

# BIG HOUSES AND HARDSHIP IN 5 DAYS



**ROUTE:** Counties Laois, Tipperary, Cork, Waterford, Wexford, Wicklow, Carlow, Kildare, Westmeath, Louth, Monaghan

**OVERVIEW:** Some found hope in hardship, some led lives of ease – but all the figures you'll meet on this captivating trail had unique ties to Ireland's land and great estates. Discover elegance, nature and dramatic tales as you stroll the iconic gardens of Ireland's magnificent country houses. And unearth the tragic tales and incredible endurance as you tread in the tracks of Ireland's Famine lives. Be bold and be awed by history's abiding presence on this vital journey through Ireland's iconic past.



## DAY 1

**ROUTE:** County Laois, County Tipperary, County Cork

**OVERVIEW:** Farmers abandoned their fields, families took to the sea – and others were compelled to work wherever they could find it. Pay tribute to these tales of toil and tragedy at the **Donaghmore Famine Workhouse Museum**. Dark and desperate days were spent in this workhouse, founded in 1853, but today the guided tours and vivid displays of Irish rural life provide an indispensable memorial to times gone by.



Next, make your way through scenic countryside to the **Swiss Cottage** in Cahir. This traditionally thatched but ornate retreat was built in the early 1800s by renowned architect John Nash. Pay a visit, then enjoy the enchanting surroundings as you take the **Coronation Walk** to Cahir. No doubt you'll be ready for lunch after this riverbank stroll. Drop by the **Lazy Bean Café**, where you'll enjoy homemade treats and friendly service before heading to **Fota House** in Carrigtwohill, County Cork. Richard Morrison, who was later knighted for his works, was commissioned to remodel this stately mansion in the early 19th century. Its refined architecture and elegant interior design testify to his talents. Take a guided house tour and then be sure to explore the arboretum, not to mention Fota's acclaimed wildlife park.

**IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME:**

Stop off at **Mitchelstown Caves**, and enter a world without sun, without time, a world where humans almost feel like intruders and where nature reigns supreme.

**SUGGESTED EXPERIENCES:**

**DONAGHMORE WORKHOUSE & FAMINE MUSEUM:** [www.donaghmoremuseum.com](http://www.donaghmoremuseum.com)

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

**FOTA HOUSE:** [www.fotahouse.com](http://www.fotahouse.com)

## DAY 2

**ROUTE:** County Waterford, County Wexford

**OVERVIEW:**

From Fota head along the coast to where, with Norman blood and noble airs, the family de la Poer settled in the mid-12th century. The spectacular **Curraghmore House and Gardens** is among the four magnificent castle sites they left behind. Enter the courtyard here to see the original structure elegantly embedded within the Victorian architecture. Book ahead for a guided tour, where you'll discover quirky treasures like The Shell House, constructed from the seashell collection of a resident Countess in 1754.

Heading east, board the ferry at Passage East and cross the River Suir to Ballyhack. Stop off at Kevin Dundon's award-winning **Dunbrody House** for refreshments braving yourself for a trip to **Loftus Hall**, reputed to be Ireland's most haunted mansion. Shake off those creepy tingles when you stretch your legs at the scenic site of **Tintern Abbey**. These remarkable remains of a bygone age date back to 1203, when Norman leader William Marshall founded the monastery in thanksgiving after surviving a stormy sea passage to Ireland. Finish your trip in the historic port town of New Ross, founded in the Dark Ages but garnering its first fame as a Norman stronghold in the 13th century.

**IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME:**

Explore some of Waterford city's most significant artefacts and historic tales at **Bishop's Palace**, a Georgian mansion and museum.

**SUGGESTED EXPERIENCES:**

**CURRAGHMORE HOUSE AND GARDENS:** [www.curraghmorehouse.ie](http://www.curraghmorehouse.ie)

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

**LOFTUS HALL:** [www.loftushall.ie](http://www.loftushall.ie)

**BISHOP'S PALACE:** [www.waterfordtreasures.com](http://www.waterfordtreasures.com)



## DAY 3

**ROUTE:** County Wexford, County Carlow

**OVERVIEW:** In New Ross, you can walk on board the **Dunbrody Famine Ship**. Don't worry about your voyage, though – this vivid memorial is anchored safely in its place so as to pay tribute to tales of desperation and endurance from the local area in the Great Famine. Continue next to County Carlow, where you'll catch some breathtaking views of the Barrow Valley and Blackstairs Mountains at **Borris House**. Rebuilt in the early 18th century, this beautiful country house is called home by the MacMorrough Kavanaghs, former High Kings of Leinster. Dermot MacMurrough may have gotten more than he bargained for when he invited the Normans to Ireland in 1167, but today his legacy lives on in the splendid form of this enchanting mansion and its grounds.



