



COUNTY WICKLOW
FILM COMMISSION

MICHAEL COLLINS DRIVE The Michael Collins Drive – South Wicklow Film Trail – 45 miles round trip.

The Michael Collins Drive starts in **Wicklow Town** and covers 45 miles while it brings you through a landscape of rolling hills and lush valleys dotted with picturesque villages. The Michael Collins Drive starts in Fitzwilliam Square in **Wicklow Town** and brings you through **Rathnew** and **Glenealy** to **Rathdrum**, the film capital of Ireland. Next on the drive is the now world famous **Avoca**, the living television set for the BBC series **Ballykissangel**. The beautiful lush **Vale of Avoca** brings you down to historic **Woodenbridge** and next to **Arklow**, a seaside resort exuding a warm welcome to visitors looking for entertainment and activities. After the buzz of Arklow the drive returns to the peaceful countryside and rolling hills of **Redcross** and further on to the mile long golden beach of **Brittas Bay**.

Wicklow Town

Wicklow Town is the capital town of County Wicklow and has a population of 9,000. The town, built on the slopes of **Ballyguile Hill**, overlooks a wide bay fringed by a crescent curve of coast. In the town there is an abundance of good restaurants, B&Bs, lively pubs and attractive shops. During the summer most of the towns in County Wicklow are alive with festivals. Wicklow is no exception with its **Regatta Festival** and numerous musical events. All this makes Wicklow the ideal starting point for a holiday or short break. Throughout the County there are plenty of excellent golf courses and equestrian centres for those looking for activities. Highly recommended is also a visit to a hot glass studio where some beautiful Wicklow Glass is created while you watch. You find the **Glassworks Hot Glass Studio** in the Wicklow Enterprise Centre across the bridge. Tel. 0404 62048.

The boy band **Boyzone** used Strand Street, just over the bridge, in the harbour as the setting for one of their pop videos. A visit to **Wicklow's Historic Gaol** should not be missed. A number of actors and displays tell the story of life in the Gaol since 1702, the events during the famous 1798 Rebellion and the subsequent convicts transportations to Australia.

Haunted Wicklow Gaol has been filmed on numerous occasions, one of which was for an episode in the fifth series of **Ballykissangel**. While in Wicklow **Ballykissangel** also filmed on the Main Street, at the end of the old pier and at the old Viking ruins of the **Black Castle** in Wicklow Town. The Black Castle has looked out on the Irish Sea for 800 years. It was built by **Maurice Fitzgerald** and his sons starting in the late 1170s and was finished in about 1780. It was an important castle because it guarded the southern

end of the Pale. It was constantly under attack by local chieftains, the **O'Byrnes** and the **O'Tooles**, who had their land taken from them by the Normans.

In 1988 a number of scenes for the **Pierce Brosnan** film **Taffin** were filmed in Wicklow town. Phil Healy's pub on Fitzwilliam Square and the old station house on the Murrough feature prominently in the film. Taffin tells the story of a debt collector who has to battle with crooked developers who want to build a chemical plant in an Irish village. Many Wicklow people got roles as extras in this average film.

The Michael Collins Drive leaves Wicklow and brings you through the small villages of **Rathnew** and **Glenealy** before coming into **Rathdrum**, pitched high on the western side of the beautiful valley of the **Avonmore River**. Rathdrum with its lively square is a real meeting point and a great starting point to explore the scenic valleys and mountains in its hinterland.

Glenmalure Valley, 8 miles west from Rathdrum, for instance, is the longest glacier valley in the British Isles and is also the historical setting for a number of clashes and battles between the British and rebels like **Fiach McHugh O'Bryne** and **Michael Dwyer**, the 1798 Rebel Leader. More information on local history, accommodation and activities on offer in the area can be obtained from the local tourist office.

There is an abundance of famous pubs with film connections in County Wicklow. In **Rathdrum**, you could go on a cinematic pub-crawl because nearly every single one has been immortalised in film.

Start at the square and work your way around from **The Railway Bar**. The front as you see it now was used as the background for the film **Michael Collins**, in which **Liam Neeson** as Michael Collins addresses a crowd in the square. Next is **Morgan Mackeys**, which has welcomed more film crews on the premises than anyone can remember. This pub was the setting for the filming of **John B. Keane's** book **Durango**, which was shot during Wicklow's heyday of filming, the summer of 1998. The film which stars **Patrick Bergin**, **Matt Keeslar** and **Brenda Fricker**, tells the story of a 40-mile cattle drive in Kerry in the 1930s. Upstairs in the corner room of the **Woolpack** overlooking the square, the steamy love scenes between **Julia Roberts** as Kitty and **Liam Neeson** as Michael Collins were shot. Top Irish actors **Liam Cunningham** and **Orla Brady** starred in the historical drama **A Love Divided**. Again the square with its untouched character and lack of electric wires, which were put underground to facilitate period filming in Rathdrum, features prominently.



