in towards the mountains over the beautiful bay.

This is very much a course of two halves, with the anti-clockwise front nine

encompassing the clockwise back. Usually described as a links, I feel there are other elements to the golf here that offer greater variety; a different type of challenge and style of golf. Donegal is very much one of a kind, and all the better for that.

Stats: par 71, 6,368 yards

W: donegalgolfclub.ie

GF: Round: €120

Donegal Golf Club is very much one of a kind



5 LETTERKENNY

In a county packed with outstanding links courses, Letterkenny provides a very entertaining parkland alternative. Having said that, water is still very much a feature as lakes connected by ditches feature prominently on the front nine, with holes 2 to 5 also bordering the lough.

Originally designed by Eddie Hackett, the course was upgraded a decade ago and is a tough driving test in a very pretty location that offers excellent value for money.

Stats: par 72, 6,282 yards

W: letterkennygolfclub.com

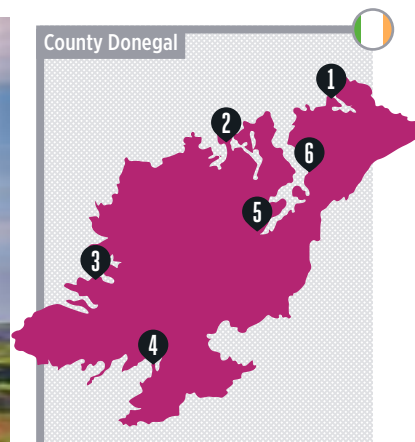
GF: Round: €25wd, €30we



One of Letterkenny's many water hazards



County Donegal



STAY

Harvey's Point, Donegal

W: harveyspoint.com

This superbly appointed and stylish lakeside hotel is just a short drive from the county town and is first class in every respect. It has some of the finest and most spacious accommodation you could possibly want, and its characterful restaurant is at the heart of the hotel offering a superb array of mouth-watering local fare.



EAT/DRINK

Railway Tavern & Firebox Grill, Fahan

W: fireboxgrill.com

This welcoming and very characterful hostelry was once the Station House of the Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway Company. It now serves delicious food and is a perfect place for a post-round Guinness or two.

VISIT

The Northern Headlands

W: wildatlanticway.com

In a county dominated by beautiful and unspoiled scenery, there can be no better off-course recommendation than to see as much of the landscape as possible. From Donegal to Ballyliffin, follow the Wild Atlantic Way and take in the stunning scenery, rugged coastline and, if you're lucky, the Northern Lights.

NORTH WEST

This traditional and welcoming links has been likened to St Andrews, and it is easy to see why. There are plenty of humps, hollows and run-off areas, and the bump-and-run is a vital ingredient to scoring well.

The two long holes that close each nine run in the same

direction and offer scoring opportunities. The compact plot has been squeezed by coastal erosion over the last 20 years, meaning there is a small degree of cross-over in places, but this is nonetheless a very enjoyable course in a beautiful setting.

Stats: par 70, 6,314 yards

W: northwestgolfclub.com

GF: Round: €60wd, €70we

North West GC is on a compact plot



Photography: Larry Lambrecht, Rob Smith