

13 Days Shrines and Abbeys of Ireland

Dublin 3 Nights - Armagh 1 Night - Belfast 2 Nights - Letterkenny 2 Nights Mayo 2 Nights - Galway 1 Night



Day 1. Depart USA flight to Dublin.

Day 2. Welcome to Ireland

Your transatlantic flight arrives into Dublin Airport.

On arrival you will be greeted by our Irish tour driver and your tour guide before driving into Dublin City. Enjoy a panoramic tour of Dublin City. A panoramic tour is the ideal introduction to "Dublin's Fair City". The tour will introduce you to the principal sites, which you may then revisit at your leisure. You will see the elegant Georgian squares, famous for their architecture and of course the famous doors. See Dail Eireann – seat of the Irish Government, Trinity College, with the 8th century Book of Kells and the long room with its 200,000 books, Dublin Castle, St Patrick's Cathedral built in 1192 is one of Ireland's largest Cathedrals made famous by its former dean Jonathan Swift, author of "Gulliver's Travels." See Christchurch, built by the Anglo-Normans in 1172 to replace an earlier Church built by the Vikings in 1038. Pass by the Guinness Brewery and Kilmainham Jail on your way to the Phoenix Park with its many monuments including the Papal Cross. Return to the city centre via the Quays and Collins Barrack, now part of the national museum, before arriving back into O'Connell Street where we see the Millennium Spire. Drive past the Abbey Theatre and the Custom House to Trinity College.

Visit Trinity College Trinity was founded in 1592 by Queen Elizabeth 1st on grounds confiscated from an Augustinian priory and is the oldest University in Ireland. The Campanile, erected in 1852, was built on what is believed to be the centre of the monastery. Built to further the education of the ruling Anglo-Irish families, restrictions were imposed to prevent Catholics from attending courses. These restrictions were not fully lifted until the 1970's. Trinity however admitted women in 1902, earlier than most British universities. Most of the main buildings off the main square were built during the Georgian period, some of which replaced older buildings. Within its walls, you will be able to admire Parliament Square and its 18th Century edifices. Trinity College has had many famous students such as Jonathan Swift and Samuel Beckett who later became a lecturer in French at the university. The Interdenominational Church is very well worth a visit. After your visit of Trinity College, you will have time for lunch in the many cafes around Dublin city centre. We will then be transferred to your hotel, where you will check in and have time for a rest and leisure.

Dinner and Overnight, Leopards town.

Day 3. Dublin

This morning visit Whitefriar Street Carmelite Church and view the shrine of St. Valentine. Whitefriar was founded in 1279, dispossessed during the Reformation and then re-established in 1825. Since 1974, it has been under the care of the Order of Carmelites. The house of worship is one of the most well-known and largest in Dublin. It has many notable details, including a shrine with the remains of St. Valentine, which Pope Gregory XVI gifted to the church in 1835. There are also shrines to Our Lady of Dublin and St Albert of Sicily, from which many people take water, thought to be curative.

Then visit St Mary's Pro Cathedral St. Mary's Pro Cathedral was built between 1815 and 1825 on the site of a 12th-century Cistercian abbey of St. Mary. St. Mary's is not an official cathedral, even though it functions as one. St. Mary's functions as the main Catholic parish church of the city centre in Dublin. The cathedral is in the Neo-Classical Doric style, which provides a distinct contrast to the Gothic Revival look of most other churches of the period. The exterior portico is modelled on the Temple of Theseus in Athens, with six Doric columns, while the Renaissance-style interior is patterned after the Church of St. Philip de Reule of Paris. Enjoy the balance of your day at leisure.

Overnight, bed and breakfast at the Hotel, Leopardstown. Mass today in St Marys Pro Cathedral.

