

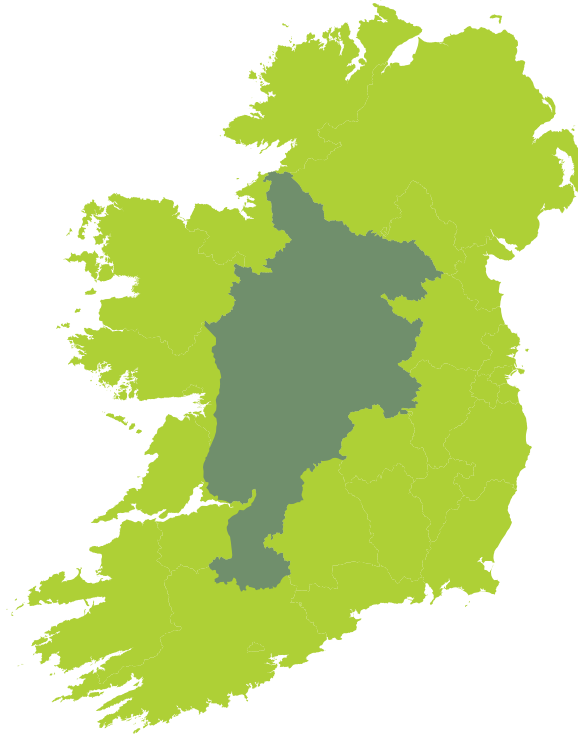


**Ireland's Hidden
HEARTLANDS**

YOURS TO UNCOVER



IRELAND'S HIDDEN HEARTLANDS



Beyond Ireland's famous coastline lies a vibrant core of peaceful lakes, dense forests, alluring peatlands, rich pasture-land and richly wooded islands. Known as the Hidden Heartlands, this lesser-known realm is liberally scattered with castles, prehistoric monuments and sacred places. It's a magical water-world, with myriad walking trails through pastoral beauty, vibrant communities, rare ecological biospheres, and great opportunities for getting off the beaten track, slowing down and reconnecting with nature.

The Hidden Heartlands extend through Ireland's central plains, from CAVAN and LEITRIM in the north, encompassing LONGFORD, ROSCOMMON, WESTMEATH, OFFALY, southwards to LOUGH DERG with shores in parts of CLARE, GALWAY, TIPPERARY; and stretching to the BALLYHOURA region of EAST LIMERICK and NORTH CORK. So far, this area has mostly been a secret sanctuary for anglers and artists, and those seeking a quieter pace, far from the coach traffic of the more renowned tourist hubs. Long ago, this was an area of some commerce and light industry, but today it runs at a quieter pace. Much of it is now a sanctuary for nature lovers and fishermen, and those keen to get away from it all. Its forgotten charms await rediscovery.

On the Water

THE RIVER SHANNON

The prime jewel of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands is undoubtedly the RIVER SHANNON, a silver ribbon running through the centre of Ireland, dividing the rugged landscapes of the west from the gentler plains to the east. She meanders at a stately pace through a palette of rural landscapes: natural and agricultural ecosystems where wild animals and plants still thrive as almost nowhere else. It's a place of lost-world islands, labyrinthine canals and radiating streams.

Taking a trip by boat gives a compelling sense of Ireland as experienced by the Vikings a millennium ago, during the 300 years they raided and traded along this artery of verdant beauty. There are old tow-paths, watermills, grain stores and barge facilities from centuries past, but the true allure is the lush, green landscape itself, with its sudden flashes of wild nature – a heron rising up from the bank, kingfishers darting by and otters hunting salmon. The health of this ecosystem is shown by the WHITE-TAILED EAGLES that are now nesting on an island on LOUGH DERG.



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01 STAND UP PADDLE BOARDING AT KILLALOE, COUNTY CLARE

02 PRE-SWIM EARLY MORNING STRETCH AT BALLYCUGGARAN, NEAR KILLALOE, COUNTY CLARE

03 PADDLE BOATING ON THE SHANNON



RIVER CRUISING

Five hundred kilometres of rivers, canals and lakes extend from the majestic Shannon River between KILLALOE on LOUGH DERG and BELLEEK at the northern end of LOUGH ERNE. Hiring an elegant barge or cruiser allows you access to this vast realm where no roads go, far from tourist routes. It allows for intimate encounters with nature, such as losing yourself in a world of lush woodlands, eerie demesnes, leafy canopies, skittish otters and regal waterfowl.

Cruising around forgotten islands and teeming backwaters makes for a sublime escape and a sense that you are the first explorers. Whether cruising under a hand-carved stone bridge, navigating centuries-old canal locks or visiting historical sites along the waterside, boating through the Hidden Heartlands is a life-changing experience. When the journey is the destination, not a minute is wasted. The two great canals of Ireland, the ROYAL and the GRAND, both follow different routes from the busy melee of central

Dublin through the eastern midlands to meet the River Shannon. The Royal Canal heads northwest to reach the Shannon in the historic village of CLONDRA, COUNTY LONGFORD, while the Grand Canal takes a more direct western route to SHANNON HARBOUR in OFFALY.

The wonderful thing about cruising on the Shannon and its lakes, and on the Shannon Erne waterway, in addition to the spectacular scenery and wildlife, is that you don't need a licence to hire a cruise boat or take out a river barge as there is no commercial boat traffic on the water. enabling the most novice of 'river captains' to cruise the full length of the Shannon including the north via the Shannon-erne waterway to Belleek. For further details on hiring a cruise boat, visit the websites of SILVERLINE CRUISERS (www.silverlinecruisers.com), CARRICKCRAFT (www.carrickcraft.com), and EMERALD STAR (www.emeraldstar.ie). Information is also available on WWW.BOATHOLIDAYSIRELAND.COM





07 LOUGH KEY BOATS
08 ROSE OF INISHFREE

If you prefer to take a short river or lake cruise, there are some great operators to choose from. These include KILLALOE RIVER CRUISES (www.killaloeRiverCruises.com), VIKING TOURS (www.vikingtoursireland.ie) and RIVER RUN (www.theRiverRun.ie) in Athlone, and MOON RIVER CRUISES (www.moonriver.ie) in Carrick on Shannon. They typically offer one-hour trips along the Shannon, revealing some wonderful hidden gems along the way. HIDDEN HEARTLANDS TOURS operate both private cruises and taxi services around the lake (www.hiddenheartlandstours.ie).

