Experience The Narrows of Strangford Lough

Fascinating maritime heritage, captivating wildlife, outstanding natural beauty, exciting coastal activities, and racing tides.

www.strangfordlough.org
You could sink a 15 storey building without trace in the deepest part (60m) off Ballyhenry Island, but it is only 0.8km wide at its narrowest span.

The incredible tidal energy is harnessed by the world’s first experimental, commercial marine current turbine - SeaGen. Its huge impellers rotate with the tide to generate electricity.

The rushing waters have many swirling tidal pools – the largest being the Routen Wheel.

The jagged rocks and seabed here are over 400 million years old but the channel was gouged out during the last Ice Age.

The steep sides of the Narrows are cloaked in colourful sponges, crabs, lobsters and anemones. They cling on tightly and grab or filter food from the water.

The churning water mixes temperature and nutrients and adds to the area’s environmental importance.

Kelp and wrack seaweeds shelter many wee beasties and add nutrients.

The bobbing heads of harbour and grey seals are a common sight as they hunt for fish in the Narrows. They haul out to rest and to pup on the rocks. Please keep your distance as they are easily disturbed on land. Careful boat handling avoids collisions in the water.

Harbour porpoise move swiftly with the tide and there is the occasional huge basking shark. Killer whales and even a humpback whale have been spotted here!

Look out for the black guillemot nesting boxes on the sea wall by Strangford’s Old Quay.

Each Spring upwards of 4,000 Sandwich, Arctic and common terns arrive from Africa to breed on the islands, including Swan Island. Watch these graceful birds with their distinctive calls as they plummet into the water for small fish.

About 70 pairs of grey herons have woodland homes around Strangford Lough. See them standing motionless in shallow water waiting for prey.

Nearby Ballyquintin and Killard Points are carpeted with thousands of glorious coastal flowers, including orchids, especially in early summer.

Visit the Exploris aquarium to see our fascinating marine life up close!

The eagles and golden eagles (with only 25 pairs in Ulster) are frequently seen soaring over the steep cliffs. A host of raptors hunt for prey including the osprey and the peregrine falcon.

The beacons on the Gowlands and the Angus Rock are amongst the many historic markers protecting vessels from the rocks. Today they mainly serve fishing and leisure boats.
Hilly narrow streets are crammed with buildings, many reflecting a history of trade, commerce and smuggling! In the 1700s this area had a thriving shipbuilding industry. Coal and timber were imported and corn, potatoes and agricultural produce were traded.

### Tower Houses

- Portaferry, Audley's and Strangford Castles are just some of this area’s distinctive, fortified houses. Anglo-Norman John de Courcy, invaded from 1177 and granted the lower part of the Ards Peninsula to the Savage family. In the C16th they built Portaferry and Strangford tower houses. The Audley’s built their castle in the C15th and later sold it to the Wards (see also nearby Kilclief).

### Christian Heritage

- In the C5th St Patrick arrived through the Narrows at the mouth of the Slaney River. He began his teachings at Saul in the barn (sabhall) of the local chieftain Diochu, his first convert. This whole area is steeped in Christian heritage.

### Vikings

- The Strangford Ferry

  A ferry has plied the Narrows from at least 1180 but was granted a Royal Charter from James I in the early 1600s making it the oldest continuous ferry service in the world. In 1836 the paddle steamer, Lady of the Lake, began ferrying sizeable numbers across. A jaunt on the ferry is one of the best ways to experience the Narrows, spotting jellyfish or seals in the swirling water and getting great views along its length. Crosses every 30 minutes in just 8 minutes.

### World War II

- People living here can still remember U-boats entering the Lough during the War. Look out posts at Ballyquintin and Killard - reminders of those times. The SS Empire Tara was a Liberty ship used in the Gooseberry Breakwater in Normandy on D-Day in 1944. Also known as Lee’s wreck; it broke near Ballybunni Island before it could be salvaged. Today it forms an artificial reef for wildlife and is a favourite dive site.

