



# The Best Day Trips from Belfast: Exploring Northern Ireland's Gems

At the request of one of my readers I have put together this list of the best day trips from Belfast and I've included some great bus tours that you can take to [County Donegal](#). Donegal is part of the [Wild Atlantic Way](#) and it is further North than Northern Ireland so if you have the time make the trip.

I recommend [renting a car](#) as once you are out of Belfast the driving is easy as long as you remember to keep your rear end in the middle of the road as my husband says. Belfast and Derry are small cities so if you have driven around a larger city in the USA or Canada you will find these drives fairly easy.

[Belfast, the vibrant capital](#) of Northern Ireland, is not only a cultural hub but also a perfect base for exploring some of the most stunning landscapes, historical sites, and charming towns in the region. Whether you're into history, nature, or just soaking in the local atmosphere, these day trips offer something for everyone. Here are some of the best day trips from Belfast that will enrich your Northern Ireland experience.

Since I live in Ireland I've added links for you to explore all the areas and day trips I mention in this article just click on the coloured link and it will take you to an article on that particular area.

## Frequently Asked Questions: The Best Day Trips from Belfast

### 1. What are some of the best day trips from Belfast?

When looking for the best day trips from Belfast, consider visiting iconic locations like the Giant's Causeway, Dunluce Castle, and Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge. These stunning sites offer a glimpse into Northern Ireland's natural beauty and rich history.



## 2. How can I explore Northern Ireland's gems in a day trip from Belfast?

A day trip from Belfast provides the perfect opportunity to discover Northern Ireland's hidden treasures. Whether you opt for a guided tour or choose to drive from Belfast, attractions like the Giants Causeway are must visits for a memorable experience.

## 3. Is the Causeway Coastal Route a popular choice for day tours from Belfast?

Yes, the Causeway Coastal Route is a highly popular option for day tours from Belfast. This scenic drive offers breathtaking views of the Antrim Coast and access to attractions like the Giant's Causeway and Dunluce Castle.

## 4. What makes the Giant's Causeway a must visit destination in Northern Ireland?

The Giant's Causeway is one of Northern Ireland's most iconic and beloved attractions. Its unique geological formations and breathtaking coastal views make it a top choice for visitors seeking natural beauty and wonder.

## 5. How can I access the Giant's Causeway from Belfast without a car?

If you prefer not to drive from Belfast, public transport options and guided tours are available for easy access to the Giant's Causeway. These convenient alternatives ensure you can still explore this natural wonder hassle free.

## 6. Are there Game of Thrones filming locations near Belfast worth visiting?

Absolutely! Northern Ireland is home to several Game of Thrones filming locations, such as Tollymore Forest Park. Fans of the series can embark on tours from Belfast to explore these iconic settings and immerse themselves in the world.

## 8. What are some hidden gems in Northern Ireland and Donegal?

There are just so many hidden gems in the northern part of Ireland from the [Stairway to Heaven walk](#), [Boa Island](#) and the Janus head, the [Inishowen Peninsula](#), the [Cliffs of Slieve League](#) (better than the [Cliffs of Moher](#)). There are [stone circles](#), [celtic crosses](#) and sacred places like [Glencolumbkille](#).



## Giant's Causeway and the Antrim Coast

Distance from Belfast: 1.5 hours by car

The Giant's Causeway, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is one of Northern Ireland's most iconic attractions. This natural wonder features around 40,000 interlocking basalt columns, formed by ancient volcanic activity. The sight of these unique formations, along with the mythological tales of giants, makes it a must visit.

Along the way, explore the stunning Antrim Coast, the 9 Glens of Antrim, stopping at the Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge, which hangs 100 feet above the Atlantic Ocean, and the picturesque Dunluce Castle perched dramatically on the cliffs.

Highlights:

[Giant's Causeway](#)

[Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge](#)

[Dunluce Castle](#)

[Antrim Coast Road and the 9 Glens of Antrim](#)

[Lough Neagh](#)

[Mussenden Temple](#)

## The Mourne Mountains

Distance from Belfast: 1 hour by car

For nature lovers and hikers, the Mourne Mountains offer a breathtaking day out. Located in County Down, these mountains are an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and provide some of the best hiking trails in Northern Ireland. Slieve Donard, the highest peak in Northern Ireland, offers challenging trails with rewarding panoramic views. For a more relaxed day, visit the nearby Tollymore Forest Park, which features walking trails through ancient woodland, and Silent Valley Reservoir for a peaceful retreat.

