

Counties Limerick & Tipperary



From marching ditties to bad puns on bathroom walls, the names Tipperary and Limerick are part of the lexicon. But, as is so often the truth, the reality bears little relationship to the lore.

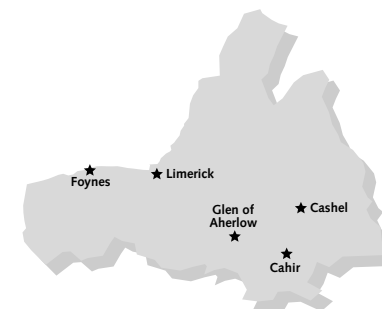
Limerick is a city with a history as dramatic as Ireland's. In a nation of hard knocks, it seems to have had more than its share. This is where generations of people fled from as soon as they could. But today it's a place where you can enjoy the delights of modern, urban Ireland, all near the shores of the Shannon Estuary.

Tipperary is surprisingly beautiful – not that Ireland has its dogs of counties – but the rolling hills, rich farmland and river valleys bordered by soaring mountains make every exploration a delight. This is a place to get near the ground; to follow a river to its source; to climb a stile to see that lonely ruin.

Both counties are places to revel in the Irish past. Ancient Celtic sights, medieval abbeys and other relics endure in solitude, waiting for discovery. Sights like the monumental Rock of Cashel and Cahir Castle are on many an itinerary, but despite their popularity are still able to move and inspire. In fact, you might find yourself whistling a merry tune as you explore Limerick and Tipperary – just leave those bathroom walls alone.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Surprising City** The pubs and restaurants in Limerick (p302), plus the delightful Hunt Museum (p300)
- **At Waters Edge** The narrow roads and Shannon vistas of the drive west of Limerick to Foynes, and its new flying boat museum (p306)
- **Over Hill and Dale** Exploring the wilds of Tipperary, from the Glen of Aherlow (p309) to the River Suir valley (p314)
- **Boiling Oil** Walking the walls and keep of Cahir's authentic and preserved castle (p314)
- **On Top of the World** Views of County Tipperary from the ancient monuments on the Rock of Cashel (p310)



■ POPULATION: 262,000

■ AREA: 6989 SQ KM

COUNTY LIMERICK

Limerick's low-lying farmland is framed on its southern and eastern boundaries by swelling uplands and mountains. Limerick city is boisterously urban in contrast and has enough historic and cultural attractions for a day's diversion. About 10km south of the city lie the haunting archaeological sites around Lough Gur and just a few kilometres southwest is the tourist-pleasing village of Adare, with its twee 19th-century rusticity.

LIMERICK CITY

☎ 061 / pop 56,200

With flashy developments along its waterfront, new top-end hotels and a splash of style from an embryonic café culture, Limerick is striving to bury its unfortunate 'stab city' moniker and join the march of Ireland to the future. Still, it's easy to see traces of the squalor, as portrayed graphically by Frank McCourt in his novel *Angela's Ashes*. Until beautification schemes take hold, the main drag, O'Connell St, remains rooted in the city's past. But that doesn't mean you should pass up the Republic's fourth largest city. It has an intriguing castle, interesting museum and several good restaurants and pubs. Perhaps nowhere else can you so easily sense the Irish transition from old to new.

History

Viking adventurers established a settlement on an island in the River Shannon in the 9th century. They fought with the native Irish for control of the site until Brian Ború's forces drove them out in 968 and established Limerick as the royal seat of the O'Brien kings. Brian Ború finally destroyed Viking power and presence in Ireland at the Battle of Clontarf in 1014. By the late 12th century, invading Normans had supplanted the Irish. The two remained divided, and throughout the Middle Ages the repressed Irish clustered to the south of the Abbey River in Irishtown, while the Anglo-Normans fortified themselves to the north, in Englishtown.

From 1690 to 1691, Limerick acquired heroic status in the endless saga of Ireland's struggle against occupation by the English. After their defeat in the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, Jacobite forces withdrew

west behind the famously strong walls of Limerick town. Months of bombardment followed and eventually the Irish Jacobite leader Patrick Sarsfield sued for peace. The terms of the Treaty of Limerick, 1691, were then agreed, and Sarsfield and 14,000 soldiers were allowed to leave the city for France. The Treaty of Limerick guaranteed religious freedom for Catholics, but the English later reneged on it and enforced fierce anti-Catholic legislation, an act of betrayal that came to symbolise the injustice of British rule.

