

RSA article – Walking & Cycling
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Ask any visitor to Ireland what they love most about the country and they'll all say the same thing: The scenery. But to really get a sense of the place, you need to switch off the engine and get out there either on foot or by bike.

Ireland has invested substantially in its walking and cycling infrastructure in recent years, and there are now cycling and walking options to suit all tastes. You can get a map and a compass and head out on your own, or take advantage of the network of local guides who'll provide you with insights into the history, natural heritage and archaeology of the area.

One of the most popular innovations of recent years has been the development of a series of looped walks, each one mapped and graded to allow visitors to match it with their own schedules and fitness levels.

The Templecronan Loop, for example, is a 5km, two-hour walk through the unique limestone landscape of the Burren in Co. Clare. By contrast, the Millennium Stone Loop in Co. Tipperary will guide walkers between the Galtee Mountains and the wooded ridge of Slievenamuck, through the lush green beauty of the Glen of Aherlow. At the discoverireland.ie site, you can download a map of each walk, together with detailed descriptions of what you'll find as you progress.

For those looking for an even deeper appreciation of the scenery, there are the Way Marked Ways, which offer visitors a multi-day trek experience. The Sheeps Head Way, for example, is an 88km hike through the spectacular Atlantic coastal scenery of West Cork.

While most of these routes will get you off-road, care should be taken when walking on the roads, no matter how remote. Always walk on the right hand side, facing oncoming traffic. If there's a footpath, use it. If not, walk no more than two abreast, or in single file if the road is narrow. Keep your wits about you and switch off the headphones.

As a cyclist or pedestrian it is very important to increase your visibility. Always wear reflective armbands, while a high-visibility belt or vest will help you to be seen from a distance. Always carry a torch on country roads.

Drinking and driving is of course a complete no-no, but neither is it a good idea to walk back from the pub if you've had one too many. Hail a taxi, use public transport or get a lift from a non-drinking friend.

The cycling options in Ireland are just as diverse as the walking, with mountain bike trails and long distance options as well as shorter, family friendly bike treks. Among the long distance treks, the 138km Beara Way Cycle Route takes you from Kenmare Bay to Bantry bay through some of the wildest and most remote countryside you'll find. Alternatively, the just-opened Great Western Greenway in Co. Mayo offers a traffic-free cycle that runs for 18km from Mulranny to Newport and is ideal for families.

As with all road traffic in Ireland, you cycle on the left. Always look behind and give the proper signal before moving off, changing lanes or making a turn

Ensure your bike is in good working order before you set out, checking brakes and making sure tyres are inflated to the right pressure. Watch your speed, especially when cycling on busy streets and going downhill. Steer well clear of left-turning trucks; let them turn before you move ahead.

Staying visible is of course vital. Never cycle in the dark without adequate lighting – white for front, red for rear. Always wear luminous clothing such as hi-vis vests, fluorescent armbands and reflective belts. Helmets are essential.

If you're cycling with children, make sure the bike is matched to their height and experience, and of course, make sure they always wear a helmet. Don't let them out on the road unsupervised, and make sure they're wearing the right clothes – no loosely worn scarves that might get caught in chains or spokes.

And of course always dress for the weather. The rain won't spoil your enjoyment of the scenery, but getting wet might.

Visit the Road Safety Authority's website www.rsa.ie for more information on walking and cycling safety.