LOUGH REE ACCESS FOR ALL offers boat trips from BALLYLEAGUE, COUNTY ROSCOMMON and can accommodate up to three wheelchair users at a time (www.loughreeboattrips.com). And don't forget THE HOT TUB BOAT based out of various locations around Athlone (www.hottubboat.ie)



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09 CRUISING BY CARRICK ON SHANNON, COUNTY LEITRIM, WITH MOON RIVER
10 LEISURELY TRIP THROUGH CLONDRA VILLAGE, COUNTY LONGFORD



11



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- 11 SIGHTSEEING IN KILLALOE, COUNTY CLARE WITH SPIRIT OF KILLALOE
12 RIVER RUN IN ATHLONE, COUNTY WESTMEATH

KAYAKING

Kayaking is one of the Hidden Heartlands greatest unsung pleasures – you get to paddle out to ancient, unspoiled retreats such as the castle on LOUGH OUGHTER, COUNTY CAVAN, or the monastic remains on INISCEALTRA (HOLY ISLAND) on LOUGH DERG, COUNTY CLARE or TRINITY ISLAND on LOUGH KEY, COUNTY ROSCOMMON or THE ROYAL CANAL in MULLINGAR, COUNTY WESTMEATH. Each feels like a lost world you have just discovered hidden in the undergrowth. A number of activity providers offer

guided kayaking trips in the Heartlands across different sections of the Shannon from LEITRIM to the lower reaches of LOUGH DERG, and across the entire HIDDEN HEARTLANDS. For example, in north CORK, you'll find BALLYHASS LAKES, Ireland's premier outdoor adventure facility. Offering 15 different activities there's something for all the family. There are a number of bespoke canoe trails along the Blueways. For a full list of Blueways see WWW.BLUEWAYSIRELAND.ORG



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15 KAYAKING IN DRUMSHANBO, COUNTY LEITRIM
16 KAYAKING ON LOUGH OUGHTER, COUNTY CAVAN



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ANGLING

Those in the know hail the Hidden Heartlands as one of the world's premium angling destinations. The salmon and trout fishing have been a well-kept secret for centuries, and more recently the region has developed quite a reputation for the quality of its coarse fishing, with pike, roach, bream, trench and rudd common in most rivers. Pike is now among the most highly sought after sport fish species in Europe, and there is an abundance of them here, in some of the most lightly-fished watercourses in Europe and without the interruption of commercial traffic on the river.

The River Shannon and its major lakes are an angler's paradise, particularly LOUGH REE, which produces quality pike, tench and bream. The RIVER SUCK, the

RIVER INNY and the great lakes of COUNTY CAVAN along with LOUGH ENNELL in COUNTY WESTMEATH also promise a great fishing challenge. Moderate rainfall, mild winters, temperate summers and the warm influence of the North Atlantic Drift results in a unique mixture of hot and cold water fishes. It makes a unique destination for both experienced and informal anglers to enjoy a spectacular fishing vacation. For the pure serenity of tranquil waterside fishing at dawn or dusk, these lakes, rivers and canals are unparalleled. Information on angling is available on WWW.FISHINGINIRELAND.INFO





OFF THE WATER

In COUNTY LEITRIM there's even a lake that you can walk across – on a floating boardwalk. ACRE'S LAKE lies just south of DRUMSHANBO, a pretty village at the foot of SLIABH AN IARAINN (Iron Mountain), known for its traditional music and a local gin that is made with meadowsweet foraged in the area and distilled in the town's SHED DISTILLERY. Across LOUGH ALLEN at ARIGNA, COUNTY ROSCOMMON, former miners take visitors inside the mountain on a tour of what was the last working coal mine in Ireland at THE ARIGINA MINING EXPERIENCE.



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Active in Nature

THE BEARA BREIFNE WAY

Ireland's longest and most diverse walking route crosses six separate upland regions along its length and meanders through some of the most iconic parts of the Hidden Heartlands. It starts along the banks of the River Shannon and from there it follows the SUCK VALLEY WAY through Roscommon, past the ancestral home of the last HIGH KINGS OF IRELAND, the O'CONORS, whose descendants live there. Stop in at their Victorian stately home, CLONALIS in CASTLEREA, for a tour and enjoy the beautiful parkland with its soaring oaks and redwoods.

The trail continues on northwards along the LUNG RIVER to BALLAGHADERREEN, passing numerous Early Medieval ringforts. It follows the shore of LOUGH GARA, which has over 30 prehistoric crannógs (man-made islands) and is a winter habitat for Greenland white-fronted geese. It links up with the MINER'S WAY and HISTORICAL TRAIL north of BOYLE, crossing into the CURLEW MOUNTAINS and linking up with the CAVAN WAY in the geological splendour of the CAVAN BURREN – part of the CUILCAGH LAKELANDS UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARK.

This evocative route through little-known natural havens follows the heroic march of one of Ireland's last great Gaelic chieftains, DÓNAL CAM O'SULLIVAN BEARE, who fled northwards from QUEEN ELIZABETH I's army in 1602.

Today the trail is well-maintained and is separated into a series of 12 different community-managed sections. This gem of a route is marked out with plaques, signposts and map-boards that inform you of local myths, historic remains and natural features. There is also a BEARA BREIFNE WAY PASSPORT in which one can collect elegantly designed stamps at various stages along the trail.

Each section of the way has its own pleasures and surprises, with routes for all levels of experience and enough variations for almost infinite permutations. For now, the trail remains a quiet, lesser-known, treat; though, with parts of it as spectacular as the Wild Atlantic Way (albeit in a quieter, tranquil way), its fame will spread.

