

Dunluce Castle on the northern coast of County Antrim may have been the original Cair Paravel

Step into **NARNIA**

Discover the magical landscapes of County Antrim and County Down, which together inspired one of the most fantastical worlds in English literature

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1.5 HOURS FROM LONDON



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ILLUSTRATION © MICHAEL HILL

This preternatural land of Narnia, first introduced to the world with the publication in 1950 of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, fired the imaginations of generations of children. What child didn't read CS Lewis's series of seven fantasy novels, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and wish they too could step into a wardrobe and out into another realm – one where talking animals led them on adventures to rid the world of evil, and they were rewarded by being crowned kings and queens? In Narnia, anything could happen and it often did.

Born in Belfast in 1898, Clive Staples Lewis (nicknamed Jack) was an accomplished scholar and writer who rose to become Fellow and Tutor in English Literature at Oxford University before being elected to the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge University, but

Right: The Mourne Mountains from Murlough National Nature Reserve.
Inset, top to bottom: Maurice Harron's lovely sculptures of Aslan and the White Witch in CS Lewis Square, Belfast



it was his early life in Northern Ireland that fuelled his imaginings for his most recognised piece of work.

Lewis spent his first decade in east Belfast, a fact celebrated in the new CS Lewis Square, where seven sculptures by artist Maurice Harron pay homage to the main characters in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, including Aslan – the lion, who represented all that was good – and the White Witch, the embodiment of evil.

A short walk will bring you to Hollywood Arches Library, where another statue, *The Searcher* – this time by artist Ross Wilson – delights literary lovers. Inspired by the character of Digory Kirke in *The Magician's Nephew*, through whose magical wardrobe the Pevensie children enter Narnia, Wilson said he hoped his sculpture would capture the “great ideas of sacrifice, redemption, victory, and freedom for the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve,” that lie at the heart of *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

St Mark's Church, less than a mile away, was Lewis's local church and the place of his baptism on 29 January 1899. Religion was very important to Lewis, who rediscovered his Christian faith while at Oxford University after being a lapsed Protestant for many years. Following his conversion, he went on to write several Christian-themed books and included lots of religious symbolism in his writings. The

What child didn't wish that they too could step into a wardrobe and out into another realm?

church is worth a visit if only to see the stained glass window, designed by Irish artist Michael Healy – a member of the esteemed Tower of Glass studio at the time – which was donated by Lewis and his brother Warren (or Warnie) to honour their parents.

At Queen's University to the south of the city, the entrance to the CS Lewis Reading Room is marked by a replica of the wardrobe door used in the feature film, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, while engraved quotes from the writer adorn the walls and windows, such as this passage from his Christian doctrine *Mere Christianity*: “If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.”

The room also holds a collection of 10 rare unpublished letters written by Lewis to his friend Captain Bernard Acworth, founder of the Evolution Protest Movement.

Unfortunately Little Lea, Lewis's childhood home on Circular Road in Belfast, is privately owned and not open to the public, though some tour guides bring visitors to near its gates where you can peer at the house in which Lewis spent hours writing about an imaginary place he called ‘Animal Land’. Despite its name, the house was actually rather large and occupied a sizeable plot, which was chosen by Lewis's father due to its uninterrupted views of Belfast Lough and the Belfast Hills, including Divas and Black Mountain.

Lewis's early years were happy and, although the family lived in the city, they took regular holidays to the nearby countryside and coast, including the Mourne Mountains, which he would later reference in his work. ▶



The clifftop Mussenden Temple in Binevenagh. Below: Queen's University houses the CS Lewis Reading Room





Carlingford Lough provided CS Lewis with inspiration for Narnia. Below: Head to Rostrevor to join the Narnia Trail

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Although CS Lewis spent much of his life in England, he never forgot his homeland, which inspired Narnia



Following his mother's death when he was aged just nine, Lewis was sent to Wynyard boarding school in Watford, Hertfordshire, where his idyllic childhood came to an end. The school was a dreadful place: Lewis tellingly renamed it Belsen in his semi-autobiographical work, *Surprised by Joy*, but, mercifully, he left the school two years later when it was forced to close due to a lack of students.