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Make sure to check out the recruitment posters for extras for the Michael Collins film in **The Cartoon Inn**. The world famous girl band **The Spice Girls** chose the village of

Rathdrum to shoot the pop video to go with their 1999 hit Stop. The famous five received a very warm Irish welcome from all their fans in Ireland and as soon as the word was out thousands of fans descended upon the town to get a glimpse of the spicy stars.

About 2 km south of Rathdrum (see signposts) is **Avondale House and Forest Park** which was the residence of **Charles Stewart Parnell**, one of the greatest political leaders of modern Irish history. Avondale House is set in an estate of 500 acres of forest and parkland. In 1846 Charles Stewart Parnell was born here. The House is now a museum to his memory and has been restored to its décor of 1850. The tranquil forest park contains miles of woodland paths and an amazing collection of rare trees. The house is open from April to October daily from 11 am – 6 pm. Tel. 0404 46111.

As we follow the Michael Collins Drive further south the views to your right of the Wicklow Mountains are truly breathtaking: images of green fields and rolling hills dotted with small white houses and flanked by the silhouette of the dark mountains will remain with you like a film. The road towards **The Meeting of the Waters** is lined with mature beech, oak and chestnuts that exude an air of untouched tranquillity and provide an inspiration to explore.

A short detour. Just before coming to the Meeting of the Waters you see a turn to the left, that takes you to **The Motte Stone**. The Motte Stone is a huge boulder, also known as an erratic, left sitting on top of a hill by the great ice flow of the last ice age. A number of local legends and stories are connected with the stone. According to one, the stone was hurled from the top of Lugnaquilla Mountain by the legendary Fionn MacCumhaill. At 247 m above sea level the Motte Stone is a fine viewpoint from which the mountains of Wales across the Irish Sea can be seen on a clear day.

The Meeting of the Waters

This meeting point of the **Rivers Avonmore and Avonbeg** was immortalised almost 200 years ago by the famous poet Thomas Moore. Here on a rustic seat, formed from the root of a tree, **Thomas Moore** is said to have immortalised the spot by writing the words of the Irish melody, The Meeting of the Waters.

*“There is not in the wide world a valley so sweet
As that vale in whose bosom the bright waters
meet Sweet Vale of Avoca how calm could I rest
In thy bosom of shade with the friends I love best*

*When the storms that we feel in this cold world
should cease And our heart like the waters be
mingled in peace.”*

The pub overlooking The Meeting is a famous landmark and is renowned for outdoor traditional music and ballad sessions. Open daily all year. Less than a mile downstream of ‘The Meetings’, the river cuts through the centre of one of Ireland’s most extraordinary and forgotten landscapes, the **Avoca Mines**. While following the Michael Collins Drive through the **Vale of Avoca**, you will notice the unmistakable signs of a long and interesting mining tradition. On both sides of the Valley old vegetation are the telltale signs of Avoca’s history. Copper and sulphur have been mined in Avoca since the Bronze Age. The main commercial activity began about 250 years ago, but the 1840s were the boon years with over 000 men employed in the mining industry in this area. The fortune of the people of the valley varied with those of the mines. The most exciting period in the Avoca Valley’s history came in 1796 when a nugget of gold was discovered which sparked a real gold rush. During the 1980s virtually all mining in Avoca ceased and hard times hit the Valley. One of the oldest films filmed on location in County Wicklow is the silent film **Wicklow Gold**, which was partly filmed in Avoca in 1922. In 1966, the filming of **Rocket to the Moon**, inspired by the writing of **Jules Verne**, starring **Troy Donoghue** and **Burl Ives**, came to Avoca. The spoilheaps and remnants of the Avoca Mines as well as the beach and sand dunes of **Brittas Bay** served as the perfect setting for the launching in 1875 of a moon-bound spaceship. The filming of Rocket to the Moon once again proved that Irish locations could substitute for countries as diverse as Germany, England and France.

Avoca

The small village of Avoca, straddled on the **Avonmore River**, is the location for the popular BBC TV series **Ballykissangel**. The village set includes the **Church of St. Mary and Patrick**, built in 1862. The local garda station, the butcher and the main street all feature prominently in the series. For the thirsty traveller **Fitzgerald’s Pub**, otherwise known as the Fountain Bar, is the local watering hole and used to be an absolute must for a chance meeting with the Ballykissangel cast. Avoca is a popular tourist attraction with fans flocking to it from all over the world. Filming in Avoca continued up to the end of the Summer of 2000 but unfortunately the series is now finished. The old courthouse provides an information sheet on the mining walks, tourist information, and houses an IT centre with internet access.

