

Tourism Ireland trade itinerary

Title: Flavours of Ireland Ancient East

Strapline: Get a taste of Ireland's Ancient East on this food-focused trip

Taking in 15 counties and bordered by the River Shannon to the west and the Irish Sea to the east, Ireland's Ancient East is a touring region like no other. Traditions are strong in these lush green lands where generations have perfected the arts of foraging, brewing, farming and distilling.

Now a new generation of food heroes is making its mark, taking advantage of the fertile soils and pure waters to produce food and drink that is truly world-class. There's a lot to see but here are some of the highlights to help you discover the flavours of Ireland's Ancient East for yourself.

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: Foodie

Duration: 7 days

The details

Nearest airports: Cork Airport, Dublin Airport

Total distance: 1,084km

Day 1 [106km] Dublin to Dundalk

Morning [49km, 41 mins]

Slane Castle [<https://www.slanecastle.ie>], on the banks of the River Boyne in County Meath, has quite the history. Home to the Conyngham family since 1703, it found international fame as a unique concert venue that's been rocked by everyone from Madonna to the Rolling Stones. Ever the fun-loving innovators, the Conynghams have now teamed up with the family behind Jack Daniels to create **Slane Distillery** [<https://www.slaneirishwhiskey.com/>], where they produce their Triple-Casked Slane Irish Whiskey. Tours of the distillery and the castle are available – and you can do a two-hour combined tour for the full experience. Groups must be pre-booked but discounted rates are available and groups are limited to 25 people.

Lunch

You won't need to travel far for lunch. **Browne's Bar** [<https://www.slanecastle.ie/food-drink/bar/>] in Slane Castle (named after a fondly remembered castle housekeeper) is filled with

concert memorabilia and offers a nice menu that features the best of local produce. Try the Castle wings and you can choose between a Slane whiskey sticky glaze or a Boyne Valley blue cheese dip.

Afternoon [15km, 15 mins]

In the small village of Tenure in County Louth, you'll find Ireland's only gin school at **Listoke Distillery** [<https://listokedistillery.ie/gin-school/>]. The gin school experience incorporates a tour of the working distillery, where Listoke 1777 gin is made, a tasting session where you decide what kind of gin you'd like to make and then a gin-making class, where you create your masterpiece. Gin and tonics and a spread of tasty treats from the surrounding Boyne Valley are served up as you wait for your gin to distil and you end the class with a bottle of your very own gin to take away. The whole experience takes around three hours and runs every Friday evening and twice on Saturday. It costs €95 and groups of up to 18 can be accommodated. The distillery can also arrange bespoke experiences on request.

Overnight [42km, 37 mins]

Dine by the sea and enjoy glorious views of the Cooley Peninsula and the Mourne Mountains at the Linn Duachail restaurant at the **Glyde Inn** [<https://www.theglydeinn.ie/>] in Annagassan. Seafood is the specialty here so try the seafood platter with its selection of fish caught in nearby Clogherhead.

Stay the night at the **Ballymascanlon House Hotel** [<https://www.ballymascanlon.com/>] outside Dundalk, a 19th century country house hotel, set in 130 acres of parkland.

Day 2 [260km] Dundalk to Portlaoise

Morning [145km, 2 hr 8 mins]

Every Friday morning, Church Square in Monaghan town turns into a fantastic bazaar of fresh local fruit, vegetables, fish and crafts. This is the **Monaghan Farmers Market** [<https://www.iomst.ie/market/monaghan-farmers-market/>] (9am-2pm), a great place to browse and sample some of the tasty home-baked goods on offer.

If you have the time, another great County Monaghan food experience is afternoon tea at **Castle Leslie** [<https://www.castleleslie.com/>], a sumptuous Victorian pile outside Glaslough, that's well-known for its quirky but luxurious accommodation as well as for hosting the occasional celebrity wedding.

Head south to Cavan town, host of the **Taste of Cavan food festival**

[<http://www.tasteofcavan.ie>] and another fine **farmers market**

[<https://www.facebook.com/Cavan-Farmers-Market-113719082014859/>] (Fridays, 10am-2pm)

and on to County Meath, home of **Sheridan's Cheesemongers**

[<https://sheridanscheesemongers.com/shops/meath/>].

Here, in a converted stone railway station, is the beating heart of the cheese empire started by brothers Kevin and Seamus Sheridan in 1995. Shop manager Franck Le Moenner and his staff will talk you through the bewildering range of Irish farmhouse cheeses on sale here. There's a weekly Saturday food market that draws artisan food producers from far and wide and every May, Sheridan's host a festival that celebrates everything that's good about Irish food.

