

MYTHS, LEGENDS AND FOLKLORE OF IRELAND (8 Days / 7Nights)

Folklore occupies an important place in Irish society. The legends, myths and stories of the past tell the tale of a vibrant and unique society populated with courageous heroes, bold heroines, powerful Gods, Goddesses and mighty Kings. By travelling through the mystical Irish landscapes, your imagination will be revived and you will discover ancient sacred sites, old ring forts and early Christian settlements.

These epics have left an indelible mark on the Irish people and their Culture and Arts. What we know of Irish mythology comes from stories written by the monks in the 12th century. Until then, stories were passed along in the great oral tradition passed on from one generation to another. The stories are about brave and strong warriors, druids and poets, betrayal and duty, rights and responsibilities. All the elements for a good story-telling session are there!

During this mythology journey of Ireland, you will see where Cuchulain, the Ulster Champion, grew up, where the remains of the causeway that Finn MacCumhaill built from Ireland to Scotland, and where Queen Medb, the Connemara Queen, is buried. Much will be revealed to you.

These mystical places will bewitch you!

PROGRAM ITINERARY

DAY 01: DUBLIN

Upon arrival at Dublin airport you will begin to discover this beautiful and charming city where one third of Ireland's inhabitants live. Dublin is a young and dynamic city in the process of undergoing an economic boom. Adored by its people and visitors alike, Dublin has everything a capital needs; a multitude of interesting visits and unforgettable cultural experiences.

Enjoy a panoramic city tour and discover the north side as well as the south side of the River, Liffey. The north side, offers great civil monuments such as the GPO (General Post Office), where you will see the statue of CuChulain, a mythical hero. The statue was erected to commemorate the 1916 rising. Other important monuments are the Custom House along the quays. In the Gardens of Remembrance, on Parnell Square, you will be able to see a large sculpture by the artist Oisín Kelly, based on the theme of the 'Children of Lir' and dedicated to the memory of all those who gave their lives to the cause of Irish freedom. The 'Children of Lir' is the most famous of Irish legends! It is a beautiful but also very sad myth. The four children of King Lir were changed into swans for 900 years by their jealous mother-in-law.

The south side appears more sophisticated with its vast Georgian squares characterised by colorful doors, along with Grafton Street and its quality shops. Trinity College, the oldest university in Ireland, is also an integral part of the city.

Visit Trinity College, founded in 1592 by Elizabeth 1st. The visit to the ancient Library, containing over twenty thousand manuscripts, is surprising in its splendor. The famous Book of Kells, an illuminated manuscript dating from the 9th century, is exhibited here. It was produced by the monks at St. Columba's monastery on the island of Iona, north of Scotland. The book will amaze you and will introduce you to early Irish Christian Art.

In the afternoon, visit Dvblinia. Linked to Christ Church Cathedral via an elegant stone bridge, Dvblinia is an adventure that will immerse you in medieval history. A miniature model of medieval Dublin explains Dublin's birth and development. The tour ends with an exhibition about the different activities of the time and an interactive market. Then you will visit the National Museum, situated in the heart of the city, beside the Dail, in a magnificent edifice, this museum is packed with treasures: its collection of golden prehistoric jewellery is, without doubt, the most beautiful in Europe. Also amongst the exhibits are Celtic finery as well as numerous early Christian ornaments and relics of great beauty. Overnight in Dublin.

DAY 02: DUBLIN / GALWAY

This morning, you will leave Dublin and travel west. Your morning visit will feature Clonmacnois, situated in the wilds, on the banks of the Shannon, sixth century Clonmacnois is now partly in ruins. We will explore its museum where the original Celt crosses are being exhibited, followed by a guided tour of this monastic settlement, the high towers, the eleventh century cathedral and the wonderful High Crosses'.

Upon arrival in Galway, you will visit the Galway Heritage Center. The guided visit will take you through different rooms dedicated to different aspects of Galway's life and history: the Claddagh village, which once was an Irish fishing harbour located outside the medieval walls, the Galway Hookers (boats) or the Galway Tribes. You will also visit the crystal factory before we conclude our tour with an audio-visual about the city and its crystal.

Later on, you will enjoy some free time to wander through the streets of Galway. The city has preserved vestiges of the era that saw it as the center of trade with Spain, such as the "Browne Doorway" on Eyre Square (a stone-built door frame which adorned a Hispanic looking abode) and the "Spanish Arch" (remainder of a bastion from which the medieval harbour's traffic was regulated). Along the way, you will admire Lynch Castle

and further down you will come across St. Nicholas's eighteenth century church, where the old craft and local produce market still takes place on Saturdays. A stroll along the River Corrib, fringed with old warehouses converted into apartments, will bring you to Claddagh or to the Roman-renaissance style Catholic Cathedral consecrated in 1964. Overnight in Galway.

