

# Kinsale, Ireland

## County Cork



Nestled where the River Bandon meets the Atlantic Ocean, Kinsale is one of Ireland's most captivating coastal towns. Just 27 km (16 miles) south of Cork City, this harbor gem punches well above its weight — a population of under 6,000 swells dramatically each summer as visitors arrive for its colorful streets, rich history, and world-class food scene.

Kinsale is the southernmost starting point of the famed Wild Atlantic Way, making it both a destination in its own right and the perfect launchpad for exploring Ireland's stunning southwest coast.

## Where to stay

The White House	Actons Hotel	Perryville Hotel
Historic, Family run, 4 Star Boutique Guesthouse, Bar and Restaurant. Located on Pearse Street in the heart of town it is an amazing place to stay. A traditional breakfast is included and the September 11th Remembrance Hallway and Wall are worth the look.	Boutique hotel established in 1946, blending coastal charm with contemporary comforts. Offering 77 stylish rooms, leisure club, 15 meter pool, and a waterfront bistro it offers the best of old charm and modern amenities.	An elegant Georgian manor overlooking Kinsale Harbor, offering gracious rooms, service and timeless charm. Included breakfast with locally sourced ingredients.

## Things to Do



### Charles Fort

One of the finest examples of a late 17th-century star-shaped fort in Europe, Charles Fort sits dramatically on the water's edge at Summer Cove on Kinsale Harbor.

Built between 1670 and 1682, it was designed to protect Kinsale from naval attack and has been at the

center of some of the most defining moments in Irish history. Declared a National Monument in 1973, it remains remarkably well preserved. Allow at least 90 minutes to explore the fort and take in the sweeping harbor views.

## Ringfinnan Garden of Remembrance



Located just a few minutes outside Kinsale, this peaceful hillside memorial was created after the September 11, 2001 attacks. The garden was established by Kathleen Murphy, a Kinsale native who spent much of her nursing career in New York City and was deeply affected by the loss of the firefighters and first responders.

The most striking feature is its 343 trees, each dedicated to one of the FDNY firefighters who died on 9/11. Attached to each tree is the firefighter's name, and many contain personal mementos left by family members and visitors over the years. The memorial is also dedicated to FDNY chaplain Mychal Judge.

What makes the garden especially memorable is the setting. It sits on a quiet hill overlooking the rolling countryside and Kinsale harbor area. The rows of trees create a simple but powerful landscape that invites reflection rather than sightseeing. Many American visitors describe it as one of the most emotional stops on their Irish trip.

### Old Head Golf Links

Occupying a stunning and unique headland reaching out over two miles into the Atlantic Ocean, the Old Head of Kinsale is home to the most spectacular world-class golf course. The incredible brainchild of the late John O'Connor together with his brother Patrick, the Club has developed into one of the most recognized and sought after golf experiences anywhere on earth. It is a sanctuary for those seeking the finest in personalized service. Inquires for tee times are available on [Old Head Golf Links website.](#)

### Scilly Walk

If you're parking on Pearse Street, (there's a lot opposite the Tourist Information Center, plus some two-hour spots out front), it's just a short walk into town to pick up the trail. The Scilly Walk itself starts near The Spaniard \* (see below) and Man Friday restaurant, both on Lower Road.

From there, follow Lower Road downhill and you'll come out along the water's edge, with Kinsale Harbor opening up in front of you and Charles Fort and James Fort visible across the water. It's an easy, mostly flat walk — about 2.6 miles out-and-back, or 6km if you do the full loop — and there are benches

along the way where you can sit and watch for seals, herons, and the occasional dolphin.

For the full loop, continue on to Charles Fort, then loop back via High Road, which climbs above Scilly and gives you the best elevated views in Kinsale — Give yourself 1 to 1.5 hours if you're taking your time.

## Kinsale's Food and Pub Scene: Ireland's Gourmet Capital

Kinsale has earned its nickname as the "Gourmet Capital of Ireland" honestly. This small harbor town in County Cork has more than 60 restaurants, cafés, and pubs packed into a walkable grid of colorful streets — and the food scene here has been drawing serious attention since the 1970s, when a group of local chefs banded together to found Ireland's first Good Food Circle. That same organization still exists today, and it's part of why Kinsale keeps producing Michelin-recognized kitchens decade after decade.