Lunch [45km, 44 mins]

Stop to refuel in the bustling town of Mullingar in County Westmeath. **Red Earth**

[<http://www.redearthireland.com/>] is a magnet for local foodies, with its well-stocked foodhall, restaurant and deli.

Afternoon [35km, 33 mins]

Whiskey lovers are spoiled for choice in this part of Ireland's Ancient East. At **Kilbeggan Distillery** [<https://www.kilbegganwhiskey.com/>] you'll find one of the oldest licensed distilleries in the world, where the slow process of creating great whiskey is explored through a range of tours that last from one to three hours. Tours cost between €14 to €85 and must be booked in advance.

Just 15 minutes away, on the banks of the Grand Canal, is the **Tullamore D.E.W. Distillery**

[<https://www.tullamoredew.com/en-gb/>]. Guided tours are available in the original 19th century bonded warehouse and you'll have the chance to learn about the history and craft involved in distilling what the Irish call "uisce beatha" (the water of life). Tours run for 45 minutes and are also available in French and German. Pre-booking is essential to avail of discounted rates. Minimum number per group is 15 and maximum is 45.

Finish your day at **The Blue Apron restaurant** [<https://theblueapronrestaurant.ie/>] for fine dining with a European twist. Closed Mondays and Tuesdays.

Overnight [35km, 32 mins]

After a busy day, it's time to rest up at the **Midlands Park Hotel**

[<https://www.midlandsparkhotel.com/>] in the centre of Portlaoise.

Day 3 [121km] Portlaoise to Waterford

Morning [59km, 59 mins]

Kilkenny has a well-deserved reputation as a good food hub. With great places to eat and drink in the city, not to mention exciting visitor experiences around the county, you could happily spend a couple of days here. If you're looking for some highlights, try starting out at the

Smithwick's Experience Kilkenny [<https://www.smithwicksexperience.com/>]. Smithwick's ale has been brewed in Kilkenny since 1710 and the tour around the Smithwick's Experience is fun, quirky and full of interesting facts about the Smithwick's family who started the whole enterprise. Guided tours last approximately one hour, and multilingual audio guides are available. Contact the team for more information about group bookings.

We leave Kilkenny city behind now and head south west to **Highbank Orchards** [<https://highbankorchards.com/>]. It's all about the apple here and you can follow the production of ciders, vinegars, syrups and spirits from "pip to sip". Rod and Julie Calder-Potts have turned the family farm into an organic orchard and onsite farm shop beloved by locals and visitors alike. And a tour of the organic orchards on Rod's tractor train is a must for any foodie. Tours take approximately 1.5 hours and group bookings are welcome.

Lunch [11km, 13 mins]

One of Ireland's most successful potters, **Nicholas Mosse** [<https://nicholasmosse.com/pages/irish-country-shop-cafe>] and his team create beautiful handcrafted pottery at a restored watermill in Bennettsbridge, County Kilkenny. The on-site café serves up tea, coffee and light lunches and after you eat, you can browse the shop or introduce yourself to the resident gaggle of geese!

Afternoon [13km, 16 mins]

Helen Finnegan made the first batch of the now legendary **Knockdrinna Farmhouse Cheese** [<http://www.knockdrinna.com/>] in her kitchen in 2004 and since then, she's turned her passion for cheese into an internationally recognised, award-winning business. Enjoy a cheese tasting at Knockdrinna Farmhouse in Stoneyford in County Kilkenny and you'll find out all you ever wanted to know about cheesemaking. Sessions cost €30 per person and must be pre-booked.

Another Kilkenny food champions can be found at **Goatsbridge Trout Farm** [<https://goatsbridgetrout.ie/>] in Thomastown. Mag Kirwan and her husband Ger run this traditional trout farm and on a farm tour they will take you through the fascinating process of farming, smoking and processing the fish. They'll also share the history and heritage behind their family business. Tours must be pre-booked and cost €15. Minimum 10 per group and maximum 30.

Overnight [39km, 33 mins]

Head south to Waterford city for the night. Eat at **Everett's** [<https://www.everetts.ie/>] for an adventure in modern Irish dining in the wine cellars of the 15th century John Collyn House, once owned by the city's most famous mayor. Sleep at the **Waterford Fitzwilton Hotel** [<https://www.fitzwiltonhotel.ie/>], just a short walk from Waterford's Quays and the city's charming Viking quarter.

