



PHOTO DAVID J. WHYTE

*The spectacular Macreddin GC was the first course design project undertaken by former Ryder Cup captain Paul McGinley*

## UNDISCOVERED IRELAND

**Why there's never been a better time to get to know the Emerald Isle's East and South East a little better**



BY DAVID J WHYTE  
@linkslands  
PHOTOS Supplied

*David is a specialist in golf travel writing, photography and video*

**T**HE EAST AND SOUTH EAST of Ireland might not be at the top of your golf holiday bucket list - not yet anyway! There are some well-known courses along the east coast such as Druid's Glen, Portmarnock or the European Club but there is also a host of lesser-knowns which represent possibly the best value, best quality golf packages on this planet. And it's those I went to explore courtesy of Club Choice Ireland.

The tour operator of choice for this region, Club Choice Ireland has created a series of tailored packages throughout the east and

south-east. They pair great courses with the best hotels in each area and I have to say, I was surprised and delighted with the exceptional standard and variety of golf not to mention the accommodation. But what is truly amazing is the value. You can enjoy a five-day break with four rounds of top quality golf and four nights in beautiful hotels for under £400pps... including return ferry from Cairnryan (near Stranraer) to Belfast. Equally, you could fly from Edinburgh, Glasgow or Aberdeen and get there in around an hour. Either way has its advantages. A group of four with a car and golf clubs in tow will probably

find the ferry best. Dublin is only a two-hour drive from Belfast.

### THE ISLAND GOLF CLUB

My first stop was The Island Golf Club just north of the Fair City. If you fly in, this veritable links is only 20 minutes from the airport. The course weaves through high dunes with firm, fast-rolling fairways. The club was founded in 1890, making it one of Ireland's oldest. Yet, as recently as the 1970s, The Island was accessible only by rowing boat. The Island somehow sneaks under the radar of Ireland's most popular links courses but I think it's only a matter of getting ▶



► the word out. This is a genuine links challenge and should be on everyone's 'to play' list.

#### MACREDDIN GOLF CLUB

I drove on south towards Wexford on the M11. Ireland's motorways are superb and whisk you along from Dublin towards the Wicklow Mountains, a delightful part of the country. Macreddin GC was the first course design project undertaken by former Ryder Cup captain Paul McGinley. The back nine is especially good, with devious twists, drops and climbs. The 12th is the best example of that, a determined dogleg across the Ballycreen Brook then again across a wilderness chasm. It's surely one of the best par-4s in Ireland. If you're accurate and enjoy golf in a stunning setting, it'll be right up your street.

#### THE ASHDOWN PARK HOTEL

Irish four-star hotels seem to be a notch above UK standards. The Ashdown Park Hotel in Gorey offers large, well-appointed rooms, cosy-thick towels and a comfortable bed; all the ingredients that make a hotel stay memorable. Its Rowan Tree Restaurant might be its best aspect. They cook with produce from their own farm just down the road. There's also an indoor pool, steam room and sauna next to the gym, whilst the downtown area of Gorey is only ten minutes walk with welcoming pubs and a thriving local music scene.

#### ARKLOW GOLF CLUB

Arklow is maybe not as renowned as Royal Dublin or Royal County Down but it's easily as delightful and as tough a par-69 as you'll find anywhere. I teed up with Stephen Larkin, the Banqueting Manager from The Ashdown Park Hotel who kindly agreed to accompany me. We bounced around these delicious links, the greens complexes contemporary but the rest pretty much the way it was back in the day. I was blown away, not by the wind but by the links delight that Arklow is.

#### THE MARTELLO

That night I stayed at the Martello, a lively place on the front in the



Killeen Castle

seaside town of Bray. It's a 'Pub & Guesthouse' combination with an expansive, covered seating area for dining, music and large screen sports-casting. The atmosphere most nights is lively, especially if there's a football or rugby match on. The accommodation is two-star but more than adequate. You stay here for the craic, the food and the great seaside location.

#### POWERSCOURT GOLF CLUB

It was then back towards Dublin, with two of Ireland's finest parklands to be discovered at Powerscourt Golf Club. Set in a country estate, the courses are enhanced with staggering views of the Great Sugar Loaf Mountain. I went for the West, designed by none other than Scotland's David McLay Kidd. This was one of David's early outings with his father Jimmy helping out. This is a classy product and not to be missed.

#### CARTON HOUSE HOTEL & GOLF RESORT

I honestly find it hard to believe the high standards that are on offer in this part of Ireland. Carton House Hotel & Golf Resort is a seriously upmarket

effort akin to Gleneagles with superb rooms and a classy restaurant. There are two courses: the O'Meara Course, a classic parkland meandering through pastures and woodland by the River Rye, and the Montgomerie, which is more links-like with fast, firm fairways, massive bunkers and impeccable greens. In preparation for my round on the O'Meara, I had a quick lesson with David Kearney, Carton House's Director of Golf and Director of the Irish Ladies Golf Union High Performance Unit, which proved invaluable.

#### KILLEEN CASTLE GOLF CLUB

My final outing was at Killeen Castle, again one of the finest parkland venues in all of Ireland with the elegant outline of the eponymous castle enhancing the views. A world-class Jack Nicklaus signature design, it hosted the 2011 Solheim Cup along with the Ladies Irish Open from 2010 until 2012. That's just how good it is.

#### CONCLUSION

Club Choice Ireland specialises in golf tours to the East and South East of Ireland bringing together tailored packages and customised itineraries. To get to the area, you can travel using their 'Return Ferry' inclusive packages or fly direct into Dublin Airport.

• For more on golf in this part of Ireland, visit [clubchoiceireland.com](http://clubchoiceireland.com), call 0800 285 1490 or email [info@clubchoiceireland.com](mailto:info@clubchoiceireland.com)



Arklow



Carton House



The Island

## 3 OTHER PLACES YOU COULD STAY

#### ● THE BRIDGE HOTEL, ARKLOW

Located in the scenic coastal town of Arklow, the Bridge Hotel is just a few minutes' walk from the sea and is close to the Avoca river. Boasting 15 rooms, each with television, complimentary WiFi and more, it is an ideal resting spot after a day of golf around the sunny South East.

#### ● COURT YARD HOTEL, LEIXLIP

The four-star Court Yard Hotel, built on the site where Arthur Guinness created his brewing empire, offers old world charm, beautiful original stone work with contemporary design. Described as 'Kildare's best-kept secret', you'll find it just 15 minutes from Dublin City Centre and 20 minutes from Dublin Airport.

#### ● WATERSIDE HOUSE, NORTH DUBLIN

Dublin's only beachfront hotel, Waterside House is situated in the picturesque village of Donabate in North County Dublin, offering stunning views of the Irish Sea, Lambay Island, Ireland's Eye and Howth Head.

**"If you're accurate and enjoy golf in a stunning setting, Macreddin Golf Club will be right up your street."**