Highlights:

Hiking in the Mourne Mountains

Tollymore Forest Park

Silent Valley Reservoir



## Derry/Londonderry

Distance from Belfast: 1.5 hours by car or train

Derry/Londonderry is a city steeped in history, making it a fascinating day trip. Known for its well preserved 17th century city walls, you can walk the entire circuit while enjoying views over the historic center. Don't miss the Peace Bridge, which symbolizes the city's desire for a peaceful future, and the Museum of Free Derry, which offers insights into the Troubles and the civil rights movement.

I highly recommend taking the train journey from Belfast to Derry as is one of the most scenic rail routes in the world, offering breathtaking views of the region's diverse landscapes. The journey winds through rolling hills and lush farmlands of County Antrim. The scenery becomes even more spectacular as the train hugs the rugged coastline, providing passengers with panoramic views of the North Atlantic Ocean.

Along the way, the train passes by quaint villages, historic castles, and dramatic cliffs, including a stunning stretch along the shores of Lough Foyle as it approaches Derry.

Highlights:

[Derry's City Walls](#)

Peace Bridge

Museum of Free Derry

Guildhall and Tower Museum

[Derry Murals and Bloody Sunday Memorial](#)

## The Ards Peninsula and Strangford Lough

Distance from Belfast: 45 minutes by car

A scenic drive around the Ards Peninsula offers a tranquil escape into nature. Strangford Lough, Northern Ireland's largest sea lough, is a haven for wildlife and offers opportunities for bird watching and kayaking. Visit Mount Stewart, a grand National Trust property with beautiful gardens, and explore the charming village of Portaferry, where you can catch a ferry across to Strangford village.

Highlights:

Mount Stewart

Strangford Lough



## Portaferry and Strangford villages

Distance from Belfast: 40 minutes by car

The Gobbins Cliff Path is an exhilarating coastal walk along dramatic cliffs on the Antrim Coast. Originally opened in 1902, the path was restored and reopened in 2015, offering visitors a thrilling experience of walking along a path carved into the cliff face, crossing suspension bridges, and exploring tunnels. The views of the rugged coastline and wildlife, including puffins and seals, make it an unforgettable adventure.

Have lunch at the Cuan and admire the GOT memorabilia and wander this beautiful little village.

Highlights:

Gobbins Cliffsides walk with dramatic views a historical engineering marvel

Wildlife spotting

Strangford Lough Ferry to Portaferry

## Carrickfergus Castle and the Causeway Coastal Route

Distance from Belfast: 20 minutes by car

Just a short drive from Belfast, Carrickfergus Castle is one of the best preserved medieval castles in Ireland. Dating back to 1177, the castle played a key role in various historical events. After exploring the castle, you can continue along the Causeway Coastal Route, one of the world's great road journeys, offering stunning views of the coastline and the North Antrim coast road countryside.

Highlights:

[Carrickfergus Castle](#)

[Famous Causeway Coastal Route](#)

Giant's Causeway Tour

Glenariff Forest Park

Hillsborough Castle

Bushmills Distillery

Whitehead Railway Museum

Ulster Transport Museum



## Rathlin Island

Distance from Belfast: 2 hours by car and ferry

Rathlin Island, located off the coast of Ballycastle, is Northern Ireland's only inhabited offshore island. A day trip here offers a unique experience of remote island life, with opportunities for bird watching, particularly puffins, at the RSPB Seabird Centre. You can also visit the island's lighthouse and learn about its history at the Boathouse Visitor Centre. The ferry ride itself offers stunning views of the Causeway Coast.

Highlights:

[RSPB Seabird Centre](#)  
[Rathlin Island Lighthouse](#)  
[Boathouse Visitor Centre](#)  
[Scenic ferry ride](#)

## Armagh City

Distance from Belfast: 1 hour by car or train

Known as the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland, Armagh is rich in history and culture. The city is home to two cathedrals named after St. Patrick, each offering stunning architecture and spiritual heritage. The Armagh Observatory and Planetarium provide an educational and fun experience for all ages, with interactive displays and stargazing opportunities.