DAY 03: GALWAY / THE ARAN ISLANDS

Today's visit will take you to Inishmore, the largest of the Aran Islands. So many legends haunt the islands, by visiting Inishmore, you will be plunged into a world that is halfway between the past and the present. The three Aran islands, Inisheer, Inishmaan and Inishmore, standing out in the Galway bay, forming a mass of limestone, similar to the Burren's geology. Neither turf, lakes nor trees are the characteristics of these lands. Today, the inhabitants survive essentially from fishing and tourism while remaining strongly attached to Gaelic traditions. These islands are the last real "Gaelthacht" of the modern Ireland.

Inishmore, the largest of the islands, is covered by old stone walls and small fields. On the west coast of the island, you will see majestic cliffs dropping into the wild Ocean and dominated by Dun Aonghasa, one of the most impressive Neolithic forts in Europe. Its origin is lost in the mist of time, but we know that these enclosures were used in Celtic times as places of assembly for tribes or may have been used as ritual centers on ceremonial occasions. A trip to the islands offers a journey through time, as well as an encounter with the ancient Ireland, the mythical Ireland. For this reason, the islands are fascinating. Overnight in Galway

DAY 04: GALWAY / LETTERKENNY

Today, you will travel north and visit Carrowmore Cemetery. This tour takes place in a beautiful setting, not far from the mountain called Ben Bulbin. It is a cemetery, approximately 6000 years old. The place will fascinate you by its landscape, its history, its burial techniques and most of all by its legends. From here, you will be able to see the hill and burial site of the mythical Queen Medb, a strong female character. She is one of the many warrior women depicted in Irish legends. She was a goddess, who chose her husbands for a year and a day.

Later on, visit Creevekeel Court Cairn. Recently restored, this court tomb is one of the most beautiful of its type. It was constructed around 2500 BC and many legends surround the place as little is known about the people who built it. At a later stage, chambers were added to the west side and the court was re-used by a blacksmith in the Middle-Age for his ovens. Overnight in Letterkenny.

DAY 05: LETTERKENNY / BELFAST

This morning you will visit Derry. Its name comes from "doire", which means "oak wood". The Oak forests were considered by the Celts as magical and sacred places, which explains why to this day about 1500 placenames still contain the element 'wood'. This visit is different from the traditional and classical sightseeing of the city. It is a Celtic Legendary Tour of Derry. A local guide will bring you to different sites around and in the city, the stories told will include the story of St. Colmcille, legends of local Kings, warriors, druids and bards. You will learn a great deal about the mythological secrets of this very intriguing city.

Later on in the afternoon, you will visit the Giant's Causeway. This unique place was built by the giant Finn MacCumhaill. The legend tells that Finn built this causeway over the sea to Scotland, in order to fight against his enemy, Fingal, who had started his own path from his side (in fact the same scenery can be seen also on one of the Hebrides Islands). They had never met before and when Finn heard the heavy footsteps of Fingal, he turned back and, helped by his wife, he dressed up as a baby! When Fingal arrived and saw Finn, the baby giant, he assumed his father would be much, much bigger and went home running, destroying the causeway behind him. This site is a UNESCO World Heritage site, one of the most amazing natural treasures. More than 40,000 basalt polygonal columns form cliffs and plateaux by the sea. In the Visitor Center, an audio-visual show will explain its formation and tell its legends. An unforgettable scenery and story! Overnight in Belfast.

DAY 06: BELFAST / DUBLIN

This morning, you will visit the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum. You will also learn about food, clothing, farming and lifestyles that have changed over the years in Ulster. Finally climb aboard some of the great trains of the past and see a unique collection of old bicycles, trams and cars.

You then depart and arrive in Armagh, a place of legends and myths: the coming of St. Patrick and visit nearby Emain Macha, which is associated with the Celtic legendary heroes.

