

Causeway Coastal Route

Parks, Gardens & Art Tour

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Day 1: Belfast to Glenariff

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Starting out from **Belfast** along the M2 motorway, the tour hugs the banks of Belfast Lough as you follow the Causeway Coastal Route signs (coloured brown) in the direction of Whiteabbey and **Carrickfergus**.

Striking coastal views set the scene for what is to come before the journey reaches Carrickfergus and its imposing castle (built in 1177 by John de Courcy) that dominates the town's skyline. The quaint seaside village of **Whitehead** bridges the gap between Carrickfergus and **Larne**, with **Carnfunnock Country Park**, just two miles north of **Ballygally**, another natural stopping off point. With more than 191 hectares of woodland, gardens, and walking trails, the Park formed part of the estate owned by Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon until coming under the auspices of Larne Borough Council in 1957. Carnfunnock also offers spectacular panoramic views of the Antrim Coast and the North Channel that separates Northern Ireland from Scotland.

Next stop is **Glenarm**, the southernmost of the nine Glens of Antrim. Fittingly Glenarm (meaning Glen of the Army) is home to one of Northern Ireland's oldest estates, **Glenarm Castle**. Dating from the 18th century, a leisurely stroll around its walled garden is a sensory delight, with cascading fountains and sculptures surrounded by all manner of blooms. In the village of Glenarm itself is another gem, **Steenson's Jewellery Workshop** where you can purchase one of the unique designed pieces or just watch the goldsmiths as they go about their craft.

A visit to this beautiful part of the world would not be complete, however, without taking a trip through the meandering glen and on to the inland villages of **Broughshane, Galgorm, and Ahoghill**. With *Ulster In Bloom*, *Britain In Bloom*, and *Europe In Bloom* awards it's no real surprise that Broughshane is often referred to as the Garden Village of Ulster. On the way to Ahoghill, stop in Galgorm and visit the UK's first Économusée (Marion Woodburn Jewellery) where you can watch the artisans at work. Or pay a visit to **Gloonan Gallery** in Ahoghill, renowned for its original Irish art, ceramics, and designer jewellery, Gloonan also has a fine collection of literature on local history.

Diversion completed, the tour returns to the coast via the second of Antrim's glens, Glencloy. Again the road winds its way through trees and hedgerows, shards of light illuminating the way as you descend on the village of **Carnlough** with its picturesque harbour and bay.

Once more the lapping waters of the North Channel keep you company as you make a beeline for **Cushendall**. Before you reach Ballycastle 'capital of the Glens, however, there are many more treats in store, not least **Glenariff Forest Park**. Pass through the village of **Waterfoot** and on reaching **Glenariff** (Queen of the Glens) follow the signs for this popular tourist attraction now entering its 80th year. A quartet of walking trails, each varying in length, convey the visitor to a fairytale landscape of leafy glades and tumbling waterfalls.

Day 2: Glenariff – Limavady

Day two follows the Causeway Coastal Route through Cushendall in the direction of Ballycastle and Ballypatrick Forest, a mature woodland that is complemented with an open area and fantastic views of Rathlin Island. Visitors can also take the option of following Glentaisie to **Armoy**.

Just outside the village, near to Gracehill Golf Club, you will discover a beautiful avenue of beech trees known locally as the '**Dark Hedges**' and a favourite of photographers, professional and amateur alike. Continue to Ballintoy and on to Bushmills. Located just outside Bushmills in the hamlet of Castlecat there is a treat in store for art lovers with the **Castlecat Studio Gallery** situated in a converted stable. The Tour then heads inland to the historic estate at **Benvariden**. First established in 1630, it was recently voted the favourite garden to visit in Ireland by *Gardener's World*. This accolade is richly deserved as Benvariden, on the banks of the River Bush, radiates colour. It's 12 foot high walls enclose a fabulous rose garden, kitchen garden, apple and pear trees, a melon house, and much, much more.

Continuing to the university town of Coleraine, there is the opportunity to visit the **Guy L. Wilson Daffodil Garden** which, in Spring, boasts an eye-catching and extremely rare collection of the Welsh national flower. Then it's on through the village of **Articlave**, as the tour passes **Hezlett House**, where visitors can sample a slice of life in the 17th century. Next stop is **Downhill Demesne** and one of Northern Ireland's most iconic monuments **Mussenden Temple**. Dramatically perched on the cliff's edge, the temple was built in 1785 as a summer library and provides jaw-dropping views westwards over Downhill Strand and on to Donegal, and east to Castlerock, Portstewart and Portrush. And if a visit to this wind-swept vantage point leaves you a might puckish, why not call in at the **Willow Garden Tea Room** and **Pretty Crafty Design** shop in **Downhill Forest** or **Crusoes Coffee Shop** in Castlerock. Or why not pander to your artistic side in Downhill by taking one of the creative groups events at the **Elements Studio Arts and Crafts**.

The assault on the senses continues as you take in the splendour of **Binevenagh**, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and on to **Roe Valley Country Park** on the outskirts of Limavady. Running for three miles either side of the tranquil River Roe, the relaxing walks provide the perfect place to unwind.

If the Parks, Gardens, and Art 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**.