Day 4. Dublin to Armagh

This morning depart Dublin and journey to Armagh. En-route visit St Peter's Church in Drogheda. St Peter's Roman Catholic Church was constructed in 1884 using local limestone. The site previously housed a church built in 1791 and parts of that structure were incorporated into the present building, which boasts an impressive Gothic architectural style. Inside, visitors can view fine sculptures, a spectacular marble high altar and more than 40 stained glass windows. The church is also famous for housing the shrine of St Oliver Plunkett, who is credited with bringing Jesuits to Drogheda. He was hanged for treason in 1681. Pope Paul VI declared him a saint in 1973, and his preserved head forms the centrepiece of the shrine. Then visit Monasterboice, one of the most famous religious sites in the country, was built in the 5th century a few miles north of Drogheda in a lovely-secluded setting. It is said that the monastic site was founded by St Buithe a follower of St, Patrick. It is one of the most visited religious sites in Ireland with 2 churches, a round tower and 2 high crosses. The treasure of this site is the high Cross-of Muiredach. Muiredach was the Abbott in Monasterboice until 922 and the prayer at the base of the cross is translated as "a prayer for Muiredach for whom the cross was made". Considered the finest High Cross in the country, it is the pinnacle of achievement with many sculpted biblical scenes, which are still legible today. Continue to Armagh to visit Armagh St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Cathedral is an imposing site, perched on the hilltop in Armagh and dominating its skyline. The church was begun in 1840, but because of the intervening famine years, not completed until 1873. The cathedral was designed and built in Neo Gothic style from pale limestone, with large twin spires dominating the approach up flight after flight of steps. Sculptured statuary forms a unique arch over the main entrance. The sanctuary was modernised in 1981 and has a very distinctive Tabernacle Holder and Crucifix, which appear out of place with the mosaics and statues in the rest of the church. There is a rich Austrian oak woodwork and an Irish granite altar. The painted ceiling is ornate. The walls are painted with rich colours that blend easily with the stained glass windows. Armagh is the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland.

Overnight, dinner, bed and breakfast at the Hotel. Mass today in Armagh Cathedral.

Day 5. Armagh to Belfast

This morning depart Armagh and journey to Belfast. Morning drive via Newry and the Mountains of Mourne – an area of great folklore and legend. Hear about "The Black Monk of Newry", "The Weird Weaver of Warrenpoint", "The Well of all Healing" in Rostrevor, and "Maggies Leap" in Newcastle.

Visit the St Patrick's Centre in Downpatrick. St Patrick is known worldwide as the patron saint of Ireland and his feast-day is celebrated on the 17th March every year. Now discover the story of St Patrick and his place in Ireland's history at the St Patrick Centre, located beside Down Cathedral and St Patricks Grave in the Medieval heart of Downpatrick. As the main destination on the Saint Patrick Driving Trail which runs from Armagh to Bangor, the centre welcomes all travellers who want to explore more detail about St. Patrick's background. The visit begins with the impressive 'In the Footsteps of Saint Patrick' Imax presentation about the life of St Patrick and has aerial video footage of some of the landmark sites in Ireland associated with the Saint. Visitors can also visit the gardens developed behind the centre which lead to the grave of St Patrick beside Down Cathedral. "In Down one grave three Saints do fill, Patrick, Bridget and Colmcille". En route to Belfast we stop in Killyleagh to see, and hear the legend, of "Mary's Stile". On arrival in Belfast enjoy a panoramic tour of the city. The tour will take in the leaning Albert Memorial Clock tower (Ireland's answer to the Tower of Pisa) and the Opera House, which is one of Belfast's great landmarks. Your tour will pass by the City Hall, the Opera house, The Crown Bar (dates from 1885), Queens University and the Botanic Gardens. A visit to the Shankill and Falls road will be of interest as it will give the visitor an indication of how life was in Belfast during the troubles.

Overnight, dinner, bed and breakfast at the Hotel, Belfast - Mass today in Downpatrick.

Day 6. Belfast

This morning visit Titanic Belfast. Located in the heart of Belfast, the Titanic Belfast recreates the story of the world's most famous ship in a new iconic, six floor building right beside the historic site of the original ship's construction. The self guided journey begins on entering the building's giant atrium, where the visitor is surrounded by the four 'ship's hull' shaped wings which house the Titanic Experience. As you journey through the nine large galleries of the interactive exhibition, you will uncover the true story of the Titanic, from her conception in Belfast in the early 1900's, through her construction and launch, to her famous maiden voyage and subsequent place in history. Highlights include breathtaking views to the slip-ways where the Titanic was launched and the Voyage to the bottom of the sea in the unique Ocean Exploration Centre with live links to contemporary undersea exploration. Return for overnight, dinner, bed and breakfast at your hotel, Belfast - Mass today in Belfast.