During the 18th century, the old walls of Limerick were demolished and a well-planned and prosperous Georgian town developed. Such prosperity had waned by the early 20th century, as traditional industries fell on hard times. Several high-profile nationalists hailed from here, including Eamon de Valera. These days, technological and service industries are major employers. Call a helpline somewhere in the world and you may be speaking to someone in Limerick – if not India.

Orientation

Limerick straddles the Shannon's broadening tidal stream, where the river swings west to join the Shannon Estuary. The city has a clearly defined grid of main streets. The central thoroughfare runs roughly north to south and its name changes from Rutland St in the north to Patrick St, O'Connell St, the Crescent and Quinlan St. It then exits south along O'Connell Ave onto the Cork and Killarney roads. The main places of interest are clustered to the north on King's Island (the oldest part of Limerick and once part of Englishstown); to the south around the Crescent and Pery Sq (the city's noteworthy Georgian area); and along the riverbanks. The joint train and bus station lies southeast, off Parnell St.

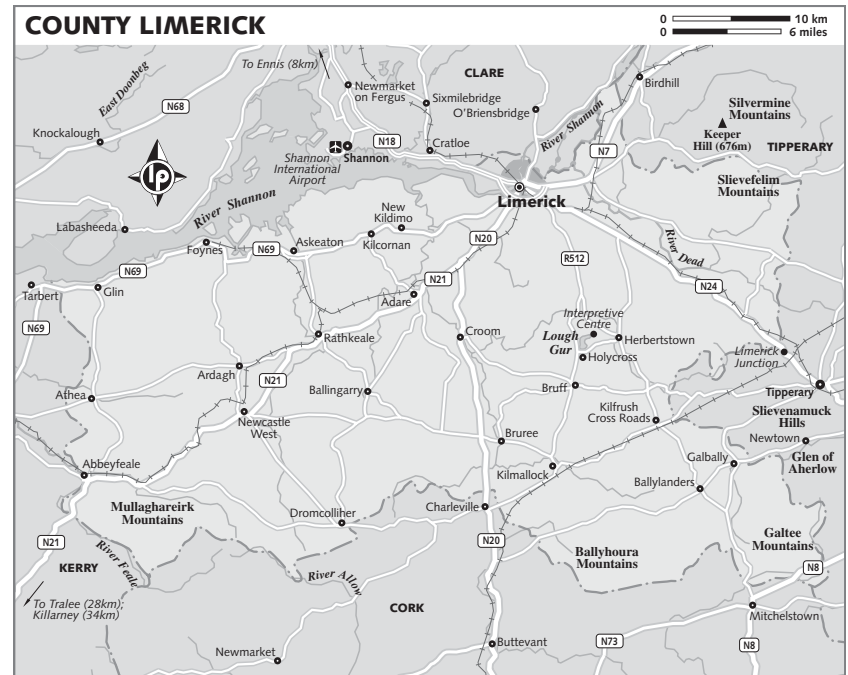
Traffic is often coagulated. A welcome new bypass south of town will join the N7 (itself being improved), N18, N20 and N24.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Eason (☎ 419 588; 9 O'Connell St) A good place to source newspapers and magazines.

O'Mahony's (☎ 418 155; 120 O'Connell St) Ireland's largest independent bookshop has occupied these premises for over 100 years, with an excellent selection of books of local and regional interest.



INTERNET ACCESS

Check at the tourist office for new access points. There's also internet access at Limerick City Library, below.

Netlink (☎ 467 869; 11 Sarsfield St; per 15min €2; ☎ 9am-9pm) Small and busy.

LAUNDRY

Superwash Launderette (☎ 414 027; 19 Ellen St; per load €8-18; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat)

LEFT LUGGAGE

Limerick Train Station (☎ 217 331; Colbert Station, Parnell St; per item 24hr €2.50; ☎ 8am-6pm & 6.30pm-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-6pm Sat & Sun)

LIBRARIES

Limerick City Library (☎ 407 501; The Granary, Michael St; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mon & Tue, to 8pm Wed-Fri, to 1pm Sat)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Both of the following hospitals have accident and emergency departments.

Midwestern Regional Hospital (☎ 482 219, 482 338; Dooradoyle)

St John's Hospital (☎ 415 822; John's Sq)

MONEY

ATMs can be found at shopping complexes, and bus and train stations.

AIB (☎ 414 388; 106/108 O'Connell St) ATMs and bureau de change.

Ulster Bank (☎ 410 200; 95 O'Connell St) Also has ATMs and bureau de change.

