

Tourism Ireland trade itinerary

Title: Following St Patrick's Footsteps

Strapline: Trace Saint Patrick's journey on the island of Ireland and unearth the locations that helped make him a legend.

In this itinerary, you'll follow in the footsteps of one of the world's most beloved saints, while taking in Ireland's rich Early Christian heritage. Spread across Northern Ireland, this itinerary can be enjoyed in one trip via Belfast, or you can stay longer and visit other locations across the island of Ireland and return home via main access points.

Whichever way you plan your itinerary, visitors will get the chance to visit the places that reveal the patron saint's legacy: the soaring cathedrals, crumbling monastic ruins and magnificent landscapes, all united by one incredible story – St Patrick and his journey from slave to saint.

To avoid disappointment, make sure to book tours, suggested restaurants and accommodation in advance. There are a few mountain hikes included in this itinerary – all require people of a good level of fitness and some experience with hiking/hill walking. Good walking boots are essential.

This is a sample itinerary to offer suggestions and ideas for planning trips. You can contact your local Tourism Ireland representative for further information

Theme: History and Heritage

Duration: 3 days

The details

Nearest airports: Belfast International Airport or Dublin Airport

Total distance: 157 miles

Day 1 [52 miles] Belfast to Newcastle, County Down

Morning

From Belfast International Airport, make your way to Downpatrick, County Down, where St Patrick first began his mission to spread Christianity. Captured as a slave in Wales and brought to Ireland, young Patrick initially escaped. But after he left, he found himself called back in a dream. Returning to Ireland, he set about his quest to convert pagans by the thousands. So effective was Patrick that one new convert, a local chieftain, donated a barn in which Patrick could hold his services. It was here, just outside Downpatrick, that Patrick lived leading up to his death and on this very spot in 1932, a church called Saul Church was built to honour the site. Tours can be booked in advance by contacting Down Cathedral.

Lunch

Book a table at the award-winning [Curran's Bar & Seafood Steakhouse](#) in Downpatrick.

Afternoon

Stay in Downpatrick – this is the town where St Patrick is thought to be buried – under a memorial stone, a short walk away from the soaring crenellations of Downpatrick cathedral. Tours can be booked in advance by contacting Down Cathedra.

You can also take a tour of the [Saint Patrick Centre](#), which celebrates the saint's life with interactive exhibits and stories. Information about group tours can be found on the [website](#). Before the afternoon ends, visit Struell Wells, blessed by St Patrick when he first arrived in Downpatrick. These wells are said to have healing powers and thousands of people visit them every year. While [admission is free](#) and there is a small parking area, it is unsuitable for wheelchair users.

Overnight

Stay overnight in the lovely [Slieve Donard Resort and Spa](#). You can dine at the onsite restaurant, or head to Newcastle to enjoy [Brunel's](#) award-winning fare.

Day 2 [60 miles] Newcastle to Armagh city

Morning

Start your day with a walk up the slopes of [Slieve Donard mountain](#), where you can see the tallest statue of St Patrick in the world. The terrain on the way up to the 2,789ft-high summit is mainly forest and mountain paths. It is tough going in places, so proper boots and walking poles are advised, and take note that some parts can be very steep.

Lunch

Journey from the slopes of Slieve Donard to Armagh city. Its status as the ecclesiastical capital of Ireland ensures its importance to the island's Christian heritage. Enjoy hearty food at [4 Vicars](#) in the heart of the city.

Afternoon

Right next door to your lunch venue is the museum at [No. 5 Vicar's Hill](#) where you'll see the sparkling collection of gems and Early Christian artefacts collected by Archbishops Robinson and Beresford. The stars of the city, though, are the twin cathedrals dedicated to St Patrick that sit atop Armagh's two hills – one [Church of Ireland](#), one [Roman Catholic](#). St Patrick founded his main church here in 445AD on the spot where the Church of Ireland cathedral now stands. Contact each cathedral to arrange guided tours.

Overnight

Refuel at [Uluru](#) with some well-earned award-winning food. You can either stay in the [Armagh City Hotel](#), or continue driving onto [Newforge House](#) for your overnight stay.

Day 3 [45 miles] Armagh to Belfast

Morning

From Newforge House, it's a short drive to where the story of St Patrick all began. As a teenager, St Patrick was captured and brought to Ireland to work as a slave herding sheep on Slemish Mountain, County Antrim. He spent six years on these slopes with only sheep for company. But it was here that Patrick found consolation in God. The [walk to the summit](#) along a steep rocky track is 1.2 miles, but it's a strenuous climb and quite steep, so good boots and walking poles are advised if not essential.

Lunch

Journey from the slopes of Slemish Mountain back to Belfast, where you can enjoy lunch at [James St South](#) or one of the city's other innovative restaurants.

Afternoon

Return to the airport for your flight home.

If you have more time

There are plenty of other sites around the island of Ireland where you can follow in the footsteps of St Patrick. Although not concentrated in one region like those mentioned in the itinerary above, these other locations can be added to your itinerary if time permits.

The Sanctuary of St Patrick, Lough Derg, County Donegal

Closest airports to this location are Belfast International Airport and Ireland West Knock Airport, which are both just over 2 hours and 10 minutes away.

The tranquil Lough Derg sets the scene for two stories regarding St Patrick. One tale sees him hunting the last snake in Ireland here and turning the lake red with its blood. The other has Christ dramatically revealing the entrance to Hell to Patrick inside a cave. For more information, visit the [website](#).

Croagh Patrick, County Mayo

Ireland West Knock Airport is the closest airport at just over 1 hour away, while Shannon Airport is just over 2 hours away.

Nothing illustrates the importance of St Patrick in Ireland better than the annual pilgrimage to the top of Croagh Patrick. Every year, up to 3,000 people make this pilgrimage on the last Sunday of July (Reek Sunday) – some barefoot. The name of the mountain translates as “Patrick’s stack” in Irish, and it was on this scree-covered mountain that the saint fasted for 40 days during Lent. The effort to climb to its peak was described by one pilgrim as a voyage of curiosity that ended with fulfilment and peace. For more information, visit the [website](#).

The Rock of Cashel, County Tipperary

Closest airport to the [Rock of Cashel](#) is Shannon Airport at 1 hour and 18 minutes away.

One of the most important heritage sites in Ireland, the hill above Cashel is where Patrick baptised Aenghus, the King of Munster. This marked the end of paganism and ushered in a new era of Christianity. Amidst the crumbling cathedral walls, look out for the 12th-century St Patrick's Cross: one face depicts Christ's crucifixion, while the other shows an image of a bishop. Nearby, St Patrick's Well in Clonmel (where the saint baptised locals), is said never to freeze in winter.

Hill of Slane, County Meath

Closest airport is Dublin airport at 37 minutes away.

When druids celebrated the pagan feast of Bealtaine (first day of summer) with a ritual fire on the Hill of Tara, County Meath, Patrick chose to defy the reigning High King by lighting his own unquenchable paschal fire on neighbouring Hill of Slane. To answer for his actions, Patrick performed feats and miracles to prove to the King that the Christian God was far more powerful than the pagan god, using the three-leafed shamrock as a way of explaining the Trinity and the mysteries of Christianity. For tours, [visit this website](#).