Highlights:

St. Patrick's Cathedrals (Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland)  
Armagh Observatory and Planetarium  
Armagh County Museum  
Navan Fort



## Game of Thrones Tours Filming Locations

Distance from Belfast: Various locations within 12 hours

For fans of HBO's *Game of Thrones*, Northern Ireland offers a treasure trove of filming locations that can be explored in a day. Visit the Dark Hedges, which served as the Kingsroad, or Ballintoy Harbour, known as the Iron Islands. Castle Ward, which doubled as Winterfell, offers immersive experiences where you can dress in costumes and try archery. Many guided tours are available, providing insights into how the series was filmed in these stunning locations.

Highlights:

Dark Hedges (Kingsroad)

Ballintoy Harbour (Iron Islands)

Castle Ward (Winterfell)

Cushendun Caves (Stormlands)

## Bus Tours across Northern Ireland and Donegal

There is just so much more you can see in a rental car but if not try one of these highly recommend tours. Northern Ireland and Donegal offer stunning landscapes, rich history, and vibrant culture, making them ideal for bus tours. Here are some of the best bus tours that will give you an unforgettable experience across these regions:

### McComb's Coach Travel – Giant's Causeway Tour

- **Overview:** This is one of the most popular tours in Northern Ireland, covering the Giant's Causeway, Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge, Dunluce Castle, and the Dark Hedges (featured in *Game of Thrones*).
- **Duration:** Full-day tour.
- **Highlights:** Scenic Antrim Coast, Giant's Causeway (UNESCO World Heritage site), iconic filming locations.

### Paddywagon Tours – Belfast to Donegal

- **Overview:** This tour departs from Belfast and heads to Donegal, covering key attractions like Glenveagh National Park, Errigal Mountain, and the wild Atlantic coastline.
- **Duration:** Full-day tour.
- **Highlights:** Glenveagh National Park, stunning Donegal scenery, historic villages.



## Wild Rover Tours – Belfast, Giant’s Causeway & Dunluce Castle

- **Overview:** This tour offers a mix of Northern Ireland’s political history with a visit to Belfast, followed by the stunning natural wonders of the Giant’s Causeway and Dunluce Castle.
- **Duration:** Full-day tour.
- **Highlights:** Belfast city tour, Giant’s Causeway, and Dunluce Castle.

## Finn McCools Tours – Northern Ireland Coast & Game of Thrones Locations

- **Overview:** Ideal for *Game of Thrones* fans, this tour explores the rugged Northern Ireland coast, including several iconic filming locations, as well as the Giant’s Causeway.
- **Duration:** Full-day tour.
- **Highlights:** Ballintoy Harbour, Dark Hedges, Cushendun Caves, and Giant’s Causeway.

## McGeehan Coach Tours – Donegal & Northwest Ireland

- **Overview:** A more in-depth exploration of Donegal, this multi-day tour covers the Wild Atlantic Way, Slieve League Cliffs, and Glenveagh National Park.
- **Duration:** 3-5 days.
- **Highlights:** Slieve League Cliffs, Glenveagh National Park, Donegal Town, and picturesque coastal villages.

## CIE Tours – Northern Ireland & Donegal Highlights

- **Overview:** CIE offers a comprehensive multi-day tour that includes Belfast, Derry, the Antrim Coast, and a detailed exploration of Donegal’s wild beauty.
- **Duration:** 8-10 days.
- **Highlights:** Belfast, Derry, Giant’s Causeway, Donegal’s rugged coast, and cultural sites.

## Ulsterbus Tours – Northern Ireland Explorer

- **Overview:** A broad overview of Northern Ireland’s key attractions, including the Antrim Coast, the Mourne Mountains, and the Ards Peninsula.
- **Duration:** 5-7 days.
- **Highlights:** Mourne Mountains, Strangford Lough, and coastal villages.

These tours offer a mix of history, culture, and natural beauty, catering to a range of interests from history buffs to nature lovers. Whether you have a day or a week, these options will help you explore Northern Ireland and Donegal to the fullest.

Northern Ireland’s compact size makes it an ideal destination for day trips, each offering a unique experience and insight into the region’s diverse landscape and history. Whether you’re exploring ancient castles, hiking rugged mountains, or walking in the footsteps of giants and kings, these day trips from Belfast will leave you with lasting memories of this enchanting corner of the world.





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