POST

Main Post Office (☎ 316 777; Lower Cecil St)

TOILETS

Toilets (Arthur's Quay; admission €0.20)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Limerick Tourist Office (☎ 317 522; www.shannonregiontourism.ie; Arthur's Quay; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat) A large, impressive facility with regional information; open longer hours in summer. Ask here about *Angela's Ashes* tours. Also look around town for red-clad 'street ambassadors' offering advice and info.

Dangers & Annoyances

Reputation aside, central Limerick is not any less safe than other urban Irish areas. Keep alert at night and you should be fine.

Sights

KING JOHN'S CASTLE

The massive curtain walls and towers of Limerick's showpiece **castle** (☎ 360 788; www.shannonheritage.com; Nicholas St; adult/child €9/5.25; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, 10.30am-4.30pm Nov-Mar, last admission 1hr before closing) are best viewed from the west bank of the River Shannon. The castle was built by King John of England between 1200 and 1212 on the site of an earlier fortification. It served as the military and administrative centre of the rich Shannon region.

Inside there are re-creations of brutal medieval weapons like the trebuchet, as well as excavated Viking sites, reconstructed Norman features and other artefacts. Walk the walls and pretend you're carrying a bucket of boiling oil.

Across medieval Thomond Bridge, on the other side of the river, the **Treaty Stone** marks the spot on the riverbank where the Treaty of Limerick was signed. Before you cross the bridge look out for the 18th-century **Bishop's Palace** (☎ 313 399; Church St; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Fri) and the ancient **toll gate**.

HUNT MUSEUM

Although named for its benefactors, this **museum** (☎ 312 833; www.huntmuseum.com; Palladian

Custom House, Rutland St; adult/child €7.50/3.75; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) might well be named for the kind of hunt you do for treasure. Visitors are encouraged to open drawers and otherwise poke around the finest collection of Bronze Age, Iron Age and medieval treasures outside Dublin. The 2000-plus items are from the private collection of the late John and Gertrude Hunt, antique dealers and consultants, who championed historic preservation throughout the region. Look out for a tiny, but exquisite, bronze horse by da Vinci, and a Syracusan coin thought to have been one of the 30 pieces of silver paid to Judas for his betrayal of Christ. Cycladic sculptures, a Giacometti drawing and paintings by Renoir, Picasso and Jack B Yeats add to the feast. Guided tours from the dedicated and colourful volunteers are available.

The museum has an excellent in-house restaurant, DuCartes (see p303).

GEORGIAN HOUSE & GARDEN

There is an engaging eeriness about the lofty, echoing rooms of the restored **Georgian House** (☎ 314 130; 2 Pery Sq; adult/child €6/4; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri), a re-creation showing how Limerick's swells once lived. Lavish marble, stucco and wall decorations adorn the main rooms, while things are decidedly downscale when you reach the bare boards and dusty furnishings of the servants' quarters. You'll say 'Brace yourself, Bridget!' reading the hackneyed but entertaining limericks on various wall plaques. The restored back garden leads to a coach house that contains a photographic memoir of Limerick. Things get truly downscale in the small but evocative **Ashes Exhibition**, which features a recon-

struction of the childhood home of novelist Frank McCourt.

