

County Down (historically “Downe”), Northern Ireland

County Down (Irish: *Contae an Dúin*, meaning “fort”), nicknamed the Mourne County, is one of the six counties of Northern Ireland in the province of Ulster. It covers roughly 2,489 km² (961 sq mi) and had a population of about 553,000 in the 2021 census, making it one of the more populous counties on the island.

Geography and climate

Located in southeastern Northern Ireland, Down borders County Antrim to the north, County Armagh to the west, the Irish Sea to the east, and Carlingford Lough (and County Louth) to the southwest. It features the dramatic granite Mourne Mountains—where “the mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea”—with Slieve Donard (850 m / 2,790 ft) the highest peak in Northern Ireland. Other highlights include Strangford Lough (the largest sea inlet in the British Isles), the Ards Peninsula, and the easternmost point of Ireland at Burr Point. The climate is temperate oceanic: mild winters, cool summers, and regular rainfall moderated by the sea.

History

The area was central to the ancient kingdom of Ulaid. Downpatrick (the county town) has deep links to St Patrick, who is traditionally said to be buried at Down Cathedral. Normans under John de Courcy invaded in 1177; later Scottish and English settlement during the Plantation of Ulster shaped its mixed Protestant and Catholic heritage. It remained part of the United Kingdom after partition in 1921.

Tourist attractions and fun facts

Key draws include the Mourne Mountains for hiking, Strangford Lough for wildlife and ferry trips, Mount Stewart House and Gardens, Castle Ward, Tollymore and Castlewellan Forest Parks, the Royal County Down Golf Club, and the Saint Patrick Centre. Fun facts: it holds both the southernmost point of Northern Ireland (Cranfield Point) and Ireland’s easternmost point; the Brontë family’s roots lie here; and local legend claims Strangford Lough has 365 islands—one for every day of the year.

Business and economy

Agriculture (livestock, potatoes, barley), fishing, tourism, and some manufacturing and services (especially near Belfast) form the backbone. Coastal resorts and outdoor recreation support a strong visitor economy.

Common surnames

Typical County Down surnames include Thompson, Johnston, Patterson, Martin, Wilson, Campbell, Smith, Graham, and Murray. (Note: the query also referenced County Fermanagh, where common surnames include Maguire, McManus, Johnston, Cassidy, Gallagher, and Corrigan.)

County Crest

The arms feature agricultural sheaves, a fish, a ship, flax flowers, and supporters of Irish elk, with the motto *Absque Labore Nihil* (“Nothing without labour”).

Location on a map of Ireland

County Down sits in the southeast of Northern Ireland (highlighted on maps of the island).

Down blends rugged mountains, scenic coastline, rich history, and welcoming communities into one of Ireland's most distinctive counties.