For further details see WWW.BEARABREIFNEWAY.IE



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- 24 AFTERNOON WALK ALONG THE BEARA BREFNE WAY, COUNTY CAVAN
- 25 THE MINER'S WAY AND HISTORICAL TRAIL
- 26 SUNSET ON SEEFIN MOUNTAIN, COUNTY LIMERICK

SLOW ADVENTURE

The Hidden Heartlands are spear-heading the growth of slow adventure, a form of tourism that favours immersive experiences in which you engage with remote, nature-rich places, rather than seeking cursory thrills. In COUNTY LEITRIM, activity providers have teamed up to create SLOW ADVENTURE LEITRIM which showcases holiday itineraries where you can surf, cycle, kayak, hike, fish and forage in remote and tranquil natural havens. Locals share their sense of place with visitors by introducing them to traditional skills, community lore and the natural heritage of an area.

The slower pace allows for more reflection and reconnection, with fewer crowds and hullabaloo. Whether exploring in a Canadian canoe or cooking food that you've just gathered from the wild, a slow adventure creates memories through meaningful experiences with the traditions and the people of a locality. This is responsible tourism at its best; beneficial for the body and mind as well as the local community and environment. It allows time to engage more deeply, and space to consider life's journey and the characters you meet along the way.

For more details visit WWW.SLOWADVENTURE.IE



27 ADVENTURE GENTLY, COUNTY LEITRIM

28 SLOW FOOD HAMPER BEING PREPARED AT THE ORGANIC CENTRE, COUNTY LEITRIM

29 STAND-UP PADDLEBOARDING ON THE LOUGH ALLEN CANAL, NEAR DRUMSHANBO



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LOUGH KEY EXPERIENCE AND TREE CANOPY WALK

LOUGH KEY FOREST AND ACTIVITY PARK offers 350 hectares of a mixed woodland haven on the shores of radiant Lough Key, which boasts a CASTLE and MONASTIC RUINS that can be discovered and explored on hidden

overgrown islands. From the pier, a short walking trail takes you through servants' tunnels from the 19th century to Ireland's only tree canopy walk. You can also hire row boats and bikes, and explore secret canals by kayak.





THE OLD RAIL TRAIL extends from **ATHLONE** for 40km of tranquil car-free peace through lush pastoral lands and is a cycling/walking route alongside the tracks and sleepers of an old Victorian railway line. The original station houses and locomotion signals evoke the sense that you have slipped back through time and, at any moment, a steam train will come whistling up behind you. A disused railway, softened by a profusion of wildflowers and lush fields of pedigree horses and specimen cattle, has a meditative calm to it. The route passes through beautiful villages of **MOATE** and **CASTLETOWN GEOGHAN** on its way to **MULLINGAR** where it links up with the **ROYAL CANAL GREENWAY**, another Greenway running the whole way to **MAYNOOTH**.



LOUGH DERG WAY is a tranquil walking trail across terrain that was once the home ground of 11th century Irish High King, **BRIAN BORU**. The route extends for 68km along the **SHANNON** and via a network of canals through the waterside towns of **DROMINEER** and **GARRYKENNEDY** to the heritage town of **KILLALOE**, home to **ST FLANNAN'S EARLY CHRISTIAN ORATORY** and the later **CATHEDRAL** built in his honour. The trail offers an eclectic mix of riverbank, canal bank, forest track and country roads that combine to give a wonderful sense of the beauty of the **LOUGH DERG** region.



THE PEATLANDS OF THE HIDDEN HEARTLANDS



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THE PEATLANDS of the Hidden Heartlands are rare and complex biospheres that once covered a large part of the planet and now offer incomparable expanses to hike, cycle, horse ride and observe traditional bog cutting practices. This internationally important ecological biosphere is animated by a whole range of endemic insects and carnivorous plant species, as well as curlews, skylarks and grouse. The Hidden Heartlands possess a significant portion of the world's remaining raised bog.

The raised bogs of the midlands are home to an ancient wonder that is LOUGH BOORA. Formed over 15000 years ago, for centuries the peatlands provided light, heat and comfort to the inhabitants of the area. LOUGH BOORA DISCOVERY PARK is a prime example of how a cutaway space of bogland can transform and develop into a natural amenity with a huge biodiversity presence and importance.

To those who've never experienced them, these swathes of richly pigmented peatlands are a revelation: heathery water realms, clad in rusted bracken and spongy sphagnum, as textured as tweed and with tints ranging through ochre, olive, emerald and purple. A network of ancient nature trails make it simple to explore the undulating heaths, sedges

and medicinal plants that rise and fall like a slalom across the wet spongy peatlands. Hire a bike, or else venture out for a hike on to some of the new boardwalks that have been installed across quaking surfaces, such as at CLARA BOG NATURE RESERVE in COUNTY OFFALY.

Ireland's bogs are as unimaginable to those who've never set eyes upon them, as snowfields are to jungle-dwellers. The poet Seamus Heaney called them Ireland's "unfenced prairies" - cultural memory banks that preserve the past within them - everything, from golden treasures to human bog bodies and monumental timber constructions, such as the IRON AGE CORLEA TRACKWAY.

Touch, feel and sculpt the ancient bog wood at CELTIC ROOTS STUDIO in BALLINAHOWN, COUNTY WESTMEATH. There, Eibhlín will take you on journey of Ireland's ancient past, bringing this underworld alive through lore, history and scientific facts. Further north, in CASEY'S WORKSHOP at BARLEY HARBOUR on LOUGH REE, father and son carve ancient oak, yew and pine that might not have seen the light of day since at least the Bronze Age.



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WOODLANDS



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Some remnants of the native woodland that once covered Ireland 7,000 years ago are still intact in parts of the Hidden Heartlands, often mixed with more recent conifer forests. They offer unbeatable opportunities for walking, horse riding and mountain biking in glorious arboreal wonderlands. ST JOHN'S WOOD at LECARROW on the western shore of LOUGH REE is a fine example, and there are other great trails at LOUGH KEY FOREST PARK, COUNTY ROSCOMMON, PORTUMNA FOREST PARK, COUNTY GALWAY and the BALLYCUGGARAN CRAG

WOOD WALK in COUNTY TIPPERARY. For the more free spirited and adrenalin-filled among you, take on the challenges of the SLIEVE BLOOM TRAILS in COUNTY OFFALY and the BALLYHOURA TRAILS of COUNTY CORK. Rising high above the fertile farmland of COUNTY WESTMEATH is the idyllic MULLAGHMEEN FOREST. This 400 hectare hideaway is populated with Sitka spruce, Scots pine and noble fir. Take on the RED TRAIL to the summit which delivers fantastic views north across LOUGH SHEELIN and deep into neighbouring COUNTY CAVAN.



