

Causeway Coastal Route Family Tour

From bouncy castles to bungee runs, beautiful beaches to a rope bridge challenge, and with a world famous tourist attraction thrown in for good measure – the **Causeway Coastal Route Family Tour** ticks all the right boxes.

Day 1: Belfast to Bushmills

Departing from Belfast, Northern Ireland's capital city, the tour makes its way along the M2 towards Whiteabbey and Carrickfergus, the road framed by the Belfast Hills on one side and the lapping waters of Belfast Lough on the other.

Striking coastal views set the scene for what is to come before the journey reaches **Carrickfergus** and the imposing castle that dominates the town's skyline. Larne provides the gateway to the Glens of Antrim and a chance to have some serious fun at **Carnfunnock Country Park**, situated just two miles north of Ballygally. The Family Fun Zone gives the kids a chance to relax on board the miniature railway, or to try out their best Rory McIlroy impersonation on the 18-hole crazy golf course. Get the pulses racing with bungee running or even try your hand at laser clay pigeon shooting or remote control lorries. The village of **Ballygally** offers its own attractions, not least the wonderful beach and headland at Ballygally Bay.

Parents and children can chill out as the Family Tour passes through the myriad of picturesque seaside villages like **Glenarm** and **Carnlough** that adorn the Causeway Coastal Route. Five miles outside another of these charming hamlets, **Cushendun**, is **Ballypatrick Forest**. Mature woodland is complemented with open areas that allow young and old alike to stretch their legs whilst taking in fantastic views of Rathlin Island, situated just six miles off the coast. Better still take a boat trip to Rathlin and watch the puffins, just one of many breeds of bird that inhabit the Royal Society of the Protection of Birds sanctuary on the west of the island. Or if you prefer to keep your feet on *terra firma*, why not pay a visit to the bustling seaside town of **Ballycastle** with its harbour, beautiful beach, fishing and cycling routes. Or take a moment to enjoy the views across to Mull of Kintyre (Scotland).

Next up is the perfect family 'Bushtucker' challenge – the awesome **Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge**. Suspended across a 20-metre chasm between the mainland and the tiny Carrick Island, this will test the nerve of even the hardiest souls. With a 30-metre drop to the water below, Carrick-a-Rede has, in one form or other, been erected by fishermen for 350-years to enable them to check their salmon nets. If you're brave enough to walk across, remember the cardinal rule, don't look down.

Speaking of sights that take your breath away, none are more jaw-dropping than the next stop on the Causeway Coastal Route Family Tour – UNESCO World Heritage site **The Giant's Causeway**. Science tells us the unique six-sided basalt columns and formations were formed by volcanic activity, but we know better. Legend has it that local giant Finn McCool created this world famous tourist attraction, hence sights not to be missed such as the Wishing Chair, Giant's Boot, and a massive formation of hexagonal columns that resembles church organ pipes. The Giant's Causeway experience is set to become even more impressive with the opening of a new state-of-the-art visitor centre in 2012.

Day one ends in the historic town of **Bushmills**, home of Ireland's oldest whiskey distillery, and also site of a real treat for the (big) kids – a steam locomotive that puffs its way sedately between the town and the Giant's Causeway.

Day 2: Bushmills to Portrush

Refuelled (with a traditional Ulster fry) and re-energised the first stop on day two is **Portrush**. And no visit to the popular seaside resort town would be complete without a visit to **Barry's Amusements**. Founded way back in 1925 by the Chipperfield and Trufelli circus families, the intoxicating mix of traditional and modern amusements at Barry's are guaranteed to put a smile on the face of both young and old.

Portrush continues to be a mecca for tourists from both home and abroad with its golden beaches a particular favourite with watersports enthusiasts. Small wonder as this popular resort can boast not one, not two, but three outstanding beaches (West Strand, East Strand, and Whiterocks). Surfers and surf kayakers can't help but be impressed by the recently opened Watersports Centre with lessons and equipment hire available. Everything about Portrush is family orientated with the **Dunluce Centre** housing Ireland's only 4-D motion simulator and Finn McCool's adventure play area. If the kids enjoy making a splash then why not try **Waterworld**, a complex situated in the harbour area that boasts pools and slides, together with a six lane ten-pin bowling alley. Or why not revel in the fabulous views from the **Arcadia** whilst the kids expend some of their boundless energy in the paddling pools and play frames.

Day 3: Portrush to Ballymena (OPTION 1)

The fun just keeps on coming on day three as the Family Tour makes the short hop to Portrush's near neighbour **Portstewart**. Another popular holiday destination since Victorian times, the town's promenade leads to **The Crescent**, a children's play area perched next to the Atlantic Ocean. **Coleraine**, just a few miles inland, offers an alternative to the bracing sea air with **The Jet Centre** complex, complete with cinema, ten-pin bowling, and Alley Cats (a play area for children Under-12). The town is also a popular shopping destination with its mix of independent retailers and familiar high street chains.

Leslie Hill Open Farm in **Ballymoney** provides the opportunity to swap all things hi-tech for a slice of life in a bygone era. This beautiful Georgian estate and farm affords families the opportunity to interact with the animals in a safe environment and to observe all manner of historic machinery, carriages, and carts. On a more modern theme is **Treasure Island**, situated in the **Joey Dunlop Leisure Centre** (named after the legendary motorcycle road racer) with its three-floor themed soft play area including ball cannon, exo-station interactive games, and 540-degree spiral slide. When the world stops spinning, you can also pay visit to the 40-acre Riverside Park to feed the ducks.

Continuing inland, the tour reaches **Ballymena** and a visit to the recently opened **Mid Antrim Museum** at the Braid. The museum is proof that learning can be fun as the sound narratives for adults and interactive displays for children provide an engaging way of understanding local and national history. Speaking of fun why not take the family to the Sportsbowl with 16 lanes of tenpin bowling, indoor karting, and the Tumble Towers soft play area.

Day 3: Portrush to Limavady (OPTION 2)

The fun just keeps on coming on day three as the Family Tour makes the short hop to Portrush's near neighbour **Portstewart**. Another popular holiday destination since Victorian times, the town's promenade leads to **The Crescent**, a childrens' play area perched next to the Atlantic Ocean. **Coleraine**, just a few miles inland, offers an alternative to the bracing sea air with **The Jet Centre** complex, complete with cinema, ten-pin bowling, and Alley Cats (a play area for children Under-12).

Continuing along the Causeway Coastal Route to the magnificent beach at **Downhill/Benone** with one of Northern Ireland's most iconic buildings, Mussenden Temple, perched precariously on the cliff top overlooking the strand. The tour continues to **Limavady** and its surrounding area with a myriad of activities on offer. For the adventurous there is abseiling, canoeing, raft building, and zip line at **Carrowmena Activity Centre**. **Foylehov** provides outdoor activities sure to get the pulses racing. Try hovercrafting, be The Stig for a day with some powerturn buggies, or give Robin Hood a run for his money with some target archery.

If something a little more sedate is more your style then stroll along one of the picturesque woodland walks at **Roe Valley Country Park**, or participate in one of many fascinating parent and children courses or events at the **Roe Valley Arts and Cultural Centre**.

If the Causeway Coastal Route Family Tour is your idea of holiday heaven why not visit our accommodation and special offers section and spend a few days sampling what the region has in store. For further details check out our website on **www.causewaycoastandglens.com**.