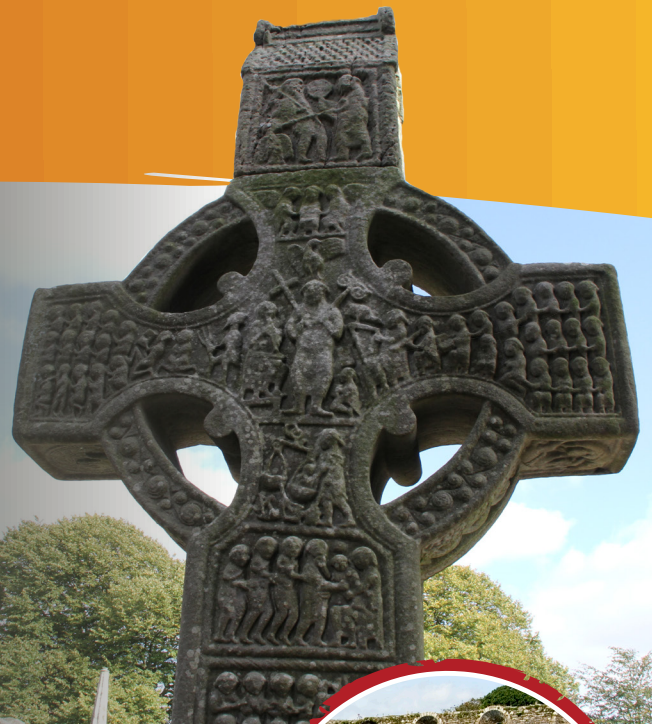


# SACRED IRELAND IN 3 DAYS



**ROUTE:** Counties Tipperary, Kilkenny, Wicklow, Kildare, Offaly, Longford, Meath, Louth

**OVERVIEW:** Persuasive saints, productive monks and pillaging Norsemen – tread the trail of the medieval movers and shakers who left their mark on Ireland's lush green hills and vales. Vanished kingdoms come to life, abandoned villages reappear and the many talents of Ireland's early missionaries are revealed on this journey through the scenic sights and striking works of Ireland's sacred past.



## DAY 1

**ROUTE:** County Tipperary, County Kilkenny

**OVERVIEW:** With a sprig of three-leaved clover – and a mounted cross to make his point – St Patrick changed Ireland's history forever when he preached Christianity to the King of Munster at the **Rock of Cashel** in the 5th century. Over 1,500 years later, this picturesque hilltop site looming over Tipperary's Golden Vale is remembered as the spot where Patrick's message first took root. Stroll through layers of Norman and ancient Christian heritage before travelling to the charming village of Thomastown. A good place for a bite to eat here is **Sol Bistro**, a featured pit stop on Kilkenny's **food trail**. It's a popular spot which adds a Mediterranean twist to its locally sourced produce.



Close to the village on the other side of the River Nore is the home of visionary philosopher George Berkeley, **Jerpoint Abbey**. This serene 12th century church was once the spiritual heart of a now vanished Irish province, the Kingdom of Osraige. Today, this Cistercian structure is considered a national monument for its elegant cloister and intriguing stone carvings. Branch out further in **Jerpoint Park**, where the sacred crosses and medieval structures form part of a mysteriously deserted medieval settlement from the 12th century. It's thought that the name of your next stop, **Kilkenny** city, derives from the patron saint of **St Canice's Cathedral**. The exquisite stained glass windows of the city's cathedral and imposing Celtic Round Tower alongside it both encapsulate the significance of this hallowed place through the long ages of Kilkenny's medieval history.

**IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME:** Castlecomer Discovery Park is an ideal spot to blow off some steam. Try out ziplining, boating and even a leafy Tree Top Adventure Walk, all set against the beautiful backdrop of woodland and a 17th century stone bridge.