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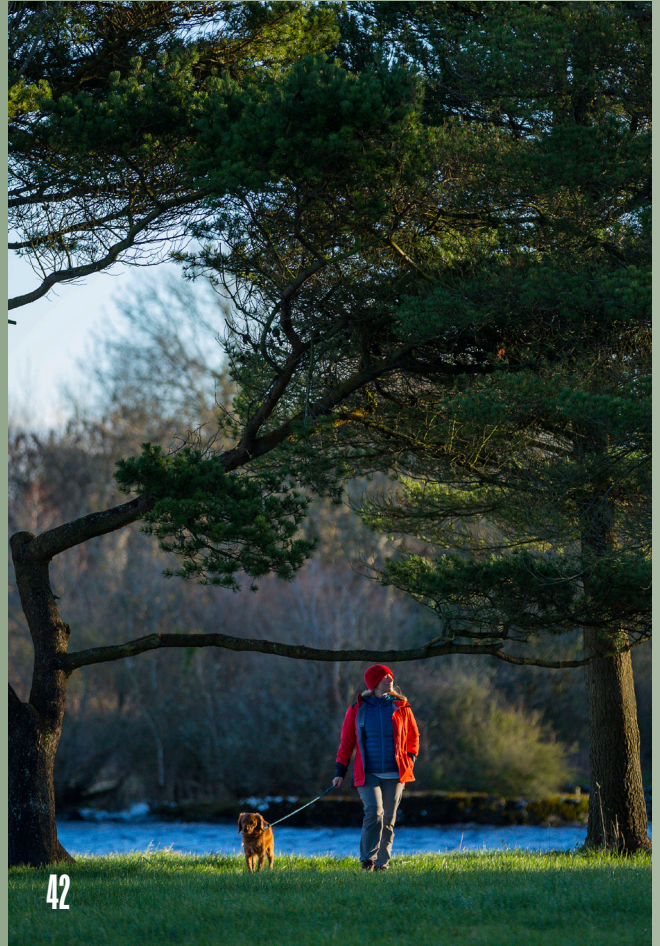
37 SLIEVE BLOOM TRAILS, COUNTY OFFALY
38 ST JOHN'S WOOD, LECARROW

39 GLENCAR WATERFALL, COUNTY LEITRIM
40 BALLYHOURA MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS, COUNTY LIMERICK



Straddling the CLARE RIVER and separating LIMERICK and TIPPERARY is the dense, wild and beautiful forest of CLARE GLENS. Overflowing with stunning waterfalls and rushing rapids you'll find a series of stunning looped walks along the marked arrows through the picturesque red sandstone gorge where the river flows.

In fact, the entire region has scores of well-marked routes meandering through state-owned woodlands, which you can find at WWW.COILLTE.IE. For looped and linear walks encompassing forests, peatlands, mountains and riverbanks check out WWW.IRISHTRAILS.IE





The ROYAL CANAL GREENWAY offers a 130km mercurial strip of waterside trail the whole way from MAYNOOTH to where it joins the RIVER SHANNON in LONGFORD. The canal is a well-preserved corridor of 18th century Ireland, laid out in 1790 and closed in 1960. It was reopened only recently and this linear cord of pastoral countryside is now a rich corridor of ecological biodiversity. Particularly charming is the 16km section from the stately cathedral

town of LONGFORD to the terminus of the ROYAL CANAL at CLONDRA, a charming village with elegant 18th century mill buildings and a fine cut-stone harbour. The GRAND CANAL GREENWAY offers additional opportunities through COUNTY OFFALY taking in TULLAMORE and LOUGH BOORA offering safe and secure passageways with lots to see and do along the way for walkers and cyclists.



THE NATIONAL FAMINE WAY weaves mostly along the ROYAL CANAL GREENWAY, through many towns and villages, telling the story of 1490 men, women and children who marched from STROKESTOWN HOUSE to DUBLIN in 1847 for failing to pay their rent. They boarded a ship to Liverpool before journeying to North America, many on board so-called coffin ships. The trail is captivating with its layers of history and culture. The planned enhancements

and expansions of the Greenway Network will transform them into extensive lifelines, seamlessly linking towns, villages, and individuals throughout the canals and historic rail networks of Ireland. These upgrades will provide well-protected and reliable routes, presenting abundant opportunities for pedestrians and cyclists to enjoy their journey with a variety of attractions and activities along the route.

Discover Myths & Legends

HILL OF UISNEACH

The Hill of Uisneach holds a unique place in Irish mythology - regarded as the Sacred Centre of Ireland and is spoken of as a place of origins and beginnings. According to Lebor Gabála Éirenn ("Book of the Taking of Ireland"), when the Gaelic people first arrived in Ireland, they met Ériu at the summit of the Hill. The goddess promised them that the land would be theirs as long as it was named after her. It was here on the Hill of Uisneach that Éire/Ireland was named!

A wealth of historical sources, medieval manuscripts and mythological literature testify to the legendary role of Uisneach in Irish history and culture. The lighting of the Bealtaine Fire on the Hill of Uisneach is one of Ireland's oldest traditions. In ancient times, masses gathered on the Hill to witness the fire being lit by the High King of Ireland. This tradition continues to be celebrated today.



CAVAN BURREN

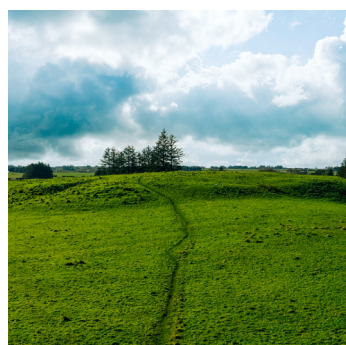
THE CAVAN BURREN is widely recognised as one of the finest prehistoric relict landscapes in Ireland, and is a treasure trove of archaeological, geological and mythological wonders. Comprised of limestone, containing the fossilised remains of tropical sea creatures that existed here 330 million years ago, the upland plateau was colonised by Ireland's earliest farmers who built fields

for the living and monuments to the dead. Nearby is the SHANNON POT, an otherworldly pool that was and still is a centre of pagan worship. Here, where the Shannon River rises to the surface for the first time, the goddess Sionnan transformed into what is still a flowing source of nourishment for the heartlands of Ireland.