LIMERICK CITY GALLERY OF ART

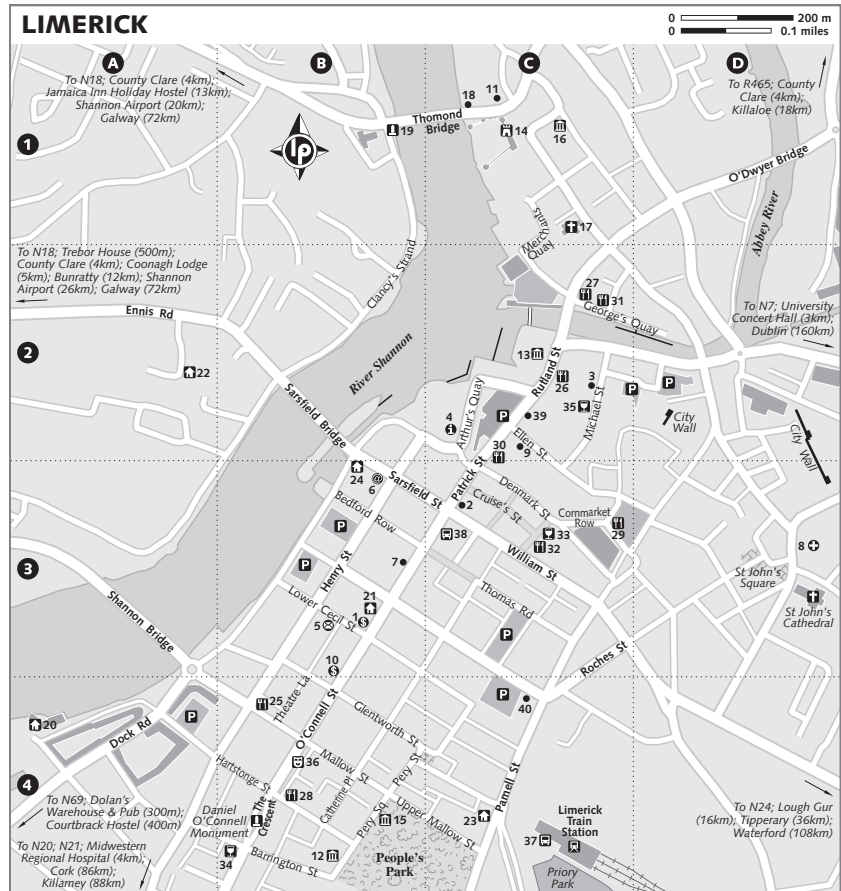
A mix of traditional paintings from the last 300 years covers every inch of wall space in the **Limerick City Gallery of Art** (☎ 310 633; Carnegie Bldg, Pery Sq; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Wed & Fri, to 7pm Thu, to 1pm Sat). The gallery is beside the peaceful People's Park, at the heart of Georgian Limerick. The permanent collection features work by Sean Keating and Jack B Yeats. Check out Keating's atmospheric *Kelp Burners* and Harry Kernoff's *The Turf Girl*; both infuse their traditional subjects with great energy and joy. The gallery also stages changing exhibitions of often pseudo-scandalous works and is the home of **ev+a** (www.ev.a.ie), a long-running city-wide contemporary art exhibition held each spring.

ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL

Limerick's ancient **cathedral** (☎ 310 293; Bridge St; admission by €2 donation; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat May-Nov, to 1pm Sat Dec-Apr) was founded in 1168 by Domhnall Mór O'Brien, king of Munster. Parts of the 12th-century Romanesque western doorway, nave and aisles survive, and there are splendid 15th-century black-oak misericords (support ledges for choristers), unique examples of their kind in Ireland. It's worth checking if there are any musical events scheduled.

LIMERICK CITY MUSEUM

This small **museum** (☎ 417 826; Castle Lane; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2.15-5pm Tue-Sat) is beside King John's Castle. Exhibits include Stone



INFORMATION		Limerick City Gallery of Art.....15 B4		Market Square Brasserie.....28 B4	
AIB Bank.....1 B3	Limerick City Museum.....16 C1	Milk Market.....29 C3			
Eason.....2 C3	St Mary's Cathedral.....17 C1	Mojo Café Bar.....30 C2			
Limerick City Library.....3 C2	Toll Gate.....18 C1	Moll Darby's.....31 C2			
Limerick Tourist Office.....4 C2	Treaty Stone.....19 B1	O'Connors Bakery.....32 C3			
Main Post Office.....5 B3					
Netlink.....6 B3	SLEEPING				
O'Mahony's.....7 B3	Clarion Hotel.....20 A4	DRINKING			
St John's Hospital.....8 D3	George.....21 B3	Nancy Blake's.....33 C3			
Superwash Laundrette.....9 C2	Green Eagles.....22 A2	South's.....34 B4			
Toilets.....(see 4)	Railway Hotel.....23 C4	Trinity Rooms.....35 C2			
Ulster Bank.....10 B3	Sarsfield Bridge Hotel.....24 B3				
		ENTERTAINMENT			
		Belltable Arts Centre.....36 B4			
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	EATING				
Ashes Exhibition.....(see 12)	Brülée's.....25 B4	TRANSPORT			
Bishop's Palace.....11 C1	Chimes.....(see 36)	Bus Station.....37 C4			
Georgian House & Garden.....12 B4	Ducarts.....(see 13)	Bus Stop.....38 C3			
Hunt Museum.....13 C2	Green Onion.....26 C2	Emerald Alpine.....39 C2			
King John's Castle.....14 C1	Locke Bar.....27 C2	McMahon's Cycle World.....40 C4			

Age and Bronze Age artefacts, the civic sword, samples of Limerick silver, and examples of Limerick's lace- and kid-glove manufacturing. There are also exhibits from the late 19th century.

Walking Tours

A local development group runs two-hour walking tours (☎ 318 106; per person €10). One, a popular tour of Limerick locations mentioned in *Angela's Ashes*, starts and ends at the tourist office on Arthur's Quay (tour starts at 2.30pm). The second historical walking tour, beginning at 11am and 2.30pm Monday to Friday, has a start point by arrangement. Confirm both with the tourist office.

