

CASTLES AND CONQUESTS IN 3 DAYS



ROUTE: Counties Cork, Tipperary, Kilkenny, Laois, Offaly, Westmeath, Meath, Louth

OVERVIEW: Power and alliance, intrigue and betrayal: whispers of Ireland's much-storied past seep from the very stone of its castles. From crumbling cliff-top perches to dramatic coastal peaks, feast your eyes on the same sights that once inspired these feats of architectural mastery – and marvel at the legion of lives and legacies within their walls.



DAY 1

ROUTE: County Cork, County Tipperary, County Kilkenny

OVERVIEW: The people of Cork have long been lauded for their Gift of the Gab – but they're happy to share it with anyone who visits the spellbinding **Blarney Castle**. Here, tales of siege, warfare and buried treasure weave their way through the creepy dungeons, secret passages and poison gardens. Kiss the Blarney Stone before you leave and you'll be reeling off these stories for years to come. Next, venture to Tipperary and the ecclesiastical icon that is the **Rock of Cashel**. Said to have been dropped in the heart of the Golden Vale by the devil, the rock's majesty comes to light within the Gothic cathedral, round tower and 15th century castle that still stand today. It was here that lightning struck, men were massacred and St Patrick converted the King of Munster to Christianity – accidentally stabbing him with a crozier in the process.



On to one of Ireland's best-loved attractions – **Kilkenny Castle** is the pride of the **Medieval Mile** and an ode to the glory days of epic architecture. Occupied by the same family for over 500 years, the restored castle boasts an art gallery and 21 hectares of parkland. Wind down at **Ristorante Rinuccini**, opposite the castle, where a dash of Italian style perfects a menu sourced from the best local ingredients.

IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME: Rothe House and Gardens' status as Ireland's only 17th-century merchant townhouse adds to its authenticity as a charming museum in the centre of Kilkenny.

SUGGESTED EXPERIENCES:
BLARNEY CASTLE: www.blarneycastle.ie
ROCK OF CASHEL: www.heritageireland.ie
KILKENNY CASTLE: www.kilkennycastle.ie
ROTHER HOUSE: www.rothehouse.com

DAY 2



ROUTE: County Laois, County Offaly, County Westmeath

OVERVIEW: Christian settlement, Viking target, regal wedding gift: the **Rock of Dunamase** has worn many hats in its centuries-long history. Legend aside – the site is said to sit above ancient buried treasure, guarded by a fearsome hellhound – it is the castle ruins atop this rocky Laois outcrop that lend the most romance to the tale, though. Presented to Norman lord Strongbow upon his marriage to Aoife, daughter of the King of Leinster, the castle fell to ruin within 200 years.

An hour's drive east, afternoon is the best time to appreciate the breathtaking gardens at **Birr Castle** – and to marvel at this unlikely hub of Irish scientific innovation. From providing the town with electricity via the river, building the so-called monstrous Leviathan telescope – once the largest in existence – and creating one of the world's first darkrooms, the inspiration in these grounds is infectious. A feast in the castle's Courtyard Café will set you up for the last leg of today's touring: **Athlone Castle**. Built as a defence on the River Shannon in the 12th century, the Visitor Centre's 360° cinematic experience of the Siege of Athlone allows you to engage with the history, hardship and vicious reality of medieval life.

IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME: While in Westmeath, save some time for **Tullynally Castle**. The historic site retains its splendour and attraction to visitors in the guise of the Victorian Experience house tour. And that's not to mention the enchanting gardens.

SUGGESTED EXPERIENCES: **BIRR CASTLE:** www.birrcastle.com
ATHLONE CASTLE: www.athlonecastle.ie
TULLYNALLY CASTLE: www.tullynallycastle.ie

DAY 3



ROUTE: County Meath, County Louth

OVERVIEW: Three storeys tall, complete with moat, towers and curtain wall, **Trim Castle** is the quintessential storybook pile. It's Ireland's largest Anglo-Norman castle and once used its sweeping view of the River Boyne to cast a watchful eye over Meath. Since then, the castle's massive, 20-cornered cruciform structure has featured in the Hollywood blockbuster *Braveheart*, and now welcomes visitors curious about its lime kilns, barbican and mint. Stay on your time travel theme at the Drogheda **Millmount Museum and Martello Tower** and you can sweep a 19th century kitchen with an antique "besom" twig broom, test how you would have fared as a worker in a shoe factory, or even examine some ancient bog butter. The most recognisable silhouette of Drogheda's Cultural Quarter, you'd never guess the tower came under fire from shells during the Civil War.

Your final stop is County Louth's **Carlingford Heritage Centre**. Bathed in the dappled light of the beautiful stained-glass windows are maps, photos and a wall mural depicting Carlingford's past. A walking tour from a local guide is priceless, as the town's life spreads like a tapestry through history, blossoming from its 9th century Viking occupation to a thriving community enriched by the stories of **King John's Castle**.

IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME: Take a tour of the **Battle of the Boyne Visitor Centre** and literally tread the path of the most famous battle in Irish history.

SUGGESTED EXPERIENCES: **TRIM CASTLE:** www.heritageireland.ie
MILLMOUNT MUSEUM & MARTELO TOWER: www.millmount.net
CARLINGFORD HERITAGE CENTRE: www.carlingfordheritagecentre.com
BATTLE OF THE BOYNE VISITOR CENTRE: www.battleoftheboyne.ie

PLEASE NOTE: A list of "Storytellers – Ways to engage with the Stories" are available on request.

This itinerary is just one of the many ways you can explore Ireland's Ancient East and should be used as a guide only.