Day 4 [139km] Waterford to Cork

Morning [63km, 1hr 3 mins]

County Waterford is famous for its beautiful Copper Coast and **The Sea Gardener** [<http://www.theseagardener.ie/>] offers a great way to explore its coves and beaches. Based in the seaside resort of Tramore, Marie Power runs guided walks and workshops that give you an introduction to foraging and cooking seaweed. They run from 1.5 to 3 hours but you can contact Marie directly to arrange a bespoke experience. Minimum group size is 10, maximum is 30.

We're heading west to Dungarvan now and paying a visit to the **Dungarvan Brewing Company** [<https://dungarvanbrewingcompany.com/>], a highly regarded micro-brewery that specialises in traditional ales and stouts. Here you can expect a tour of the brewery, where you'll hear about the brewing process and the ingredients that are used. Then you'll finish up with a tasting to see what makes their brews so special. The brewery can accommodate groups of up to 25 and pre-booking is essential.

Lunch

Not your average chipper – that's the promise at **And Chips** [<https://www.andchips.ie/>] in Dungarvan. Choose from fresh fish with homemade tartar sauce, homemade chicken goujons, beef or chicken burgers in a real Waterford blaa (the city's soft white roll). And of course, you'll get chips with everything.

Afternoon [76km, 1 hr 9 mins]

Jameson Irish whiskey is known around the world and at the **Jameson Experience** [<https://www.jamesonwhiskey.com/en-IE/>] in Midleton, County Cork, you get to see just what makes it so special. Take the guided tour of the Old Midleton Distillery or go for the Behind the Scenes Tour with visits to the Micro Distillery, Cooperage and Distiller's Cottage. Groups are welcome but pre-booking is essential and tours range from 75 minute to two hours.

We're heading in to Cork city now, for one of Ireland's Ancient East's true food oddities. The **Butter Museum** [<http://thebuttermuseum.com/>] tells the story of Ireland's butter trade and features a 1,000-year-old keg of butter that was long buried in a bog. Guided tours are available throughout the year (except July and August) and butter-making demonstrations take place at 12 on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

Overnight

Stay the night in the charming **Imperial Hotel** [<https://www.imperialhotelcork.com/>] in Cork city and dine at **Elbow Lane Brew and Smokehouse** [<https://www.elbowlane.ie/>], a restaurant that features its own nano-brewery.

Day 5 [184km] Cork to Waterford

Morning [85km, 1 hr 4 mins]

For a sweet start to the day, stop in to the **Galtee Honey Farm** [<https://galteehoney.com/>] beside Glengarra Woods on the southern slopes of the Galtee Mountains. The region is a breeding zone for the Native Irish Black Bee and the farm is home to the Mac Giolla Coda family, passionate beekeepers and pioneering conservationists. On your visit, you can enjoy a comparative tasting of local honeys and get a close look at the honey bees in a glass display hive. If you're feeling brave, you can even don a bee suit and take a look inside a beehive. Pre-booking is essential.

Nearby you'll find **The Apple Farm** [<http://www.theapplefarm.com/>], where Willem and Ali Traas have been producing apples and other fruits since they moved here from The Netherlands in the 1960s. Now, they grow over 60 varieties of apples, not to mention strawberries, raspberries, cherries, plums and pears. Come in the summer and you can pick your own strawberries. Drop in any time and browse the mind-boggling array of fresh produce, juices, jams and cider vinegars on offer.

Lunch [21km, 18 mins]

Café Hans [<https://www.facebook.com/Cafe-Hans-206192009412800/>] in Cashel is just a stone's throw from the iconic Rock of Cashel and offers great food in an relaxed setting.

Afternoon [12km, 16 mins]

A visit to **Cashel Irish Farmhouse Cheesemakers** [<http://www.cashelblue.com/>] is an opportunity to see how a legend is made. Drop in to the dairy and you'll get to meet the makers of the famous Cashel Blue cheese and enjoy a tasting of cheese curd, young and mature cheese so you can understand how cheese develops. The dairy is open Mondays and Tuesdays between 10am and 4pm and tours can accommodate up to 25 people. Visits must be booked in advance and cost €6 per person.

Overnight [66km, 1 hr 8 mins]

Return to the **Waterford Fitzwilton Hotel** [<https://www.fitzwiltonhotel.ie/>] for the night. Eat at **Momo** [<https://momorestaurant.ie/>] and drop in to **Davy Mac's gin bar** [<https://davymacs.ie/>] to sample some of Ireland's great artisan gins.