Visit the Navan Fort or Emain Macha, near Armagh. Navan Fort was the spiritual, political and cultural center in pre-Christian Ireland. Famed in Celtic mythology for stories of legendary heroes, mainly of CuChulain, the Ulster Champion, the area is steeped in history and tradition. Overnight in Dublin

DAY 07: THE BOYNE VALLEY

The day will be dedicated to the discovery of the Boyne Valley, which is without doubt the most historical region of the whole island with sumptuous Irish monuments. This fascinating route takes you through the fertile plains of County Meath to Slane, a village dominated by its hill, and it continues to Drogheda, called "the town of the churches". Moving north, scattered in the rich and green landscape, are Monasterboice, a monastery famous for its magnificent Celtic Crosses, and Mellifont Abbey, where the ruins of the first Cistercian Abbey in Ireland can be found.

Here History, legends and magic become entangled and bewitch visitors. Start the tour with a visit to Monasterboice. This relatively small monastery, founded in the 6th century by St. Buite, is a typical example of its period. The church structure is very simple, however the focus of the visit will be on the three Celtic High Crosses, real pieces of art. The Muiredach Cross is one of the most important in the country. The highlight of the day will be the discovery of The Hill of Tara. Its name is forever associated with druids and legendary Celtic figures such as King Cormac, his daughter Grainne who ran away with Diarmait on the night of her wedding to Finn MacCumhaill. The site is also connected with the legend of St. Patrick who was brought here after he lit the Pascal fire on the hill of Slane.

This hill, a mythical place, was once the residence of The High Kings of Ireland. Today, only a few remnants survive. You will visit a stone age

burial site (2000 BC), two ring forts and other forts named after the characters from Irish folklore. (People still believe today that 'fairy forts' are the homes of the Tuatha de Danaan, a semi-God race defeated by the Fomorians, who then were forced to live underground. Today they are simply called fairies.

The Interpretative Center, based in the nearby church, presents an excellent audio-visual on this rich period of Irish History. We conclude our day by our visit to Trim Castle. All castles in Ireland have ghost stories haunting them. Trim Castle is one of these. It is the largest and most impressive Anglo-Norman castle in Ireland. Hugh de Lacy began construction of the castle around 1172. Beautifully situated on the River Boyne, it has undergone extensive conservation work. Some scenes of the Movie 'Brave Heart', directed by Mel Gibson, were shot in the Castle.

Overnight in Dublin

DAY 08: DEPARTURE

Say goodbye to the fair city of Dublin as you depart from Dublin Airport with happy memories of all the sights and adventures of your journey.

PROGRAM INCLUSION

* 7 night on double-room sharing at the specified properties indicated below.

* 7 Irish breakfasts

* K-class rental car (Toyota Verso / Ford Focus or similar). Other categories such as a Mercedes can also be offered at extra cost.

* Entrance fees to all monuments as indicated in the itinerary

* Dinner in Letterkenny included.

* Service charges and taxes

Must book ahead of time to ensure availability

Entrance fees to the following sites are included:

DAY 01:

* Visit **Trinity College Dublin**

* Visit **Dublinia**

* Visit **National Museum**

DAY 02: Dublin to Galway

* Visit **Clonmacnois**

* Visit the **Galway Heritage Centre**

DAY 03:

* Visit **Inishmore**, the largest of **The Aran Islands**

DAY 04: Galway to Letterkenny

* Visit **Corrowmore Cemetery**

* Visit **Creevekeel Court Cairn**

* Dinner and overnight in Letterkenny

DAY 05:

* Celtic **Legendary Tour of Derry**

* Visit the **Giant's Causeway**

DAY 06:

* Visit the **Ulster Folk & Transport Museum**

* Visit the **Navan Fort or Emain Macha**

Hotel Information:

Accommodations on double occupancy room at the hotel per the itinerary

PROGRAM PRIZE

7 night Journey	April	May/June	July & August	Sept	Oct	Rest of the year (except B&B)
B&B	\$1,425	\$1,410	\$1,735	\$1,410	\$1,425	\$1,425
3 star Hotels	\$1,665	\$1,745	\$2,045	\$1,745	\$1,665	\$1,665
Country Manor Hotels	\$1,945	\$2,090	\$2,395	\$2,090	\$1,945	\$1,945
A Taste of Ireland	\$1,655	\$1,725	\$1,735	\$1,725	\$1,655	\$1,655

*Prices are valid from January 1st, 2007 to December 31st, 2007. Prices for the Christmas/ New Years Eve period will be on request. Prices are also subject to change due to currency fluctuations beyond our control.

Gateway2Discovery

4500 Campus Drive, Suite 440
Newport Beach, CA 92660 - USA

Phone: (949) 724-0911

Fax: (949) 724-0811

Toll free: 1-800-997-6612

info@Gateway2Discovery.com