Another of Ireland's hidden gems can be found a short drive away – **Altamont Gardens** blend an old-world atmosphere with horticultural expertise, producing a wonderland of scenic walks for visitors to enjoy. Top your stroll with a leisurely snack at the Walled Garden Café next door, before you drive to the magnificent **Wells House and Gardens** in Wexford. The delightful Victorian Tour here traces the life and character of the house. Enjoy the delicate watercolours exhibited around the manor, then roam the surrounding woodland trails that inspired the painter Lady Frances, who once owned the estate.

**IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME:** Swap parkland for sea breezes along **Curracloe Beach** in County Wexford. It was here on the shores of the Irish Sea that the opening scenes of World War II epic *Saving Private Ryan* were filmed – as well as box-office hit, *Brooklyn*. Or for a tale as old as time, visit the fairytale **Huntington Castle and Gardens**, a Carlow landmark since 1625.

**SUGGESTED EXPERIENCES:** **BORRIS HOUSE:** [www.borrishouse.com](http://www.borrishouse.com)  
**ALTAMONT GARDENS:** [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)  
**WELLS HOUSE:** [www.wellshouse.ie](http://www.wellshouse.ie)  
**HUNTINGTON CASTLE & GARDENS:** [www.huntingtoncastle.com](http://www.huntingtoncastle.com)  
**DUNBRODY FAMINE SHIP:** [www.dunbrody.com](http://www.dunbrody.com)

## DAY 4

**ROUTE:** County Wicklow, County Kildare, County Westmeath

**OVERVIEW:** Days were dark and the nights unnerving in **Wicklow Gaol**. Built in 1702, it was locally known as "the Gates of Hell", and thousands of prisoners were held within its walls during the Great Famine, the 1798 Rebellion and the War of Independence. Today, you can explore the chilling tales and ominous dungeon corridors of this historic site in the company of a troupe of local actors – while more daring visitors can book ahead for the paranormal tour. Lose your spooks and take your time when you reach the spectacular **Powerscourt House and Gardens**.



The beautifully maintained gardens here were built by renowned architect Daniel Robertson in the 1840s, and today retain their astonishing charm and stunning views. Dine on the terrace at the **Avoca Café**, browse the craft shops, and then make your way north to the paragon of Palladian elegance that is **Castletown House**. This Kildare landmark was constructed for William Conolly, reputed to be the wealthiest man in Ireland at the time of his death in 1729 – it was said Conolly would require 240 horses to bring his half-year's rent from Dublin to Castletown. Discover the dramatic story of his life and era on the guided tour. More intriguing characters await at **Belvedere House** in County Westmeath. Robert Rochfort may have had a bad habit of locking up his loved ones, but one thing that can be said for him is that he knew how to live in style. Finish your day by discovering all about him and his Jealous Wall at this lovely 18th century house.

**IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME:**

Take the scenic route and pay a visit to the longest house in Ireland on the **Russborough Estate**, a stone's throw away from Blessington Lakes.

**SUGGESTED EXPERIENCES:**

**WICKLOW GAOL:** [www.wicklowshistoricgaol.com](http://www.wicklowshistoricgaol.com)  
**POWERSCOURT HOUSE & GARDENS:** [www.powerscourt.com](http://www.powerscourt.com)  
**CASTLETOWN HOUSE:** [www.castletown.ie](http://www.castletown.ie)  
**BELVEDERE HOUSE & GARDENS:** [www.belvedere-house.ie](http://www.belvedere-house.ie)  
**RUSSBOROUGH HOUSE:** [www.russboroughhouse.ie](http://www.russboroughhouse.ie)

## DAY 5

**ROUTE:** County Louth, County Monaghan

**OVERVIEW:**

At the heart of the Boyne Valley's luxuriant green countryside, **Beaulieu House and Garden** stand as a beautifully preserved icon of another age. Built in the 17th century and finished in the rare Artisan Mannerist style, this stunning house has seen 11 generations of the Tichborne family live under its roof. After touring the house, be sure to explore the superlative grounds and gardens, which host a variety of seasonal activities every year.

Next, it's **Carrickmacross Workhouse** in County Monaghan. Erected in the 1840s and later the site of a much-needed fever hospital, this historic building now stands as a versatile heritage centre, managed by local volunteers. Don't forget to bring your ancestral queries with you on your visit to see if you can unearth the roots of your family tree at its genealogical centre. Finish your trip with a delicious dining experience in the **Grain Store** restaurant in Dundalk. This atmospheric venue is, in fact, the converted banquet hall of Darver Castle, which dates to the 14th century.

**IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME:**

Stop for a break in **Ardee**, County Louth, which boasts a number of remarkable historic sites, including Hatch's Castle, the largest fortified town house in Ireland.

**SUGGESTED EXPERIENCES:**

**BEAULIEU HOUSE AND GARDEN:** [www.beaulieuhouse.ie](http://www.beaulieuhouse.ie)  
**CARRICKMACROSS WORKHOUSE:** [www.carrickmacrossworkhouse.com](http://www.carrickmacrossworkhouse.com)

**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.