Day 7. Belfast to Letterkenny

Today depart Belfast and journey to Letterkenny. Drive north to Ballycastle (famous for it's annual "Oul Lammas Fair"), and enjoy a chat over tea and coffee in the Corrymeela Centre. This is a Christian community of reconciliation drawn from many traditions that, individually and together, are committed to reconciliation through the healing of social, religious and political divisions that exist in Northern Ireland and throughout the world. Corrymeela Ballycastle seeks to be an open village where encounter, truth telling and hospitality are expressed while contemplating and living out what it means to embrace difference, heal divisions and enable reconciliation. After leaving Corrymeela we make a stop at Carrick-a-Rede, to see the famous Rope Bridge. Visit to the Giants Causeway. Encounter Northern Irelands favourite giant Finn McCool at the new Giants Causeway visitor centre on the North Antrim Coast. According to Legend, Finn McCool created the Giants Causeway by building stepping stones to Scotland to challenge the Scottish giant Benandonner. In 2015, Conde Nast Traveller Magazine included hopping the stones of the Giants Causeway as one of the "50 things to do in Europe before you die". Continue via the city of Derry to Letterkenny.

Overnight, dinner, bed & breakfast at the 4* Radisson Blu Hotel, Letterkenny. Mass today in the Corrymeela Centre.

Day 8. County Donegal

Today explore County Donegal. Morning visit to St Eunans Cathedral in Letterkenny. However you approach Letterkenny - from Derry in the East, Gweedore & Glenties in the West, Fanad & Falcarragh in the North, or Ballybofey in South Donegal, - the tall spire of St Eunans Cathedral greets you. Built over 11 years, and completed in 1901, the Cathedral designed by William Hague of Dublin, is built of white Mountcharles stone and because of geological features of the site, it was not possible to orient the church in the traditional manner. St Eunans offers visitors the chance to appreciate a comparatively modern building and a warm welcome. Drive to the West Donegal area of The Rosses, on through Dunloe, and commence a scenic drive along the Atlantic coast to Ardara. After crossing the Glengesh Pass, we arrive at the Slieve League Cliffs. Europe's highest Sea Cliffs, although less famous than the Cliffs of Moher in County Clare, Slieve League Cliffs are almost three times higher. The site is largely untouched by tourism and walks through a largely unspoilt landscape give visitors a spectacular view of the coast and the cliff face. There are terrific views of the sea, Sligo Mountains and Donegal Bay as you near the top of Slieve League. The ruins of a church with some early Christian hermitages lie nearby, and there is a magnificent wilderness of rocks, streams and a deep rugged valley. Continue our tour via the fishing town of Killybegs to Donegal Town.

Return for overnight, dinner, bed & breakfast at the 4* Radisson Blu Hotel, Letterkenny. Today's Mass in St Eunans Cathedral.

Day 9. Donegal to Mayo

After breakfast we leave for County Mayo. Weather permitting, we make a stop at the beautiful beach resort of Bundoran. Continue to Drumcliffe at the foot of Ben Bulbin Mountain, where we visit the grave of the poet W.B. Yates in the cemetery of St Columbas church. His epitaph reads: "Cast a cold eye on life, on death. Horseman pass by". Free time for lunch in the town of Sligo. Afternoon drive to Attymass and visit the Fr Peyton Memorial Centre in County Mayo. The Memorial Centre commemorates the life and apostolic work of Fr Patrick Peyton, one of Ireland's most famous priests, who was internationally known as "The Rosary Priest". The centre is a place of respite, prayer and peace. It is highly respected by pilgrims and is a popular tourist attraction.

Dinner and overnight in the 4* Harlequin Hotel in Castlebar. Today's Mass in the Fr Peyton Centre.