Sleeping

If you can find a place to stay near the city centre, you can walk around to enjoy the nightlife. Otherwise you'll be on or near approach roads, so you may wish to opt for something more bucolic.

BUDGET

Jamaica Inn Holiday Hostel (☎ 369 220; www.jamaica.inn.ie; Mount Levers, Sixmilebridge, Co Clare; dm €18-19, d €27-29; ☎ ☑) A good option 13km northwest of the city. Rooms range from en suite singles to 10-bed dorms. There are bus connections daily (except Sunday) to Limerick and Shannon Airport.

Courtbrack Hostel (☎ 302 500; www.courtbrack.accom.com; Courtbrack Ave; dm/s/d €24/30/52; ☎ Jun-Aug; ☑) A few minutes walk along Dock Rd from the Shannon Bridge. Rates include a light breakfast, and there's a kitchen, internet room and laundry.

MIDRANGE

Alexandra Terrace on O'Connell Ave has several midrange B&Bs. Ennis Rd, leading northwest towards Shannon, also has a selection, although most are a kilometre or so from the centre.

Trebtor House (☎ 454 632; www.trebtorhouse.com; Ennis Rd; s/d €45/64; ☎ May-Sep; ☎) The McSweeney family offer a warm welcome in this classic suburban townhouse (note the pebbledash exterior), a 10-minute walk from the city centre. The five rooms are basic but have TVs.

Glen Eagles (☎ 455 521; gleneaglesbandb@eircom.net; 12 Vereker Gardens, Ennis Rd; r €45-70; ☎ Feb-Nov; ☎) Across the river from the city centre, Glen Eagles is on a peaceful cul-de-sac and has

four decent-sized, comfortable rooms and a cheerful welcome.

Coonagh Lodge (☎ 327 050; www.coonaghlodge.com; r €45-75; ☎ ☑) A cute little B&B with a traditional high-pitched roof, the six rooms here vary from singles to rather sizeable family rooms. All have wi-fi. It's in Coonagh, a small town off the N18 west of Limerick.

Railway Hotel (☎ 413 653; www.railwayhotel.ie; Parnell St; r €46-92; ☎) Right across from the bus and train station, this long-established hotel is busy and shows the wear, but the location is uberconvenient. The 30 rooms are good-sized.

Sarsfield Bridge Hotel (☎ 317 179; www.tsbh.ie; Sarsfield Bridge; r €67-125; ☎ ☑) A new and stylish place right on the river, this hotel eschews frills in order to keep prices moderate. Many of the 55 somewhat compact rooms have good views.

TOP END

George (☎ 460 400; www.thegeorgeboutiquehotel.com; O'Connell St; r €100-200; ☎ ☑) Opened in 2006, this sleek place has a popular atrium lobby and small terrace above the busy streets of the city centre. The design looks like something out of a Sunday supplement – all warm colours with luxurious touches. The 127 rooms have wi-fi, iPod docks and more.

Clarion Hotel (☎ 469 555; www.clarionhotellimerick.com; r from €100; ☎ ☑) A bold exclamation mark on the waterfront development, this striking hotel has modernist accents and is a vision of polished metal and glass. Rooms at the end of corridors seem to hover over the river. There's wi-fi throughout and many business facilities.

Eating

Seafood is *the* thing in Limerick and there's a few quite notable options. On weekends be sure to book for the better places. George's Quay has some continental flair and tables along the water. Locals call it 'first-date row'.

BUDGET

O'Connors Bakery (☎ 417 422; Cruises St; lunch €4-7) The local branch of the tasty regional chain of bakeries, family-run O'Connors has classic fresh-from-the-oven smells as you walk in. Find more than you expected in Limerick? They are renowned for wedding cakes.

Mojo Café Bar (☎ 410 898; 15 Patrick St; mains €4-10) This busy bar and café has sandwiches, paninis, toasted sandwiches and a long list

of daily hot lunch specials. The coffee is a cut above the norm.

Chimes (☎ 319 866; Belltable Arts Centre, 69 O'Connell St; breakfast €4, mains €6-9; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) The art centre's basement café has the sort of creative, healthy fare you'd expect. Good specials.

MIDRANGE

DuCart's (☎ 312 662; Hunt Museum, Rutland St; meals €5-12; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) Window seats overlooking a grassy verge and the Shannon are bathed with light even on the gloomiest of days. The food does the cultural surroundings proud, with a changing selection of salads, soups, sandwiches and hot dishes. But try to forgo something at the start in order to enjoy a delicious dessert finish.