Day 6 [136km] Waterford to Borris

Morning

The blaa, Waterford's soft, white bread roll, dates back to the 1700s and its singularity has earned it Geographical Protected Indication Status from the EU. At **Walsh's Bakehouse** [www.walshsbakehouse.ie] in Waterford city, the blaa reigns supreme. Master bakers Michael and Dermot Walsh (the third generation of the Walsh baking dynasty) will show you how it is made and tell you about its history. The tour takes approximately one hour and pre-booking is essential.

On to another well-known Waterford product now – crystal. They've been making it in the city since 1783 and in that time, **Waterford Crystal** [<https://www.waterfordvisitorcentre.com/>] has become a by-word for luxury and quality. Take a factory tour and you'll see master craftspeople at work, blowing, moulding carving and sculpting the crystal into objects of graceful beauty. Guided tours are available seven days a week and take around 50 minutes. If your group is larger than 15 people, you must book in advance.

Lunch [58km, 1hr 7 mins]

Head to County Wexford now where you can explore the oldest operational lighthouse in the world, **Hook Head Lighthouse** [<https://hookheritage.ie/>] on a guided tour. Then drop in to the café in the former lightkeeper's cottage, which serves up tasty local food, with an emphasis on seafood. The Hook Head seafood chowder is worth the visit alone.

Afternoon [68km, 1hr 19 mins]

Regan Organic Farm [<http://reganorganicfarm.ie/>] is a perfect example of how farming can work in harmony with nature. On this certified organic farm just outside Enniscorthy in County Wexford, the Regan sisters raise chickens, ducks and pigs and on a farm visit, you can see just how they are cared for. Tours must be pre-arranged.

Then step back in time at Ireland's only authentic water-powered mill, **Ballyminane Mills** [<https://www.facebook.com/BallyminaneMills/>], which has been on the go since 1832. Third generation miller, John Murphy will show you around the three mills and demonstrate the traditional milling process still used at Ballyminane today. Visits must be pre-booked.

Overnight [26km, 30 mins]

Stay in the **Step House Hotel** [<https://www.stephousehotel.ie/index.html>] in the pretty village of Borris in County Carlow and eat in the hotel's **Cellar Restaurant**, located in the old Georgian kitchens where the menu boasts dishes such as free-range pork with Kilmore scallops. Finish the night with a pint in **O'Shea's**, a traditional pub with a hardware shop conveniently located onsite.

Day 7 [138km] Borris to Dublin

Morning [38km, 40 mins]

Right across the street from the Step House Hotel is **Borris House** [<https://borrishouse.ie/>], a grand mansion in a Tudor-Gothic style and the ancestral home of the McMorrough Kavanaghs, former kings of Leinster. The house is open to the public from May to September and tickets cost €10 per person.

If you can make the time, a wild food foraging tour with **Blackstairs Eco Trails** [<https://www.blackstairsecotrails.ie/>] is a lovely way to appreciate the biodiversity of the lush County Carlow countryside.

Our next stop is ideal for those with a sweet tooth. Nestled in rural bliss on the border of counties Carlow and Wicklow, the **Chocolate Garden of Ireland** [<https://chocolategarden.ie>] makes award-winning artisan chocolate and ice cream and offers a range of visitor experiences. A workshop lasts a little over 1.5 hours and includes tastings, a chocolate-making demonstration and a hands-on chocolate-making session. Groups must be pre-booked and group rates of €11.50 per person are available.

Lunch [33km, 36 mins]

An amazing complex built on the site of a deserted village in a Wicklow valley, **Brooke Lodge and Macreddin Village** [<https://www.brooklodge.com/en/food-village/>] is foodie heaven, where organic and free range produce and wild food are at the centre of the dining experience. Stop in for lunch at the Orchard Café (open 12.30pm-5.30pm, seven days a week during the summer month, and on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays during the off season).

Afternoon [41km, 42 mins]

A winery tour in Ireland? Why yes! At **Wicklow Way Wines** [<https://www.wicklowwaywines.ie/>], Pamela Walsh and Brett Stephenson will show you around their County Wicklow winery, where they produce small batch artisan wines made from raspberries, strawberries, blackberries and elderberries. Expect a personalised tour of the winery and a tasting of their Moinéir wines. The tour takes between 60 and 75 minutes and group rates are available. Advance booking is recommended and maximum group size is 15.

Overnight [26km, 32 mins]

Finish up your tour at the **Royal Marine Hotel** [<https://www.royalmarine.ie/>] in Dun Laoghaire, a seaside town just south of Dublin's city centre. Dine at **Oliveto at Haddington House** [<https://haddingtonhouse.ie/home/#dine>]. Then join the locals for a stroll along the pier before heading back to your room for a well-earned rest.

