



## Ireland Tours – The Hidden Heartlands

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*Many visitors to Ireland arrive in Dublin and head to the coast but this strategy misses the hidden heartlands where there is so much to see! On this unique and intimate excursion, group size is limited to a maximum of 16 persons. We explore the Irish Midlands, also known as the Hidden Heartlands. Our tour starts with a driving tour of Dublin before settling into our home base near Mullingar for a few days. We'll need to change hotels later when we head west to the coast, but for now we enjoy a few days without all the packing and unpacking.*

*This tour is a perfect option for those wishing to extend their stay in Ireland.*

### Day 1 – Dublin and the sacred center of Ireland

**Uisneach is the mythological and sacred centre of Ireland** and is said to be the home of the sovereignty goddess, Ériu, after whom Ireland is named. Ériu, according to legend, rests under the Catstone. It is at the Catstone, or Aill na Mireann, where the five provinces of Ireland meet. Uisneach is also linked with the Sun God, Lugh. It is said that Lugh, who gave rise to harvest celebration Lunasa, was drowned in a lake on the Hill and rests beneath an adjoining tumulus. According to one theory, the God Lugh, with his 'long arm trailing behind him' and his face too bright to look at, was a comet. Every year during the first week of May, the Bealtaine fires are lit atop the hill and when seen, people on the surrounding hillsides also light bonfires as it has been done since ancient times. Bealtaine celebrates the beginning of the summer season. This is a private tour for your group and is always a special experience. After the tour, we stop at the Visitor Centre for a cup of tea and a chat.



After exploring the mythology and archaeology of Uisneach, you are transported to a welcome dinner at [Weirs award winning Bar and Restaurant](#) in the charming little village of Multyfarnham. Here, we share tales, yarns, truths and your Guide is available to answer the many questions provoked by today's activities.

Weirs Bar & Restaurant, Multyfarnham, in County Westmeath is a charming old world, family run pub that serves some of the best food and drink in Ireland in a relaxed, family friendly atmosphere. All their food is home made on the premises, from their soups and sauces right through to their delicious desserts. They also have available specialty coffees and a full range of liqueurs.

After your Angus beef steaks, the night warms up with a little lesson in Úisce Beatha, better known as whiskey - single malt, blended, aged, Irish and Scottish. You will sample the delights and may quickly come to recognize what you like and want out of any whiskey. Ferried back to your accommodation, your first night's sleep beckons.

## **Day 2 – Athlone and The Seven Wonders**

After a good night's rest and a hearty breakfast, we hop on our transport for a short, 40-minute drive to Athlone. Situated on the mighty River Shannon, Athlone serves as the gateway between Ireland's Ancient East and the West.

Our first stop will be Athlone Castle. Experience a magnificent journey through history at the Athlone Castle Visitor Centre. Climb the steps to the Castle Keep and enjoy the views across the majestic River Shannon or climb higher still to the Castle battlements and look across the town's rooftops. Take a step back in history through playful interactive exhibits, touch screen animations and an immersive 360-degree cinematic experience that brings the Great Siege of Athlone to life.

Swords, cannon balls and stunning sculptures gives these ancient stories great depth. Vibrant displays with historic artifacts will lead you along a 3D timeline that illustrates Athlone's last 200 years. Enjoy the wonderful voice of John Count McCormack in a display dedicated to the memory of the world-famous Athlone tenor. Rain or shine, this is a Castle with a story to tell.

Afterwards we pause for lunch before heading over to Ireland's oldest bar, [Seáns Bar Athlone](#). When you walk into Sean's Bar, you are in the oldest pub in Europe, never mind Ireland! You join the uncountable number of visitors who have been stopping here for a drink, a chat and maybe a bit of music for more than a thousand years and they have the distinctions to support it.

After exploring Athlone, we head to Kilbeggan where we take a distillery tour and see the oldest, still operating single pot still in Ireland.



Before heading back to our hotel in Mullingar we stop at the heritage village of Fore Co. Westmeath. **Fore Village** is off the beaten track but is wedged with rewards for the people who visit her; from the Stories of the Seven Wonders of Fore to the ancient Benedictine Monastery that will have you walking through its cloisters in the footsteps of the original French speaking monks. French Monks in Westmeath, you ask? Come and walk in their wake and all questions will be answered such as why some locals hadn't much time for the Benedictines, who was St. Feichin of Fore, what's an anchorite in a cell and what are The Seven Wonders of Fore.