But what makes Kinsale special isn't just the fine dining — it's that the same town holding Michelin stars also has 330-year-old pubs pulling pints exactly the way they always have. You can eat a tasting menu at lunch and be elbow-to-elbow with a local fisherman by 9pm. That mix is the real draw.

### The Food Scene

Kinsale sits on a natural harbor that's been a working fishing port since medieval times, and seafood is still the backbone of the menu all over town. Oysters, mussels, lobster, and crab show up on nearly every menu, often pulled from the water that same morning.

A few names worth knowing before you go:

- **Fishy Fishy** — Right on the harbor, this is Kinsale's most famous seafood address, run by chef Martin Shanahan, who's built a career (and several cookbooks) around simple, quality-driven fish cookery. Expect a daily-

changing menu based on the catch, plus the more casual Blue Room wine bar attached to it for small plates.

- **Bastion** — Holds a Michelin star, one of two Michelin-recognized kitchens currently in town.
- **Saint Francis Provisions** — A smaller spot that's earned a Michelin Bib Gourmand and real acclaim for its hospitality.
- **The Bulman Bar** — A short walk outside the town center, right on the water, known for a menu that shifts with the day's catch — lobster, oysters, and prawns alongside heartier Irish pub classics. A good stop if you're walking the Scilly Walk toward Charles Fort.
- **Man Friday** — Just outside the town center, known for seafood done well alongside a strong steak menu.

If you're visiting in April, don't miss the **All Ireland Chowder Cook-Off**, an annual event where dozens of Irish chefs bring their best seafood chowder to town for tasting and voting. Chowder itself is something of a local specialty — nearly every pub and restaurant has its own version, and comparing them as you go is a genuinely fun way to eat your way through Kinsale.

For something more low-key, the **Kinsale Farmers' Market** runs Saturdays in the town center, and it's a good stop for local produce, baked goods, and picking up picnic supplies to eat down by the harbor.

## The Pub Scene

Kinsale's pubs range from centuries-old snugs to lively spots built around a match on the telly, and the best way to experience the town is to hit more than one in an evening — a classic Kinsale pub crawl.

**The Grey Hound (Market Square)** is the pub every visitor should see at least once. Its license dates back to 1690, and the building itself is even older, making it one of the oldest bars in Ireland. It's tiny — the floor genuinely slants — with

cozy snugs and open fires that make it feel like stepping backward in time. Grab a Guinness, or as we prefer a pint of Beamish, find a spot by the fire, and don't be surprised if you end up in conversation with the locals next to you. That's the whole point of the place. No the picture isn't crooked. The Grey Hound dates back to 1690. It has settled a bit!



Pint of Beamish

**Oscar Madison's (7 Main Street)** is a different kind of Kinsale pub experience — a family-run, proper local's spot with a sports-bar energy. It's the place for a pint while a match plays on the TV, and it's become a popular stop for wedding parties and groups doing a night out around town. Less about atmosphere-as-destination, more about a good pour and good craic with whoever's next to you at the bar.



Oscar Madison's

**The Spaniard Inn** - Located at the junction of Lower Road and Scilly, sitting high on a hill overlooking Kinsale Harbor the Spaniard is well worth the walk along the Scilly Walk.

Other pubs worth a mention as you build out a crawl: **Kitty O'Sé's** for traditional Irish music sessions that tend to turn into full sing-alongs, and **The Tap Tavern**, run by the same family since 1886, where sitting at the bar practically guarantees a conversation with a local.

## Planning Your Visit

Kinsale's restaurants are genuinely small and genuinely popular — reservations are essential at the Michelin spots and strongly recommended everywhere else, especially in peak summer months. Pubs, on the other hand, are first-come, first-served and best enjoyed by just wandering in.

The good news: with a town this walkable, you can cover several excellent stops — one dinner, two or three pubs — in a single evening without ever needing a car.

## Need to know

Kinsale is very walkable. The town center, marina, and most restaurants are all within easy strolling distance of each other.

Parking can be tight in summer. Arriving early in the day helps. There are paid lots and parking available on streets. Always read the signs.

Kinsale is the kind of place that gets under your skin. Whether you come for the food, the history, the coastline, or simply the craic, you'll leave already planning your return.