The area of LOUGH GUR is home to one of Ireland's oldest and largest stone circles. All heritage associated with Lough Gur is interpreted in the lakeshore VISITOR CENTRE.

It is one of the few places in Ireland where you can see visible evidence of every age since Neolithic times.



RATHCROGHAN, COUNTY ROSCOMMON – the extensive archaeological landscape features the Royal Site of the ancient kingship of Connacht. This place of tribal pageantry has been the venue for seasonal gatherings and ritual for over 5,000 years. On an official guided tour from the RATHCROGHAN VISITOR CENTRE it is possible to access the Otherworld here through a cave mouth hidden in a ditch that leads to an eerie chamber of transformation deep beneath the ground, known as the “HELLMOUTH” OF IRELAND, or OWEYNAGAT. This millennia-old sanctuary of divine energy is one of the least known, but most alluring, sites in Ireland. Also one of the principal sites associated with *OÍCHE SHAMHNA* — HALLOWE’EN.

Uncover Hidden Gems

BELVEDERE HOUSE, GARDEN AND PARK

Overlooking LOUGH ENNELL and located just 8km from MULLINGAR lies BELVEDERE HOUSE & GARDENS. Built in 1740, with the finest rococo plasterwork and oak panelling, the house sits on 65 hectares of lush parkland, including a restored walled garden, Victorian glasshouse, and an 18th century woodland with exotic rare species. Built by EARL ROCHFORD, who was known as 'the Wicked Earl', would have loathed to think that we now had access to his hidden haven of hedonism.

His paranoia and jealousy of his brother's mansion led him to build the largest folly in Ireland in the form of a fake ruin, known as the Jealous Wall, that blocks the view to it. You'll also come upon his other 18th century follies as you wander the woodland paths. There are three children's playgrounds and an inviting café in an airy annex to the main house.

Visit THE KNIGHTS AND CONQUESTS EXHIBITION CENTRE in GRANARD, COUNTY LONGFORD, where history comes alive in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. Pick up the Gauntlet of our Norman ancestors and walk on an interactive journey through time in the shadow of Ireland's highest Motte and Bailey Castle. Discover if you were a Gael or a Norman and get to grips with Norman Armour

and Weaponry. The NORMAN ADVENTURE TOUR allows you to rediscover your inner warrior with some weapons training. Hear the stories of Henry II, King Rory O'Connor, and Pope Adrian IV. Explore the skills and crafts of Norman times. Experience how archaeology can help to piece the past back together in the Norman CSI room.





Housed in a beautiful 19th century building, **CAVAN COUNTY MUSEUM** traces the history of Cavan from pre-history through to the 1950s and features 18th-20th century costume displays. Discover a giant replica of Dublin City's famous General Post Office (the GPO), where, during the Easter Rising of 1916, the Irish Republic was proclaimed by the rebels. See what it was like on the battlefield for the thousands of Irish fighters who joined the war effort of World War One in the fantastically accurate World War One Trench Experience.

Nestled in a landscape of woodland, river and glen, **ANNES GROVE** is an historic estate with that spans 30 acres. It was the home of the Annesley family from the 1600s until 2015 when it was gifted to the Irish state and entered the care of the Office of Public Works. Now open, following a major restoration project, visitors can take a guided tour and hear about the history of the house and gardens including the epic exotic plant-hunting trips of the early 20th century. Some of the spectacular flowering shrubs dating from this period include *cornus cousa*, *embothrium*, *eucryphia* and *hoheria*. A rare treat for the green fingered people in your lives.



DONERAILE COURT is the stunning centrepiece of one of Ireland's most beautiful estates. Located on the banks of the **AWBEG RIVER** in **NORTH CO. CORK**, the house dates from the 1720s, when it was built by **ARTHUR ST LEGER**, the first Viscount Doneraile and father of the renowned Lady Freemason. Beautifully restored, guided tours are available, and the kitchen wing now serves as a tearooms. The Park comprises of approximately 166 acres and is an outstanding example of an 18th century landscaped park in the 'Capability Brown' style.

The gently sloping **SLIEVE BLOOM MOUNTAINS** are packed with incredible trails that bring you through sun speckled forests and blooming meadows. Listen to the chirping birdsong and breathe in the fresh air on an epic hike, thrilling horseback adventure or exciting mountain bike ride. The **SLIEVE BLOOM NATURE RESERVE** is Ireland's largest state-owned Nature Reserve and is home to two rare bird species; the hen harrier and the red grouse. Watch out for sika deer, wild goats, foxes, red squirrels and badgers too.





Set in EDGEWORTHSTOWN, COUNTY LONGFORD, The MARIA EDGEWORTH VISITOR CENTRE is rich in literary legends, inventive intellects, and enlightened educationalists. Explore the life and work of MARIA EDGEWORTH and her family and discover where the story of Ireland's national school system began. Visitors can enhance their experience by taking the EDGEWORTHSTOWN HERITAGE & LITERARY WALK which is a guided walking tour through the town's past. Explore the area's connections with historical figures such as OLIVER GOLDSMITH and OSCAR WILDE.

THE NATIONAL FAMINE MUSEUM at STROKESTOWN PARK - The stable yards of an elegant Georgian Palladian mansion owned by the first landlord to be assassinated during the height of the GREAT FAMINE OF IRELAND in the 1840s are a portal into the darkest period of Irish life, with its harrowing collection of objects and documents relating to the mass starvation that occurred in Ireland in the 19th century. It's a sobering, but revelatory, museum that conveys the tragic devastation that forced so many Irish people to emigrate.

