

# VIKING IRELAND IN 5 DAYS



**ROUTE:** Counties Limerick, Tipperary, Waterford, Wexford, Wicklow, Laois, Offaly, Meath, Louth

**OVERVIEW:** A spell spent meandering through Ireland's Viking history is one devoted to tales of battles, betrothals and bitter rivalries. Castles, treasures and charters alike will bewitch you as you see first-hand the craftsmanship these warriors brought to our shores, as well as the imprint they left across the land.



## DAY 1

**ROUTE:** County Limerick, County Tipperary, County Waterford

**OVERVIEW:** Where better to begin your journey than at Lough Gur, where a horde of Viking treasures awaits. Iron knives, jet bracelets, spindle whorls and a store of Danish silver reward the visitor at the Heritage Centre beside this tranquil lake, along with the silent stone forts of **Carraig Aille**. From here, it's a leisurely drive to Tipperary and the stunningly scenic **Glen of Aherlow**.

The peaks of the Galtee Mountains and softly wooded Slievenamuck envelop you as you pass through this timeless valley, unchanged since the Vikings tramped through it so many centuries ago... Well known for its wonderful walks, follow one of the eight looped walking trails through the glen. Afterwards, treat yourself to Afternoon Tea by the fire at **Aherlow House**. A short distance away looms the imposing Rock of Cashel, seat of Brian Boru, King of Munster and the man who would eventually defeat the Vikings in the Battle of Clontarf.



The historic walled town of **Fethard** is the perfect pit stop for an enlightening walking tour, complete with ancient stone gateway (and explicit carved Sheela-na-Gigs). At the mouth of the River Colligan in **Dungarvan**, rumours of Viking footprints still whisper through the town. The Waterford County Museum faithfully preserves these tales over a millennium of history.

**IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME:**

Call in to the **Old Market House Arts Centre** in Dungarvan, where local art is displayed against the beautiful backdrop of the building's 17th century walls. Or visit **Cahir Castle**, which looks like it grows out of a rocky outcrop by the River Suir. One of Ireland's largest castles, it has witnessed bloody sieges, brutal bombardments and cousinly killings since 1142.

**SUGGESTED EXPERIENCES:**

**LOUGH GUR:** [www.loughgur.com](http://www.loughgur.com)  
**ROCK OF CASHEL:** [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)  
**WATERFORD COUNTY MUSEUM:** [www.waterfordmuseum.ie](http://www.waterfordmuseum.ie)  
**CAHIR CASTLE:** [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)  
**GLEN OF AHERLOW:** [www.aherlow.com](http://www.aherlow.com)

## DAY 2

**ROUTE:** Waterford City

**OVERVIEW:** Reputed to be Ireland's oldest city – with a Christian parish that predates even St Patrick – **Waterford** is certainly richly decked in Viking tales, architecture, finery and folklore. Even its name, from the Norse meaning “ram fjord”, holds fast to the city's pedigree. Make sure to grab a delicious blaa from the Granary Café to fuel your exploration.

Within the **Medieval Museum** – one of a trio of Museums called **Waterford Treasures** – you'll find the exquisitely embroidered Cloth of Gold Vestments. Harking back to a rancorous dispute between Waterford and rival port New Ross in 1372 is the Great Charter Roll, created to prove Waterford's supremacy to the King. Mere metres away is one of the city's most imposing sights – **Reginald's Tower** remains the oldest urban civic structure in Ireland, and is where you will find the intricate Waterford Kite Brooch, one of the finest surviving examples of Viking jewellery. Soaring above the waterfront, the building has been in continuous use for over 800 years. Nearby, the last of the three is the elegant **Bishop's Palace** with its equally refined artefacts, including the oldest piece of Waterford Crystal in existence. Walk to Christ Church Cathedral next. It was here, in the aftermath of a bloody war 900 years ago, that the Irish princess Aoife Rua married Norman lord, Strongbow, cementing one of the most important – and divisive – strategic marriages in Ireland's history.

**IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME:**

It's best to keep away from the 1,300-degree furnace, but watching the glass being blown at the **House of Waterford Crystal** is an experience you'll definitely remember. Take the factory tour and finish with a coffee in the Crystal Café.