Lewis returned to school near Little Lea for a year before enrolling at school in Malvern, Worcestershire. Although he spent much of his life in England, he never forgot his homeland, which provided inspiration for his fictional world. In his essay, *On Stories*, he wrote: "I have seen landscapes, notably in the Mourne Mountains and southwards which under a particular light made me feel that at any moment a giant might raise his head over the next ridge."

Was it these very same giants he envisaged in the fourth Narnia tale *The Silver Chair* (which currently has a film in production) in which the children and Puddleglum escape the clutches of giants as they head across the "wild lands of the North"?

The village of Rostrevor at the foot of the Mourne Mountains also influenced Lewis's fervent imagination. In a letter to Warren he wrote: "That part of Rostrevor which overlooks Carlingford Lough is my idea of Narnia."

At Kilbroney Forest Park in Rostrevor you can join the Narnia Trail, which you enter – of course – through a wardrobe. En route you will meet characters from the

THE PLANNER



GETTING THERE

Belfast has two airports – Belfast City Airport (also known as George Best airport), which has regular flights from the UK and European destinations, and Belfast International Airport (also known as Aldergrove), which caters for long-haul flights. Translink provides bus services from both airports. www.belfastcityairport.com www.belfastairport.com www.translink.co.uk



WHERE TO STAY

The Merchant Hotel in Belfast is located in the popular Cathedral Quarter and offers accommodation in a choice of Art Deco or Victorian rooms. www.themerchanthotel.com



TITANIC QUARTER

Situated alongside the award-winning Titanic Belfast – Europe’s leading visitor attraction – HMS Caroline, the last surviving ship from the Battle of Jutland, opened to visitors in 2016 and allows you to try out

some First World War communication methods, such as signal lanterns, signal flags and Morse code.



GRAND AFFAIR

The stately home of Mount Stewart, tucked away on the shores of Strangford Lough, has undergone a huge facelift over recent years and now boasts beautifully restored rooms, an enviable art collection and one of the top 10 gardens in the world. www.nationaltrust.org.uk/mount-stewart



BOOK A CS LEWIS TOUR

With Authentic Ulster you can choose between a half-day (three hours) tour through some of CS Lewis’s old haunts in Belfast and a day tour, which will visit the 400-year-old Crawfordsburn Inn, where Lewis would meet with literary friends and where he enjoyed a ‘belated honeymoon’ with his wife. For longer visits, tours can also be extended to include locations in County Antrim and County Down. www.authenticulster.co.uk/tours

stories, such as the Tree People, or Dryads – the spirits of Narnian trees. The walk is manageable, but for something more taxing follow the trail to the legendary Cloughmore Stone, a granite boulder 230m above sea level. According to legend, the stone was thrown by giant Finn McCool (of the Giant’s Causeway fame) during a fight with a rival.

It was ancient myths like this, told to Lewis by his Irish nurse, that first sowed the seed of Narnia. The inspiration for Cair Paravel – the castle from where the Kings and Queens of Narnia rule – could have been Dunluce Castle in County Antrim, which Lewis would have known from his childhood trips to Portrush and Ballycastle. It certainly looks the part: when we initially visit it in the first story, Lewis describes it thus: “The castle of Cair Paravel on its little hill towered up above them; before them were the sands, with rocks and little pools of saltwater, and sea weed, and the smell of the sea, and long lines of bluish green waves breaking forever and ever on the beach.”

Near to Dunluce Castle is Binevenagh, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty where you will find the gorgeous beach of Benone as well as the unusual Mussenden Temple. If you’re feeling energetic you can take the mountain walk to the top of the cliff where an artificial lake commands views over Lough Foyle, the Roe Valley, Inishowen and – on a clear day – the west coast of Scotland. We certainly think CS Lewis would approve. **B**

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Mount Stewart on Strangford Lough is one of the world’s top 10 gardens

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