THE IRISH WORKHOUSE CENTRE, PORTUMNA, COUNTY GALWAY - Despite the passing of the years, this ominous building retains the tragic memories of when workhouses were the last hope of the destitute and beleaguered in 19th century Ireland. The exterior walls are foreboding and inside no attempt has been made to underplay the full horror of the workhouse system. It offers a moving reminder of Ireland's darker past, expertly managed by those with a passion for their local history.



Arriving by boat at the monastic site of CLONMACNOISE (the meadow of the sons of Níos, *Mhic Nóise*), arising from beyond a picturesque bend on the SHANNON, is an unforgettable experience: suddenly the lush fields and peatland give birth to the ruins of seven ancient churches, two round towers, three high crosses and a cathedral: a monastic city dating back to the 6th century. This is where st ciarán founded his monastery in AD 548, and you get a visceral sense of the great manuscripts that were written here a millennia ago from the beautiful high crosses that were carved in such meticulous detail in the 10th century and are still so alluring today.



An opportunity to time-travel back to the Iron Age by visiting the 2,000 year old monumental structure at CORLEA BOG in COUNTY LONGFORD which is now preserved in a vast climate-controlled chamber. This roadway consists of massive oak planks that would have been wide enough for two chariots to pass, and was built as a route across the bog, but the mystery that you must solve is why was this roadway never once used? A series of walking and cycling trails that link to the ROYAL CANAL GREENWAY offers an opportunity to explore the beautiful surrounding bogland or head off on a long distance journey along the extensive GREENWAY NETWORK.





MCKERNAN WOOLLEN MILLS

Eugene and Anke McKernan have been producing scarves since 1985 and have established themselves as one of the top scarf designers and manufacturers in Ireland. They work together in their workshop in TUAMGRANEY, COUNTY CLARE and weave on century-old Hattersley Domestic looms which combine all the knowledge and precision engineering of the nineteenth century. Their scarves epitomise the old and new working together as their knitted styles are made on their 50-year-old Stoll knitting machine as well as a modern electronic 8-Gauge machine. Each scarf and shawl are then hand finished in the McKernan's workshop. On a guided tour of MCKERNAN WOOLLEN MILLS you will meet the makers and experience the historic machinery, skill and many hands needed to create beautiful designer scarves.

LUAN GALLERY, in ATHLONE, COUNTY WESTMEATH is Ireland's most spectacularly located gallery, jutting out right over the Shannon with barges and cruisers motoring by beneath your feet. The riverine light glinting in through the glass walls hypnotises you back into the former lives of this building as a Temperance Hall, and a theatre where the famous tenor, COUNT JOHN MCCORMACK gave some of his earliest performances. The Luan has strong links with IRISH MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (IMMA), so the art is a mix of the best international and local works.



LUAN GALLERY



ATHENRY CASTLE

ATHENRY CASTLE is one of the most prominent landmarks in the charming medieval town of ATHENRY, CO. GALWAY. Athenry, which is immortalised in the song 'The Fields of Athenry', also boasts the longest surviving length of medieval walls in Ireland. The castle has been perfectly restored with the oldest part dating back to the 13th century and the most recent to the 15th century. It overlooks the RIVER CLARIN and is connected to the town centre through a winding medieval network of streets. The town hosts an embarrassment of heritage remains, including a Dominican priory, the original market cross and St Mary's Collegiate Church which now houses the heritage centre and is also well worth a visit.

THE ORGANIC CENTRE in ROSSINVER showcases traditional growing techniques for herbs and vegetables, as well as raising old heritage varieties of Irish medicinal and culinary plants. It's the ideal place to learn about small scale, sustainable horticulture and to master the techniques of fermenting, composting, and forest gardening. Learn how to create wildflower meadows, seaweed gathering, and even sourdough, and all about the raw foods on which our ancestors depended.



ORGANIC CENTRE IN ROSSINVER



TULLYNALLY CASTLE AND GARDENS

TULLYNALLY CASTLE in CASTLEPOLLARD, COUNTY WESTMEATH stands on the shores of LOUGH DERRAVARAGH where, according to the fable, 'The Children of Lir', King Lir's beloved children were exiled for three hundred lonely years having been transformed into swans by his jealous wife. Its name in Irish is TULAIGH AN EALLAIGH ('hill of the swan') which suggest King Lir's castle may have stood on this site.

The current castle was built in the 17th century, with major renovations in the Gothic Revival style in the early 19th century. The Pakenham family has lived here for ten generations and have preserved, unchanged, some parts of their garden since 1740. From May to September, visitors can enjoy a special guided tour of the castle or just explore its 26 acres of romantic gardens with magnificent views.



THE SHANNON CALLOWS

THE SHANNON CALLOWS is one of the most important wildlife sites in Ireland: a seasonally flooded grassland ecosystem that stretches for 50 km from ATHLONE in COUNTY WESTMEATH as far as PORTUMNA in COUNTY GALWAY. The Callows are renowned for their concentrations of breeding waders, including lapwing, redshank, curlew, sandpiper and godwit. Many migrant wild birds also visit, including the corncrake, while otters, foxes,

ferrets and mink are common residents. This little-known watery realm between LOUGH REE and LOUGH DERG is truly a place apart. It can be accessed on foot along tractor paths, but please keep to the paths to avoid disturbing ground-nesting birds. It's the largest area of semi-natural grassland habitat in Ireland and you're likely not to meet another person all day long.

Family Attractions



For over 400 years BIRR CASTLE DEMESNE has been a prominent feature upon the landscape of COUNTY OFFALY. Today the Castle in the hands of the 7th Earl of Rosse provides its visitors with a wide range of amenities from its award-winning gardens, coupled with accounts of amazing feats of science and engineering, as well as rare trees and flowers, wonderful wildlife, walks along peaceful rivers and the lake. A perfect day out for all the family.

Established in 2017, LOUGH GUR POTTERY SCHOOL is located in the BALLYHOURA region. Drawing on over 6000 years of natural inspiration and history, the site has unearthed numerous archaeological treasures including many pieces of pottery. Fast forward to the present day, the pottery school offers guests workshops for all ages to learn how to sculpt, mould and finish their own unique pieces of pottery.