### Day 3 – The Witches Hops and Boyne Valley

On our first day, we stopped at The Hill of Uisneach and learned about the many solar alignments with Uisneach at the center. Venturing from Uisneach, we head to three ridges known as the "Witches Hops" where we find the Loughcrew Cairns. (Seasonal) We walk to the central summit to explore Cairn T, the largest of the passage tombs. As seen from Uisneach, Cairn T will align with the midsummer sunrise.

If we were to extend the same radial line from Uisneach another 65 kilometers, we would be in line with Slieve Gullion in County Armagh which connects sacred Uisneach with both Leinster and Ulster.

The midwinter sunset also aligns, reversed back through Uisneach completing the 180-degree cycle from midsummer sunrise to midwinter sunset.



Next on today's agenda is the Battle of The Boyne Visitor Center, site of the famous 1690 battle between William of Orange and James II. The ramifications of this pivotal battle still influence the division of Ireland today.



#### Day 4 – Brú na Bóinne and Braveheart!

Newgrange, or Brú na Bóinne draws us back to the Boyne valley today to a site significant to humans for over 5000 years. To this day, crowds gather here at the winter solstice hoping to see the sunrise illuminate the passageway at Newgrange and illuminate the rear of the chamber. Each year, a lucky few, 60 in all, will have the opportunity to stand inside the chamber for the event. Want to enter the annual draw for one of the 60 spaces? [Find out more here.](#) Oh, and there are no guarantees that the morning will not be overcast!



Do you remember the movie “Braveheart?” While the plot takes place in Scotland, most of the filming was done in the town of Trim in Ireland. Before heading back for our last night in Mullingar, we stop in Trim and take a tour of Trim Castle. “Freedom!”



## Day 5 – Rock of Cashel and the Enchanted Lake

This morning we need to pack up our things and leave Mullingar as we make our way west towards the Atlantic coast. First, we head south to visit the Rock of Cashel. The Rock of Cashel is the ancient seat of the Kings of Munster and the legend goes much farther back into mythology having been created when St. Patrick banished the devil from a cave. At the Rock of Cashel, we learn about the peculiar water supply via a well at the top of the rocky outcrop. Here we view a group of Medieval buildings including the 12th century round tower, High Cross and Romanesque Chapel, 13th century Gothic cathedral, 15th century Castle and the restored Hall of the Vicars Choral.

Making our way west we visit Lough Gur, the mythical lake and one of the four royal sites aligned with Uisneach. At Lough Gur, we tour the heritage center (seasonal) and we view the hollow mountain, home of the Fairy King as we learn about the legend of the Earl of Desmond and the Castle at the bottom of the lake. We even make a stop at the largest stone circle in all of Ireland!

Finally, we make our way to our hotel for the night as we stop in the vicinity of Shannon.



## Day 6 – Cliffs of Moher and Aran Islands

The spectacular Cliffs of Moher are on everyone's checklist for a visit to Ireland, and we head there as our first stop this morning. Depending on the season and weather conditions the day of our visit, we catch the ferry in Doolin to see the cliffs up close from the sea. After viewing the Cliffs, our ferry takes us out to one of the Aran Islands for a sail by, or depending on the time of year, a day visit ashore.

Catching our return ferry after a day of exploring, we hit the road and wind up in Dublin for the evening where the remainder of the day is free for you to explore the city, have dinner or hit a few pubs.



## Day 7 – Slán Abhaile!

We start our day with a full Irish breakfast and then gather our things as we board our transport to the airport. At the airport, your guide will bid you farewell and your trip to Ireland concludes as you embark upon your journey home, full of memories and anticipating your next visit to this magical land.

## What is Included in the package?

- Full and Hearty Irish breakfast each day (except day of arrival)
- Welcome dinner on Day 1
- Professional and knowledgeable Irish Guide and admission to selected sites
- Airport transfers to and from Dublin Airport
- Six nights hotel accommodation based upon double occupancy (Single rooms available for additional charge)
- Loads of fun and treasured memories!

## Tour Map:



## Bookings and Availability

**Bonus Material:**

[Secrets of the Wild Atlantic Way](#)

[Ireland Vacation Checklist](#)

[Ireland City Guides](#)

[Ancient Ireland – Visible and Invisible](#)

[Saints and Sinners – a Dublin Guide](#)