GENERAL ORIENTATION

While the great links golf courses of Donegal lie to the north and north east of the county, with Donegal Golf links being south of Donegal town, the sightseeing attractions of one of Ireland’s most spectacular counties lie to the west and northwest.

A number of days could be spent exploring the coast between Bloody Foreland and Glencolumkille.

Donegal Town is also historic and worth a visit.

Donegal is spoilt for natural beauty with rugged coastline, windswept peninsulas, precipitous cliffs and a choice of golden beaches. Blanket bogs, now rare in the world, cover much of the county. Donegal has been occupied by humans for over 9,000 years and is renowned for its history and archaeology. Pre-Christian farmers left tomb monuments which still dot the county, while evidence of Viking settlements and Early Christian monuments are still evident today. These include churches and religious sites commemorating St. Columcille, the Donegal man who converted Scotland to Christianity. To the south, Lough Derg is a famous pilgrimage site.

Donegal has preserved its Gaelic culture and language longer than most places with a Gaeltacht area stretching from Fanad Head to Slieve League. Fishing and tweed production are Donegal’s major industries, with exports world-wide. The county’s friendly people, lively pubs and fine restaurants all add to the charm of Donegal.

Letterkenny is the principal town lying at the head of Lough Swilly. The direct route from Letterkenny to Donegal Town is through Ballybofey and the Bearnsmore Gap, but to take this route is to miss one of the most splendid parts of Ireland.

There is a spectacular 9-hole golf course at Cruit Island while the 18 links holes at Narin & Portnoo are also worth considering.
COUNTY DONEGAL
- Wild and Wonderful

DONEGAL HIGHLIGHTS
Bloody Foreland
Donegal Museum
Glenveagh
Glenties & The Rosses
Glencolumkille
Donegal Town

BLOODY FORELAND
One of the remotest parts of Ireland lies in the far northwest corner. Bloody Foreland, or Cnoc Fola, takes its name from the reddish glow of the cliffs at sunset.

From Dunfanaghy the entire coast can be explored through Gortahork and Meenlaragh to the point before turning southward to Gweedore.

From the headland the cliffs of Tory Island can be seen. The notorious waters of Tory Sound lie in between.

For a thousand years the monastery founded by Columkille flourished on Tory until sacked by the Elizabethans. The ruins are mostly in the west of Tory. Of the five churches recorded in the middle ages only the ruins of one remain. Cursing stones were used to keep out tax collectors.

DONEGAL MUSEUM
Located at High Street, Letterkenny, houses a fascinating range of artefacts covering all aspects of life in Donegal. The museum charts the history of the county over the last three centuries, from the Penal Laws to the emergency. Donegal County Museum is based in a fine old stone building, once part of the Letterkenny Workhouse, built in 1846.

GLENVEAGH
Glenveagh National Park is situated on the eastern side of the Derryveagh Mountains. The Park contains 14,000 hectares of mountain, raised bogland, lakes and woodlands and is dissected by the valley which gives the park its name, Glenveagh (Gleann Bheatha) meaning Glen of the Birches.

The Estate was established by John Adair who, in April, 1861 evicted 244 tenants and cleared the land so as not to mar his views of the magnificent landscape. This ignoble history makes the beautiful views all the more poignant for today’s visitor.

The Park lands include the two highest mountains in Donegal, Errigal and Slieve Sneacht. At the south-west end of the park are the ice-carved cliffs of the Poisoned Glen, a corruption of the name in Irish which mean ‘heavenly glen’. Lough Veagh has natural stocks of brown trout, salmon and artic char.

The 19th century Glenveagh Castle with its Neo-gothic architecture complete with ramparts, turrets and a round tower is open to the public. There are a number of pleasant walks through the fine gardens.

The Park has the largest herd of Red Deer in Ireland if not in Europe. The deer spend the summer on the Derryveagh mountains, coming down hill in winter. The Park is also home to meadow pipit, stonechats, grouse, ravens, siskins, tree-creepers, redstarts, wood warblers and occasionally peregrines and merlins. The Golden Eagle was reintroduced to the park in 2000. Having become extinct 100 years ago, largely due to over hunting by both farmers and game keepers.

The Park is particularly spectacular when the prolific Rhododendron Ponticum are in bloom in early Summer.
Donegal Castle

Donegal Bay

St. John's Point

THE ROSES

The Rosses area of West Donegal, Ireland, is an area of outstanding natural beauty, comprising lakes, mountains and rocky glens. Its barren, rugged landscape is as unique as the people who have inhabited this remote region for generations - a people with a unique history, culture and heritage. In bygone years, many events impacted greatly on the Rosses, including the Plantation, Famine, Emigration and Rebellion.

The area’s culture is well expressed in traditional Irish and Celtic music, Clannad being one of the famous bands hailing from the Rosses.

Travelling south from Gweedore the coastal road passes through Crolly, Annagry, Kincasslagh to Burtonpoint (past Cruit Island) before rejoining the main route at Dungloe.

The “Mary of Dungloe” festival takes place during the first week in August.

GLENCOULMKILLE

In the far southwest corner of Donegal is the area centred around Glencoulmkille, an Irish speaking village situated in a picturesque glen named after St. Columkille who founded a monastery there.

Columkille is one of the foremost Irish Saints. He was born at Gartan, County Donegal in 521 and is also known as Saint Columba. He was related to the O'Neill dynasty, the Kings of Ulster, and was famed for his prophecies which are frequently referred to in Donegal folklore.

Columkille established monasteries at Glencoulmkille, Derry and Kells in Ireland before founding his monastery on the island of Iona in 563AD. It was from there that he brought Christianity to the Picts (Scots). Iona became the site of a Benedictine Abbey and of a small cathedral. These were dismantled by Protestant reformers in 1561.

It was at Columkille's monastery in Iona that The Book of Kells was compiled. Columkille was also a prolific poet and some of his poems, in both Latin and Gaelic, survive. Colmcille died on 9th June, 597 which is his feast day.

Glencoulmcille boasts fine cliff walks and safe beaches and the nearby Slieve League sea cliffs are the highest in Europe.

DONEGAL CASTLE

Built by the O'Donnell chieftain in the 15th century, beside the River Eske, the Castle has extensive 17th century additions by Sir Basil Brooke. The Castle is furnished throughout and includes Persian rugs and French tapestries. Information panels chronicle the history of the Castle owners from the O'Donnell chieftains to the Brooke family.