BAYSPTS WATERPARK is situated on almost an acre of interlinking walkways, slides, towers and obstacles. It's located on the shores of LOUGH REE in HODSON BAY and is just a short journey from the heart of ATHLONE. It's accessible by car, but also by boat if you take a cruise with VIKING MIKE and his crew.

BEAR ESSENTIALS, BAWNBOY, COUNTY CAVAN - The first sign that you've entered the twilight zone of teddy bears is the zip line strung between the trees, where you're likely to encounter a bear in full safety harness plummeting through the air. Here, children and adults can sew and stuff their own bear, tailoring it to their wishes, or you can make a fully jointed bear using centuries old techniques.



There are some enchanting pet farms in the Hidden Heartlands, such as **TUOE PET FARM** in **COUNTY GALWAY**, **GLENDEER** in **COUNTY ROSCOMMON** and **TEARAWAYS**, **COUNTY TIPPERARY**. Each offers shelter to an enchanting menagerie of traditional and exotic animals in an open farm setting, allowing the whole family an opportunity to experience a genuine Irish working farm, while also getting up close to pigs, ponies, cows, donkeys, goats, poultry and sheep – not to mention cockerels, emus, lamas and bearded dragons too. There are indoor games and entertainment in case of inclement weather.



Located in **COUNTY OFFALY**, between **TULLAMORE**, **BIRR** and **CLONMACNOISE**, **LOUGH BOORA DISCOVERY PARK** is a family-friendly environment with a wide range of free, interesting and interactive activities to keep all the family entertained. From walking trails to angling and birdwatching, fairy trails and bike rental, **LOUGH BOORA DISCOVERY CENTRE** is ideal for those looking to engage with nature amid this ancient bogland setting.

Heading underground into the **ARIGNA MINING EXPERIENCE** offers the most visceral experience of what it was like to work in some of the narrowest coal seams in the western world. Former miners lead you underground where the dripping water, intense darkness and cramped conditions give a potent sense of how people worked here until 1990, often lying on their sides in pools of water to extract the coal.



Considering the violence and brutal battles **ATHLONE CASTLE** has withstood since it was built in the 13th century, it's in remarkably good fettle. This harsh, brooding bastion of war has been brought vividly to life again by interactive displays designed by the company behind **BELFAST'S TITANIC MUSEUM**, with illustrations by Victor Ambrus (of Channel 4's *Time Team*) and props by Windsor Workshop who worked on the *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars* movies. You arrive thinking the castle's violent past is safely confined to history, but are less certain after ten minutes in the Upper Keep where 360-degree projection and 4D sound layering evoke the bloody Siege of Athlone in 1690.

DÚN NA SÍ or in its Irish translation with **THE FORT OF THE FAIRIES'** is located in the heart of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. The park invites visitors to travel through time, exploring and experiencing Irish folklore. Unique outdoor activities create a sense of tradition and history, which is embedded in the park. Visitors will meet mythical characters, discover the roots of Irish music and heritage and culture.



Hidden Heartlands Golf

Golf is the perfect complement to such a location and way of life as in the Hidden Heartlands. Amidst the beautiful backdrop of lakes, canals and trails, are many superb opportunities for golfers to experience this relaxed way of life for themselves, at great value. With 24 courses to choose from and at less than 2 hours from all major cities in Ireland, golf in the Heartlands is truly Yours to Uncover. Two iconic courses in the region are described below:

PGA NATIONAL IRELAND SLIEVE RUSSELL

PGA NATIONAL IRELAND SLIEVE RUSSELL is one of only 8 PGA National designated resorts in the world and its highly acclaimed 18-hole championship course & 9 Hole 'PGA National' Academy course forms part of the magnificent 300-acre SLIEVE RUSSELL ESTATE. The course was designed by the late highly accredited Irish golf architect PATRICK MERRIGAN. The course's clever design wraps attractively around the lakes and drumlins of the COUNTY CAVAN landscape. A course of stunning quality both from a visual and a playing perspective, it is clear how it has firmly established itself in the top 10 of Ireland's parkland courses.

GLASSON GOLF COURSE

GLASSON GOLF COURSE is nestled in the heart of Ireland with stunning panoramic views overlooking LOUGH REE. The course is only an hour and thirty-minute drive from Dublin Airport. GLASSON has established an international reputation as one of Ireland's most scenic and enjoyable courses. It is a spectacular parkland course with over 6,731 yards, par 71, with shots that will challenge and excite all levels of golfers. Overlooking the golf course is the beautiful Glasson Lakehouse hotel.

To find out more about all the great golf courses on offer in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, visit GOLFINIRELANDSHIDDENHEARTLANDS.IE



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Accommodation

ELEGANT HOTELS AND GUESTHOUSES, B&BS, COSY LAKESIDE LODGES AND WOODLAND CABINS are all to be found throughout the region – many situated in the most alluring locations. For a full listing of all accommodation types in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, visit WWW.DISCOVERIRELAND.IE



61 KILRONAN CASTLE ESTATE AND SPA, BALLYFARNON, KEADUE, COUNTY ROSCOMMON
62 LAKESIDE HOTEL & LEISURE CENTRE BALLINA, KILLALOE, COUNTY CLARE



63



64

63 WINEPORT LODGE, GLASSON, COUNTY WESTMEATH
64 CABŪ IN THE LAKES, COUNTY CAVAN

Food & Drink

65



OH, AND DON'T FORGET TO DRINK A SUP OF THE ESSENCE OF THE LANDSCAPE WHILE HERE - at one of the many new distilleries and craft breweries that are re-establishing Ireland's long tradition of creating the finest beers and spirits known to man.



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On the shore of LOUGH LENE in WESTMEATH, FORE DISTILERY, located close to FORE ABBEY, uses the finest ingredients in small batch runs in order to ensure consistent quality and a character as individual as the storied land from which it originates. The name FORE comes from the Gaelic word, *FOBAHIR*, for the fresh water springs that supply



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65 THYME IN ATHLONE
66 BLACK DONKEY BREWING, COUNTY ROSCOMMON

the area and are used to produce FORE VALLEY IRISH POITIN, WHITE RUM and GOLDER RUM, while BLACK DONKEY BREWERY IN ROSCOMMON uses a strain of wild yeast harvested in OWEYNEGAT CAVE to activate its beers. Parts of WESTMEATH have been renowned for their grain for centuries and so it's no surprise that DEAD CENTRE BREWERY in ATHLONE uses organic oats from the great farms in KILBEGGAN for their IPA.