Locke Bar (☎ 413 733; George's Quay; mains €9-15) When the Atlantic gusts abate, enjoy the tables waterside at this sprawling café-cum-bar. You can get lost in the maze of rooms and bars. Enjoy the pub menu of pasta, fish and chips, burgers and more amidst the scrum, or in more refined quarters upstairs.

Green Onion (☎ 400 710; Old Town Hall, Rutland St; mains €10-20; ☎ noon-10pm Tue-Sat) Located in what was once Limerick's 19th-century town hall, the menu at Green Onion is as eclectic as the interior design and often just as striking. Food is served all day and includes a creative range of sandwiches and salads. Think modern Irish with global influences. At night, there's a changing line-up of finely crafted choices and you can enjoy three courses for under €30.

Moll Darby's (☎ 411 511; George's Quay; mains €12-30; ☎ noon-2pm Mon-Fri, 5.30-10pm daily) Exposed brick, dark wood and bundles of nautical schtick make Moll's an attractive and atmospheric choice on George's Quay. The red-checked tablecloths add a jaunty air which will only deepen as you slurp down the superb oysters and other seasonal seafood delights.

TOP END

Brûlée's (☎ 319 931; cnr Henry & Mallow Sts; mains from €20; ☎ 5.30-9pm Tue-Sat) From outside, you get a glimpse of white tablecloths and candles inside this elegant old house. The food lives up to the setting and is best described as modern Irish with plenty of European accents. Mediterranean flavours abound and there's a good and varying selection of local seafood.

Market Square Brasserie (☎ 316 311; 74 O'Connell St; mains from €20; ☎ 5.30-10pm Tue-Sat) Tucked away in

the basement of an attractive Georgian house, the food here is carefully prepared and artfully presented. Expect Irish meats and seafood in interesting sauces and surprising flavours. Service is smooth and the setting intimate. Be sure to book in advance.

SELF-CATERING

Pick from local produce and foods like cheese at the **Milk Market** (☎ 415 180; Cornmarket Row; ☎ 8am-noon), a traditional farmer's market held in Limerick's old market buildings.

Drinking & Entertainment

Limerick nightlife features local acts and visiting headliners; you'll find everything from trad Irish to trash rock, indie, chart, soul, reggae, drum 'n bass, jazz and classical, as well as theatre and stand-up comedy. Most clubs have strict door checks. The free *Limerick Event Guide* (LEG; www.eightball.ie/leg.php) can be found in pubs, eateries and hotels all over town.

Dolan's Warehouse (☎ 314 483; www.dolanspub.com; 3/4 Dock Rd) Limerick's best venue for live music promises an unbeatable gig list that has featured everyone from Roper, Kate McGarry and folk legends The Fureys, to The Twang, as well as cutting-edge stand-ups. The Warehouse nightclub is grafted on to the atmospheric Dolan's Pub, where you're guaranteed authentic trad music sessions most nights. There's usually live jazz upstairs.

Trinity Rooms (☎ 411 177; www.trinityrooms.ie; The Granary, Michael St) Three venues in one reflect the name of this vast club in a 300-year-old waterside building. The Green Room front-of-house bar is open for food and drink all day, and has DJs and live bands after dark. The Quarter Club is a late-night chill-out lounge with R&B emphasis, while the Main Room blasts into the early hours with a hot list of DJs. Courtyards rock on mild nights and there's often barbecues.

Nancy Blake's (☎ 416 443; Upper Denmark St) There's a dusting of sawdust on the floor and peat on the fire in the cosy front pub of this old stand-by. Out back is a vast covered drinking zone where there's often live music or televised matches.

South's (☎ 318 850; 4 Quinlan St) The *Angela's Ashes* connection is played up here (the loos are named Frank and Angela). But the current upscale mirrors and glass motif bears little resemblance to the pub where Frank's father

knocked 'em back. Enjoy a traditional pint in a posh setting.

Belltable Arts Centre (☎ 319 866; www.belltable.ie; 69 O'Connell St) The Belltable covers everything in theatre, visual arts, music, film and comedy – you're as likely to catch a classic work as something cutting edge. There's an art gallery too, and the Belltable's annual festival of fringe theatre, Unfringed (January and February), gets better every year.

University Concert Hall (UCH; ☎ 322 322; www.uch.ie; University of Limerick) Permanent home of the Irish Chamber Orchestra, the UCH adds lustre to Limerick's cultural scene with visits from world-class performers and regular concerts, opera, drama and dance events. Look for comedy too from the likes of Jon Kenny.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Shannon Airport (see p375) in County Clare handles domestic and international flights. A taxi from Limerick city to the airport costs €32.