**SUGGESTED EXPERIENCES:** **ROCK OF CASHEL:** [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)  
**JERPOINT PARK:** [www.jerpointpark.com](http://www.jerpointpark.com)  
**ST CANICE'S CATHEDRAL:** [www.stcanicescathedral.ie](http://www.stcanicescathedral.ie)  
**CASTLECOMER DISCOVERY PARK:** [www.discoverypark.ie](http://www.discoverypark.ie)

# DAY 2



**ROUTE:** County Wicklow, County Kildare, County Offaly

**OVERVIEW:** The longest Viking ship ever recorded was built out of oak beams from Glendalough in 1042, but this idyllic Wicklow valley of the two lakes is perhaps best known for the early medieval monastic settlement preserved beside its still waters. Although raided by marauding Norsemen at times, the remarkable cathedral, round tower and stone huts testify to the life of worship enjoyed here since the 6th century, when St Kevin first founded the site. For generations, it was women who ruled the roost in the religious settlement now occupied by **St Brigid's Cathedral** in Kildare. The resident abbess held sway over this community throughout the early Middle Ages, during which time even the bishop of the region used to bow to her will when visiting. Next, stop to enjoy the award-winning menu at **Harte's Restaurant** – or even book a session in the onsite cookery school to see how it all happens.

Of course, the enchanting Kildare landscape was home to more than one sacred settlement, as can be seen at the nearby **Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park**. Home to an ancient monastery, it's thought to have been the largest in Ireland when it was first erected in the 5th century. Just decades later in next-door Offaly, St Ciarán founded **Clonmacnoise Monastic Settlement** on the banks of the Shannon. This hub of monastic worship was renowned among missionaries – and prized by Viking raiders – throughout the Middle Ages. The 10th century cathedral and 12th century round tower are just two highlights of this iconic sacred site.

**IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME:** Head for the **Museum of Style Icons** at Newbridge Silverware, where iconic clothing worn by everyone from Grace Kelly to The Beatles is on display.

**SUGGESTED EXPERIENCES:** **LULLYMORE HERITAGE & DISCOVERY PARK:** [www.lullymoreheritagepark.com](http://www.lullymoreheritagepark.com)  
**CLONMACNOISE MONASTIC SETTLEMENT:** [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)  
**MUSEUM OF STYLE ICONS:** [www.newbridgesilverware.com](http://www.newbridgesilverware.com)  
**GLENDALOUGH:** [www.heritageireland.ie](http://www.heritageireland.ie)  
**ST BRIGID'S CATHEDRAL:** [www.kildare.ie](http://www.kildare.ie)

# DAY 3



**ROUTE:** County Longford, County Meath, County Louth

**OVERVIEW:** The heavens loom large in the 19th century **St Mel's Cathedral** in Longford. This religious landmark is dedicated to the saint who came to the area on St Patrick's mission in the 5th century. Since its careful restoration after a fire in recent years, the diaphanous interior of this magnificent cathedral has been restored to its former glory and is cherished by the local community.

Next stop is **Kells**. Flame and steel accompanied the roaming Norsemen who visited Kells in Meath. Despite the best efforts of those fierce raiders, however, the monks created and safeguarded some of the country's most renowned artefacts, including the illuminated manuscript of the Book of Kells and the Kells Crozier. At the centre of this historic town, stop for some lunch and literature at The Book Market – a second-hand bookshop and café – before stretching your legs on the **Kells Historic Trail**, where the legacy of 6th century St Colmcille and his followers is revealed. Make time for **Kells High Crosses**, too – in particular the Market Cross, as its presence signified that a fugitive could claim sanctuary once inside the boundary of the monastic area. Keep on your sacred trail to Louth's **Monasterboice**, founded in the late 5th century by St Buithe. The big draw here has to be the 5.8 metre tall Muiredach's High Cross, which is richly carved with scenes from the New Testament. There are 124 figures on the cross, but only one appears in headgear – look closely to spot Goliath in his conical hat. Height obviously mattered in Monasterboice, as this cross is also next to one of the tallest round towers in Ireland, too.

**IF YOU HAVE MORE TIME:** Head to Drogheda and the the shrine of St Oliver Plunkett, whose preserved head can be found in St Peter's Church.

**SUGGESTED EXPERIENCES:** **ST MEL'S CATHEDRAL:** [www.longfordtourism.ie](http://www.longfordtourism.ie)      **KELLS HIGH CROSS:** [www.visitingkells.ie](http://www.visitingkells.ie)  
**MONASTERBOICE:** [www.louthholidays.com](http://www.louthholidays.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.