Travelling west we find AHASCRAGH DISTILLERY, Ireland's first zero-emissions whiskey and gin distillery, located in the picturesque countryside of COUNTY GALWAY.



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The area is becoming increasingly known for the integrity of its local food produce, such as the raw Irish wildflower honey, tender lamb and pure beeswax lip balm and dipped pure beeswax candles, all produced on the idyllic BROOKFIELD FARM on the shores of LOUGH DERG, COUNTY TIPPERARY. It is these local, seasonal produce that are the stars of the region's restaurants, such as THYME in ATHLONE which received a MICHELIN BIB GOURMAND 2022 for its modern Irish cuisine, and has been included in the MICHELIN GUIDE since 2016.

67 DEAD CENTRE BREWERY IN ATHLONE
68 BROOKFIELD FARM, COUNTY TIPPERARY

MICHELIN-LISTED MACNEAN HOUSE & RESTAURANT OF BLACKLION, COUNTY CAVAN which is run by the charismatic TV CHEF NEVEN MAGUIRE, who has managed to reinvigorate this border town with the vibrancy and integrity of his food. Neven also runs a cookery school in the town which features a range of exciting cookery classes for all skill levels.



At WILDE IRISH CHOCOLATES IN TUAMGRANEY COUNTY CLARE, they're mad about chocolate and have been up to their elbows in it since 1997. This artisanal chocolate factory produces over 80 types of chocolate and has an open plan production area where you can see the chocolates being made and packed entry is free and you will be able to taste what's in production, ask the choclatiers questions, make suggestions and most importantly taste the freshly made choccies!



Nestled on the foothills of SLIEVE AUGHTY, COUNTY GALWAY, you'll find KYLEMORE FARMHOUSE CHEESE. Renowned for its award-winning artisanal cheeses, it proudly holds membership in Bord Bia's 'Origin Green'

initiative, which is Ireland's leading program for promoting sustainability in the food and drink industry.

Offered throughout the year are educational farm and cheese tours, complemented by a classic afternoon tea.



CLOUGHAN FARM is located in the heart of south COUNTY LONGFORD beside the ROYAL CANAL GREENWAY. Fiona and her husband Michael offer a range of relaxed and fun courses for food lovers of all abilities and ages. At Cloughan Farm you will have an unparalleled opportunity to reconnect with food and the land as you prepare and make delicious meals using the farm's hand-reared or locally produced meat and poultry, and home-grown seasonal vegetables.



OLD BARRACKS COFFEE ROASTERY in BIRDHILL, COUNTY TIPPERARY an over-18s coffee bar is just one of the many unique foodie experiences on offer in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. They import high quality beans from across the world and roast them right in the Heartlands. They also run tours of the roastery and classes on how to make the perfect Irish coffee and Baileys lattes. If you are a coffee enthusiast, this place is not be missed!

Taste the Heartlands

TOASTING THE HEARTLANDS- SLAINTE!



THE SHED DISTILLERY was the first newly constructed distillery to deliver liquid gold in Connaught in over 100 years. Located in the COUNTY LEITRIM town of DRUMSHANBO, the distillery was the brainchild of P.J. Rigney, turning a Winter Solstice epiphany into reality. Along with Master Distiller, Brian Taff, The Shed is responsible for award winning household names as Gunpowder Irish Gin and their delicious Single Pot Still Whiskey. The distillery offers guests the opportunity to get a pot still side view of the distillation process from wash and wort to mash and clear liquid whiskey before the maturation process begins. And the best part comes after the tour as you get to taste the gin and whiskey.



THE SHED DISTILLERY





KILBEGGAN DISTILLERY

Steeped in history, the KILBEGGAN DISTILLERY in CO WESTMEATH can trace its origins back to 1757, making it two years older than Guinness. For over 200 years the distillery has produced a wide range of whiskeys for both Irish and international markets all from their site in Kilbeggan. Offering tours daily, guests can witness how whiskey is produced the Kilbeggan

way drawing water from its signature water wheel, it's truly a sight to be seen first hand and sampled. With its roots firmly in the community the distillery wasn't without its hardships and when backs were to the wall the local community came together to save the distillery. A local inspired spirit for an international palate.



TULLAMORE D.E.W.

Distilling Irish Whiskey or Uisce Batha from 1829, TULLAMORE D.E.W. is not just a household name but one of Ireland's oldest international whiskey brands. Set up by the Molloy family in 1829 the business was eventually passed to Daniel E Williams, hence the



origins of the famous D.E.W. Fast forward almost two hundred years and visitors can experience the behind the scenes marvel of whiskey distillation, maturation and most importantly sampling the finished product. A local tour steeped in history.



Ireland's Hidden HEARTLANDS

IN SUMMARY, THE HIDDEN HEARTLANDS ARE A TIME CAPSULE AND ECOLOGICAL BIOSPHERE CONSISTING OF ALLURING NATURAL LANDSCAPES, ROLLING FARMLAND AND REED-LINED WATER-WORLDS. THIS ANCIENT LANDSCAPE IS A THRIVING, RURAL REALM THAT HARKS BACK TO A QUIETER, SIMPLER TIME, YET VIBRANT WITH AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY AND WITH ENVIABLE ADVENTURE ACTIVITIES FOR THOSE EAGER TO EXPERIENCE IRELAND WITHOUT A THRONG OF TOURISTS SURROUNDING THEM. FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, THIS HAS BEEN A SACRED PLACE TO GATHER ENERGY FOR THE SEASON AHEAD. IT IS ONCE AGAIN BECOMING A PLACE OF SANCTUARY, WHERE YOU CAN ESCAPE THE MODERN WORLD AND RECONNECT WITH A LANDSCAPE THAT HAS PRESERVED SO MUCH OF ITS BIO-DIVERSE, UNCANNY BEAUTY.

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