### Further Information

- The area has strong literary connections - from cultural and literary figure Joseph Tomalty (born at No 32 The Shore, Portaferry) and acclaimed writer Michael McAvoy who wrote much of his work from his Killard holiday home outside Strangford.

- Excellent gift and craft shops include: The Port (local artists); Castle Candles; Strawberry Fair (craft); Exploris (marine themed); Rolffes (vintage) and National Trust/SLLP Bookshop.

- Walking, literary, archaeology and landscape leaflets for this area downloadable on www.strangfordlough.org

- Portaferry Tourist Information Centre (Apr-Sept) Tel: 028 4272 9882

- www.portaferry.info

- www.portaferrygala.com

- www.nationaltrust.org.uk

- www.visitrangfordlough.co.uk
### Attractions, Activities

#### Explorius Aquarium
Some of the largest and finest displays in Europe. Seal rehabilitation centre.
Tel: 028 4272 8062

#### National Trust Castle Ward Estate
(Also causeway trail and Salt Island bothy).
Tel: 028 4488 1204

#### Castle Hill Candles
Quality local crafts.
Tel: 028 4272 9884

#### The Loft Gallery
Tel: 028 4272 9882

#### Portaferry Leisure Centre
Tel: 028 4272 8833

#### Tennis & Bowling
Cloughey and District Tennis Club
Tel: 078 0137 4444

#### Cuan Marine Services
“St Brendan” heritage boat tours
Tel: 028 4272 8297

#### North Star Boat Charter
Tel: 078 8976 1493

#### Clear Sky
RIB “Sea Safari”, kayaking, coasteering...
Tel: 028 4372 3933

#### Action Outdoors
Hiking, kayaking, coasteering...
Tel: 028 4482 1317

#### DV Diving
Tel: 028 9146 4671

#### Cuan Hotel
Quality local food. Themed events.
Tel: 028 4272 8886

#### The Cuan Restaurant
Tel: 028 4272 8856

#### Deli-licious Cafe.
Tel: 028 4272 8414

#### Wild Orchid Cafe.
Tel: 028 4272 9189

#### Barholm Guest House
Superb sea views. Conservatory restaurant.
Tel: 028 4272 8770

#### The Slip
Singers/songwriter nights, shore front beer garden.
Tel: 028 4272 8886

#### Fiddlers Green Pub
Regular music sessions and craic. Beer garden.
Tel: 028 4272 8886

#### Dunfans
Tiny pub. Lively chat. Ad hoc music sessions.
Tel: 028 4272 8886

#### The Coach Inn
Regular trad. music.
Tel: 028 4272 8886

#### The Lep Bar
Regular music.
Tel: 028 4272 8886

#### Portaferry Sailing Club
Restaurant and bar open to non-members.
Tel: 028 4272 8886

### Walks

1. **The Squeeze Gut**
   Easy circular walk behind Strangford Village and along the Black causeway. Can be extended to take in Castle Ward Estate.

2. **Castle Ward**
   Wonderful estate grounds with many paths along the shore, woodlands, parkland and fields.

3. **Nugents wood and the forty steps**
   Lovely woodland walk with glimpses of the Lough. Marvelous bluebells in early summer (NT).

4. **Windmill Hill**
   Stunning views across the peninsula towards the Isle of Man, across the Narrows to Lecale and northwards across the drumlins of Strangford.

5. **The Mountain Road**
   Popular circular route along quiet roads taking in shore front, woodland and open country. The coastal stretch offers the option to explore Ballyhenry Island at low tide.

6. **Coastal walks**
   Ballyquintin Point; Killard Point; Knockineelder; Kearney Village. National Nature Reserves, coastal grasslands, profusion of wild flowers in early summer, rocky outcrops, wonderful beaches, pleasant country roads, ancient pilgrimage site of Cooeys Wells.

Maps and information from strangfordlough.org