Day 10. County Mayo

This morning we visit Knock Shrine and Museum. This little town is an important pilgrimage centre and site of Ireland's National Marian Shrine. The story of Knock began on 21st August 1879 when Our Blessed Lady, St Joseph and St John the Evangelist appeared at the south gable wall of Knock Parish Church. 15 people, young and old, witnessed the apparition. From this miraculous occurrence, Knock has grown to the status of an internationally recognised Marian Shrine. The personal pilgrimage of Pope John-Paul II in 1979, commemorating the centenary of the apparition, inspired an even greater devotion to the shrine and endorsed the indelible seal of Vatican approval. Mother Teresa of Calcutta visited Knock in June 1993. Over one-and-a-half million pilgrims visit the shrine annually. Afternoon visit to Ballintubber Abbey. Built in 1216 for the Canon Regulars of St Augustine, Ballintubber Abbey is the only church in Ireland that was founded by an Irish King and which is still in use today. It was built next to the site of an earlier church founded by St Patrick in the 5th century. It is also known as "The Abbey that refused to die" as through its many vicissitudes, including burning by Cromwell's army in 1653, the Abbey has remained a place of worship despite years of continuous attacks and religious repression. Ballintubber retains an air of ancient beauty and spirituality, and has been restored with simple elegance. It is one of the most impressive church buildings in Ireland today.

Return for overnight, dinner, bed & breakfast at 4* Harlequin Hotel, Castlebar. Mass today in Knock.

Day 11. Mayo to Galway.

Croagh Patrick Visitor Centre. Croagh Patrick, 5 miles from the picturesque town of Westport, and overlooking Clew Bay, is considered the Holiest Mountain in Ireland. It is one of the highest peaks in the West of Ireland at 750 metres (2,500 feet). The tradition of pilgrimage to this Holy Mountain goes back over 5,000 years from the stone age to the present day without interruption. Its religious significance dates back to pagan times, when people are thought to have gathered here to celebrate the beginning of the harvest season. Croagh Patrick is renowned for its Patrician Pilgrimage in honour of St Patrick - Ireland's patron saint. It was on the summit of this mountain that St Patrick fasted for 40 days in 441 AD and the custom has been faithfully handed down from generation to generation. The Croagh Patrick Visitor Centre, Teach na Miasa, is situated in Murrisk, on the pilgrims path at the base of the mountain and opposite the National Famine Monument. The Walsh family who run Teach na Miasa, provide for the needs of pilgrims, climbers, archaeologists and nature lovers who visit this beautiful part of Ireland. Journey through the Connemara Region. Connemara is a land of lakes and rivers, bogs and mountains. A land of small villages where Gaelic is still the spoken language, and where little has changed since the beginning of time. Without a doubt, it is the wildest and most romantic part of Ireland. Connemara is a vast peninsula bordered by the arid and rocky coastline of Galway Bay in the South - a land characteristic for its stone walls and thatched cottages. On the northern shore, the land is harsher and more secret with spectacular views of the ocean and the beautiful fjord of Killary Harbour as well as the steep mountains overlooking numerous lakes and large bog areas. Kylemore Abbey is stunningly located in the Kylemore Pass in Connemara. Mitchell Henry built the house in 1868, after spending his honeymoon in the area. The architecture is best described as neo-gothic and the house still displays all the characteristics of that period. One of Kylemore Abbeys most famous features is the miniature cathedral, built in 1870, and known locally as the gothic church. Today the Abbey is home to the Irish order of Benedictine nuns. They established a private school for young girls which was the renowned Kylemore Abbey International School. It closed in 2010. Time permitting, we can visit the Victorian Walled Garden, laid out in 1867. Continue our tour via the small quaint village of Cong, where we visit the cottage of "The Quiet Man"

Dinner and overnight in the 4* Salthill Hotel, Galway. Mass today is in Kylemore Abbey.

Day 12. Galway to Dublin

Before leaving Galway we see the Spanish Arch, the Salmon Weir, and visit Galway Cathedral.

Mid-morning depart for Clonmacnois, a wonderful early Christian site founded by St Ciaran in the mid 6th century on the Eastern bank of the River Shannon. In this stunning setting, the site includes the ruins of a cathedral, 7 churches (10th - 13th century), 2 round towers, 3 high crosses, and the largest collection of early Christian grave slabs in Western Europe. The original high crosses and a selection of grave slabs are on display in the visitor centre. In 1979 Pope John-Paul II celebrated Mass at the site.

Arrive back in Dublin with a little free time before checking into hotel for our last night.

Dinner, bed & breakfast in the 4* Clayton Hotel, Leopardstown. Mass this morning in Galway Cathedral.

Day 13. Depart for home

Today, after breakfast we transfer to the Dublin airport for our transatlantic flight to USA. The end of our wonderful Ireland.

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