While filming the BBC series Ballykissangel was based in Ardmore Studios in Bray. However numerous locations around the village of Avoca and along this Drive have been used. The dramatic cliffs of Wicklow Head played their part



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in the episode where Ambrose fell off the cliffs. The beautiful golden beaches and dunes of Brittas Bay were also visited frequently by the series. Fans will also

recognise the school and square in Enniskerry and the main street and harbour in Wicklow Town.

Woodenbridge

The **Woodenbridge Hotel** is one of the oldest coaching inns in the County and certainly merits a pit stop. It was here that Michael Collins, the hero of the War of Independence, engaged in secret meetings with senior British army officers in February of 1922. From Woodenbridge you could easily make a small detour to the beautiful village of Aughrim with its attractive granite houses so typical of this area. There is a four-acre artificial lake in Aughrim that provides put-and-take rainbow trout fishing. Visiting anglers are welcome and the lake boasts purpose built facilities for disabled anglers. Make sure to return to the Michael Collins Drive for the next stop, Arklow.

Arklow, as it is today, was established by Viking raiders, who came over to Ireland in the 8th and 9th century, to raid the settlements along the coast and inland. During the 11th century the Normans came through Arklow and during 1396 the English **King Richard II** used Arklow as a base to fight against the Wicklow Irish clans rebelling against the English influence. By 1750 Arklow was becoming a great sea-faring town and for 200 years was known worldwide for its sailors and mariners. While you walk the streets of Arklow you'll find traces of its history no matter where you are, be it the Fisheries, the remains of the old castle, or the nineteen arched bridge dating back to the 17th century. Arklow has its own tourist office where you can pick up a heritage trail description, gather information on activities and enquire on where to eat, drink and stay.

Arklow's Film Past

Some scenes of **Angela's Ashes** were shot in a private house in **Greystones** on Church Road. Director **Alan Parker** and the cast and crew also visited Arklow and in particular St. Mary's Terrace, off the main street. The scene where Malachy McCourt Senior, played by **Robert Carlyle**, tries in vain to obtain financial assistance as thanks for serving his country, were shot in St. Mary's Convent. One of the early film makers in Ireland, **William Power**, used the beach and sand dunes outside Arklow for the desert scenes for the silent movie **Rosaleen Dubh** in 1919. The film tells the story of a Fenian, an Irish Rebel, who joins the Foreign Legion. In Algeria he meets a girl and marries her only to discover that she is in fact the heir to an Irish estate. The film did well at the time but unfortunately no copies have survived. Most of the other scenes for this film were actually shot in Bray.

After the hustle and bustle of Arklow, the Michael Collins drive heads for the quiet hills again towards the tiny village of **Redcross**. Redcross is still as it was 50 years ago, even though the villagers have seen their fair share of film crews stop here, attracted by its untouched character. **Mick Cullen's pub** is world famous for its unique atmosphere and sandy floor and sing-songs. Everybody is welcome but especially those who would like to try their hand at a ballad or two should pay it a visit.

The caravan park offers tennis courts, a par three golf course, a bowling lawn, and a coffee shop. Redcross has been used for films like **Durango** and **A Love Divided**, both of which were also located in Rathdrum and Brittas Bay. The remarkably ineffectual horror **Rawhead Rex** was shot in the Recross area in 1986. It tells the story of a farmer who unwittingly releases a primate demon, which immediately goes on a rampage.

The golden beaches between Wicklow and Arklow have seen more film crews than any other location in Wicklow. Take one look at the beautiful stretch of empty beach and dunes and you will understand why. The sand dunes are a designated area of scientific interest and harbour interesting wildlife species and plants.

This blue flag beach is ideal for sunbathing, walking and swimming. There are some top golf courses such as the **European Golf Club** nearby. From the horse race in **Ballykissangel** to the remake of **The Count of Monte Cristo**, **Brittas Bay Beach** has served as the setting for countless feature films and advertisement scenes. Scenes were shot here for **Kidnapped**, **Moll Flanders** and **Not Afraid Not Afraid** in 2000.

Follow the Michael Collins Drive from Brittas Bay north back towards **Wicklow Town**. The small sheltered coves and beaches between **Brittas Bay** and Wicklow Town have played host to numerous films. **Magheramore Beach** is where the airplane scene for **This is My Father** starring **Aidan Quinn** was filmed. The love scene in **Kirsten Sheridan's Disco Pigs** has been filmed here as well. Silver Strand has been visited by the crew of **The Count of Monte Cristo**, **John Boorman** used some of the dramatic cliffs under Wicklow Head and the lighthouse in 1981 for his Arthurian epic **Excalibur**. **Pierce Brosnan** visited the same site in 1998 for **The Nephew** and some special effects for the film **The Abduction Club**, starring **Liam Cunningham**, **Daniel Lapaine** and **Matthew Rhys** were shot here in 2000.