



# Ancient Ireland

Produced by Lonely Planet for  Tourism Ireland



Glendalough, County Wicklow

# Ancient Ireland

Time travel through middle Ireland's collection of ancient tombs, Celtic sites and monastic cities, and cover 3000 years in four days. This trip transports you from the Neolithic era to the last days of the first millennium.

**1 Brú na Bóinne**  
Ireland's most important Neolithic monument.

**2 Hill of Slane**  
A thick slice of Celto-Christian mythology.

**3 Hill of Tara**  
Sacred stretch of turf and dwelling place of the gods.

**4 Loughcrew Cairns**  
A 'forgotten' Neolithic passage grave.

**5 Tulsk**  
Europe's most important Celtic royal site.

**6 Clonmacnoise**  
Spectacular monastic site on the banks of the Shannon.

**7 Cashel**  
Wonderful monastic city crowning a large hill.

**8 Jerpoint Abbey**  
Magnificent church ruins in a splendid setting.

**9 Glendalough**  
Ancient ruins nestled in a forest-covered valley.



## Trip at a Glance

Duration

**4 Days**

529km/329 miles

Best Time to Go

**Apr–Sep**

For long days and the best weather.

Essential Photo

**Cashel**

The Rock of Cashel from the ruins of Hore Abbey.

Best for Culture

**Brú Na Bóinne**

The passage graves at Brú Na Bóinne.



Newgrange, County Meath

#### Trip Highlight

### 1 Brú na Bóinne

A thousand years older than Stonehenge, the vast Neolithic necropolis known as Brú na Bóinne (the Boyne Palace) is one of the most extraordinary sites in Europe. The area consists of many different sites; the three principal ones are Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth. The first two are open to visitors as part of an organised tour departing from the Brú na Bóinne Visitor Centre.

### 2 Hill of Slane

The Hill of Slane stands out for its association with a thick slice of Celto-Christian mythology.

According to legend, St Patrick lit a paschal (Easter) fire here in 433 to proclaim Christianity throughout the land. It was also here that Patrick supposedly plucked a shamrock from the ground, using its three leaves to explain the paradox of the Holy Trinity – the union of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

### 3 Hill of Tara

The Hill of Tara has occupied a special place in Irish legend and folklore for millennia. It was the home of the mystical druids, the priest-rulers of ancient Ireland, who practised their particular form of Celtic paganism under the watchful gaze of the all-powerful goddess

Maeve (Medbh). Although little remains other than humps and mounds of earth, it's an evocative, moving place – especially on a warm summer's evening.

### 4 Loughcrew Cairns

There are 30-odd tombs here but few people visit, which means you can enjoy this evocative place in peace. Like Brú na Bóinne, the graves were all built around 3000 BC, but unlike their better-known and better-excavated peers, the Loughcrew tombs were used at least until 750 BC. Some look like large piles of stones, while others are less obvious, their cairn having been removed.



### A Day in Dublin

It's most likely that your visit will begin and end in Dublin. Ireland's largest city has all the credentials of a capital: superb restaurants, world-class museums and some of the best entertainment in the country. Culture buffs should take a stroll through the archaeology and history branch of the National Museum of Ireland – don't miss the Treasury's golden hoard of artefacts from the Bronze and Iron Ages.



 Roscommon Castle

## 5 Tulsk

Anyone with an interest in Celtic mythology will be enthralled by the area around the village of Tulsk in County Roscommon, which contains 60 ancient national monuments including standing stones, barrows, cairns and fortresses. It is the most important Celtic royal site in Europe.

According to the legend of Táin Bó Cúailnge (Cattle Raid of Cooley), Queen Maeve (Medbh) had her palace at Cruachan. The Oweynagat Cave (Cave of the Cats), believed to be the entrance to the Celtic otherworld, is also nearby.

### Trip Highlight

## 6 Clonmacnoise

One of Europe's most important centres of study between the 7th and 12th centuries, Clonmacnoise is one of the main reasons Ireland got the moniker of 'land of saints and scholars.' Founded in 548 by St Ciarán, the monastery (whose name in Irish is Cluain Mhic Nóis, which means 'Meadow of the Sons of Nóis') became a bustling city and is in remarkably good condition: enclosed within a walled field above a bend in the River Shannon is a superb collection of early churches, high

## A Night in Birr

Feel-good Birr is one of the most attractive towns in the Midlands, with elegant pastel Georgian buildings, a magnificent old castle, an excellent choice of accommodation and spirited nightlife that includes great live music. Despite its appeal, Birr remains off the beaten track, so you can enjoy its delights without jostling the crowds.



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Rock of Cashel, County Tipperary

crosses, round towers and graves, including those of the high kings of Ireland.

#### Trip Highlight

### 7 Cashel

The Rock of Cashel is one of Ireland's most important archaeological sites and one of the most evocative of all ancient monuments. It has been an important Celtic power base since the 4th century. Most of what you see today dates from when it was gifted to the Church in 1101. Over the next 400 years, various bishops ordered the construction of the 13th-century cathedral, a wonderfully complete round tower, the finest Romanesque chapel in the country (1127) and the sturdy walls that surround it all.

### 8 Jerpoint Abbey

One of Ireland's finest Cistercian ruins, Jerpoint Abbey near Thomastown was established in the 12th century and has been partially restored. The tower and cloister are from the late 14th or early 15th century. The 45-minute tours are worthwhile, as the guides flesh out the abbey's fascinating history.

### 9 Glendalough

Of all Ireland's monastic cities, none has the secluded beauty and isolated majesty of Glendalough. The impressive ruins are more than rivalled by their setting: two dark glacial lakes at the foot of a forested valley. It remains, despite its immense popularity with visitors,

a profoundly peaceful and spiritual place. The solitude-seeking St Kevin came here to live in a Bronze Age tomb on the south side of the Upper Lake in 498, but most of what you see dates from the 9th century onwards, when Kevin's settlement rivalled Clonmacnoise as one of Ireland's premier universities. Huddled around the eastern end are Glendalough's most fascinating buildings, including a roofless cathedral, a couple of churches, a gatehouse and a round tower.



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