BUS

Bus Éireann (☎ 313 333; Parnell St) services operate from the bus and train station near the city centre. There are regular services to Dublin (one way, €11.30 1¼ hours), Tralee (€13.50, two hours), Cork (€10.80, 1¼ hours, Galway, Killarney, Rosslare, Ennis, Shannon, Derry and most other centres. You can also get off in Limerick at the bus stop on O'Connell St.

TRAIN

There are regular trains to all the main towns from **Limerick Railway Station** (☎ 315 555; Parnell St): six trains daily to Dublin Heuston (€43, 2½ hours) and eight trains daily to Ennis (€8.20, 40 minutes). Other routes including Cork, Tralee, Tipperary, Cahir and Waterford involve changing at Limerick Junction, 20km southeast of Limerick.

Getting Around

Regular buses connect Limerick's bus and train station with Shannon Airport (€5 one way), while a taxi from the city centre to the airport costs €32. The airport is 26km north-west of Limerick, about 30 minutes by car.

Limerick is small enough to get around easily on foot or by bike. To walk across

town from St Mary's Cathedral to the train station takes about 15 minutes.

Taxis can be found outside the tourist office, the bus and train station, and in Thomas St.

Scratch card parking discs (€2 per hour) are available from most newsagents and corner shops. There are numerous parking garages around the city at varying rates.

Bikes can be hired at **Emerald Alpine** (☎ 416 983; www.irelandrentabike.com; 1 Patrick St; per day/week €20/80). The company will also retrieve or deliver a bike from anywhere in Ireland for €25. **McMahons Cycle World** (☎ 415 202; www.mcmahonscycleworld.com; 30 Roches St; per day/week €20/80) offers free delivery and collection in the Limerick area, Shannon Airport and Galway.

AROUND LIMERICK CITY

To the south of the city there's a clutch of outstanding historic sites that reward a day visit by car or a couple of days by bike. Only the larger villages are served by bus. For many, the main trip out of town involves Bunratty Castle (see p376) in nearby County Clare.

Lough Gur

The area around this horseshoe-shaped lake has dozens of intriguing archaeological sites. **Grange Stone Circle**, known as the Lios, is a superb 4000-year-old circular enclosure made up of 113 embanked uprights. It is the largest prehistoric circle of its kind in Ireland. There's roadside parking and access to the site is free. To get there, leave Limerick on the N24 road south to Waterford. Look for a sign to Lough Gur indicating a right turn at the roundabout outside town. This takes you onto the R512. In about 18km you reach the stone circle.

Around 1km further south along the R512, at Holycross garage and post office, a left turn takes you towards Lough Gur, past a ruined 15th-century **church**, and a **wedge tomb** on the other side of the road.

Another 2km leads to a car park by Lough Gur and the thatched replica of a Neolithic hut containing the **Lough Gur Stone Age Centre** (☎ 360 788; www.shannonheritage.com; adult/child €5/3; ☎ 10am-5.30pm early May-mid-Sep; P). The centre has a good exhibit on prehistoric Irish farms (meaning pre-potato-era) and a small **museum** displaying Neolithic artefacts and a replica of the Lough Gur shield that's now in the National Museum in Dublin. Other displays explain recent emigration from the

area, which included a number of future American mobsters.

There are short walks along the lake's edges that take you to burial mounds, standing stones, ancient enclosures and other points of interest. Admission to these sites is free. The whole area is ideal for picnics.

Kilmallock

☎ 063 / pop 1400

The scattering of medieval buildings here is reason for a visit and confirms the town's status during the Middle Ages as Ireland's third-largest town (after Dublin and Kilkenny). Kilmallock developed around a 7th-century abbey, and from the 14th to the 17th centuries it was the seat of the Earls of Desmond. The village lies beside the River Lubach, 26km south of Limerick, a world away from the city's urban racket.

Coming into Kilmallock from Limerick, the first thing you'll see (to your left) is a **medieval stone mansion** – one of 30 or so that housed the town's prosperous merchants and landowners. Further along, the street dodges around the four-storey **King's Castle**, a 15th-century tower house with a ground-floor archway through which the pavement now runs. Across the road, a lane leads down to the tiny **Kilmallock Museum** (☎ 91300; Sheares St; admission free; ☎ 11am-3pm). It houses a random collection of historical artefacts, a model of the town in 1597 and information for a walking tour around town.

Beyond the museum and across the River Lubach are the moody and extensive ruins of the 13th-century **Dominican priory**, which boasts a splendid five-light window in the choir.