**SUGGESTED EXPERIENCES:**

**WATERFORD TREASURES (MEDIÉVAL MUSEUM, REGINALD'S TOWER, BISHOP'S PALACE):** [www.waterfordtreasures.com](http://www.waterfordtreasures.com)  
**CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL:** [www.christchurchwaterford.com](http://www.christchurchwaterford.com)  
**HOUSE OF WATERFORD CRYSTAL:** [www.waterfordvisitorcentre.com](http://www.waterfordvisitorcentre.com)



## DAY 3

**ROUTE:** County Wexford, County Wicklow

**OVERVIEW:** Begin your day at the Irish National Heritage Park in Ferrycarrig, County Wexford, which is a magnificently reconstructed Viking settlement, complete with circular crannóg, boathouses and wattle-walled living quarters. You can even spend the night here living like a Viking! Another town with deep Viking roots beckons next: **Wexford**. Set at the mouth of the River Slaney, Vikings first landed here in 819AD, going on to establish a settlement they named Veisafjörðr (“inlet of the mud flats”). Today, Norse and Norman influences combine in a town that has retained its compact, medieval feel. The pretty town also makes a great stop for lunch at the Greenacres Bistro, which also houses a spacious art gallery with contemporary Irish art and sculpture.

From here, travel north via **Ferns**. Once the Celtic capital of the kingdom of Leinster and with ties to Aoife Rua, the town was twice raided and burned by the Vikings. Next up, **Glendalough** in Wicklow. At the heart of Europe’s monastic history, the very wind here carries a sacred air. Nestled in the purple-flushed mountains of **Wicklow National Park**, the splendour that remains of this 6th century monastic city is breathtaking. Churches, round tower and oratory stand firm, despite the day Glendalough’s silence was pierced by merciless Viking attack in 835AD.

**IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME:** The 11km hike from **Glendalough Visitor Centre** to the summit of the Spinc is the ideal way to pay homage to the ascetic spirit of the monks who once withdrew here. If you make it to the top, the view of the two lakes is worth the effort.

**SUGGESTED EXPERIENCES:** **IRISH NATIONAL HERITAGE PARK:** [www.inhp.com](http://www.inhp.com)  
**GLEN DALOUGH:** [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)



## DAY 4

**ROUTE:** County Laois, County Offaly, County Meath

**OVERVIEW:** Strongbow rears his head again on the fourth day of your trip, in the shadow of the **Rock of Dunamase**. A behemoth rising from the Laois landscape, the rock (said to have been dropped there by the devil himself) and the crumbling castle at the top were gifted to Strongbow upon his marriage to Aoife Rua. This was long after the site’s original Christian settlement had been pillaged – and the abbot murdered – by the Vikings during the 9th century.



On the banks of the River Shannon, **Clonmacnoise** sits silently, as though still recovering from the seven brutal attacks it suffered at the hands of the Vikings. Once a 2,000-strong monastery, today the site boasts intricately carved stone crosses, two round towers and an ornate cathedral. Take a moment to share a secret at the Whispering Arch: it's said only the two who stand secreted in this Gothic doorway can hear each other's words.

Finish out your day with a meal at the **Vanilla Pod** in the peaceful town of **Kells**, a name synonymous with one of Ireland's most beloved artefacts – and who would have thought we owe it to the Vikings? The Book of Kells made its way to County Meath on the wings of terror, as desperate monks fled Viking raids on the island of Iona in the 9th century. Once sheltered in Ireland, the book was completed within the safety of Kells monastery, hailed as the "Splendour of Ireland". And don't forget to visit **Kells High Crosses**, richly carved with biblical scenes.

**IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME:**

Visit the **Hill of Tara** – a place with a 5,000-year history, seat of Ireland's High Kings and capital of the mythical god-like race of Tuatha Dé Danann.

**SUGGESTED EXPERIENCES:**

**CLONMACNOISE:** [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)

**KELLS HIGH CROSS:** [www.visitingkells.ie](http://www.visitingkells.ie)

**HILL OF TARA:** [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)

## DAY 5

**ROUTE:** County Louth

**OVERVIEW:**

You can breathe a sigh of relief at the calm that awaits along the **Cooley Peninsula**, on the shores of gently lapping Carlingford Lough. An ideal strategic location for the Vikings – the River Newry enabled them to hop in their longboats and pillage as far inland as Armagh city – all that remains of these fearsome visitors today is the name of the charming medieval town where your tour comes to a close: **Carlingford**.

With Carlingford Lough rippling at the foot of **King John's Castle**, it's hard to imagine why the Vikings named this place the "bay of the hag" when they set up camp here in the 9th century. The castle itself has survived many a drama throughout the years, from visits by wicked royalty to Jacobite attack and transformation to a pre-Battle of the Boyne hospital. Take a minute to admire the view of the hulking Slieve Foy Mountain as you dangle your feet in the shallows of the lough – after all, folklore has it that the giant Fionn MacCumhaill has been bathing his here for millennia.

**IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME:**

Take to the water for some high-speed thrills with **Louth Adventures**.

**SUGGESTED EXPERIENCES:**

**COOLEY PENINSULA:** [www.carlingfordandcooleypeninsula.ie](http://www.carlingfordandcooleypeninsula.ie)

**LOUTH ADVENTURES:** [www.louthadventures.ie](http://www.louthadventures.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.