Returning to the main street, head back towards Limerick city, then turn left into Orr St, which runs down to the 13th-century **Collegiate Church**. This has a round tower dating probably to an earlier, pre-Norman monastery on the site.

Further south along the main street, turn left (on foot, the road is one-way against you) into Wolfe Tone St. On the right, just before the bridge, you'll see a plaque marking the house where the Irish poet Aindrias Mac Craith died in 1795. Across the road, one of the pretty, single-storey cottages (the fifth one from the bridge) preserves a 19th-century interior. Obtain the key from next door.

Off the other side of the main street, in Emmet St, is **Blossom Gate**, the one surviving gate of the original medieval town wall.

Kilmallock has an excellent facility in its **Friars' Gate Theatre and Arts Centre** (☎ 98727; www.friarsgate.ie; Main St), where you can also find tourism information about the village. The centre hosts art exhibitions and has a fine little theatre in which it stages plays and music events.

Deebert House (☎ 98106; www.deeberthouse.com; r €30-70; ☎ Feb-Nov; P) is a grand Georgian mansion with five rooms (most have an en suite), gorgeous gardens and a playground. It's best reached from the southern exit of the village by turning off down the road signed 'Tipperary'. Deebert House is on the corner at the next junction. Inquire about rates for the two self-catering apartments.

Two Bus Éireann buses run Monday to Saturday from Limerick to Kilmallock (€8.70, one hour).

ADARE & AROUND

☎ 061 / pop 1150

Tourists are drawn to Adare by the busload, which is sort of a shame as the roads are already pretty clogged. But suffer the traffic in high season and you'll be rewarded by scores of medieval buildings and rows of thatched cottages that look, ahem, like they are right out of an English village (blame the 19th-century English landlord, the Earl of Dunraven). Underneath the crowds is a charming Irish village and during slack times its inherent charm is undeniable. Note: this is Ground Zero for many a wedding portrait; expect a passel of glowing brides, frantic grooms and pained fathers.

Located on the River Maigue, Adare lies 16km southwest of Limerick on the busy N21. There's street-side parking in the village, but the best bet is a free car park behind the heritage centre.

Information

AIB Near the tourist office; has an ATM and bureau de change.

Farrier's Internet Café (☎ 396 163; Main St; per 15min €2; ☎ 10am-6pm) Has good coffee drinks.

Tourist office (☎ 396 255; www.shannonregiontourism.ie; Adare Heritage Centre, Main St; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, closed Jan) Open longer in summer.

Sights

ADARE HERITAGE CENTRE

In the middle of the village is the **heritage centre** (☎ 396 666; Main St; adult/child €5/3.50; ☎ 9am-6pm). The centre's audiovisual presentation and

exhibits explain the history and the medieval context of Adare's buildings in an entertaining way (note the happy horse). Admission includes entry fee and tour of Adare Castle (right). In winter the centre may close at 4pm.

RELIGIOUS HOUSES

Before the Tudor dissolution of the monasteries (1536–39), Adare had three flourishing religious houses, the remains of which can still be seen. In the village itself, next to the heritage centre, the dramatic tower and southern wall of the **Church of the Holy Trinity** date from the 13th-century Trinitarian priory that was restored by the first earl of Dunraven. Holy Trinity is now a Catholic church. There's a restored 14th-century **dovecot** down the side-turning next to the church.

The ruins of a **Franciscan friary**, founded by the earl of Kildare in 1464, stand in the middle of Adare Manor golf course beside the River Maigue. Public access is assured, but let them know at the clubhouse that you intend to visit. A track leads away from the clubhouse car park for about 400m – watch out for flying golf balls. There's a handsome tower and a fine *sedilia* (row of seats for priests) in the southern wall of the chancel.

South of the village, on the N21 and close to the bridge over the River Maigue, is the Church of Ireland parish church, once the **Augustinian friary**, founded in 1316. It was also known as the Black Abbey. The interior of the church is pleasantly cavernous, but the real joy is the atmospheric little cloister.

A pleasant **riverside path**, with wayside seats, starts from just outside the friary gates. Look for a narrow access gap and head off alongside the river. After about 250m, turn left along the road to reach

the centre of Adare, where the main road intrudes noisily.

ADARE CASTLE

Dating back to around 1200, this picturesque **feudal ruin** (admission & tour incl with Heritage Centre admission; ☎ 10am–6pm Jul–Oct) saw rough usage until it was finally wrecked for good by Cromwell's troops in 1657. By then it had already lost its strategic importance. Restoration work is ongoing; look for the ruined great hall with its early 13th-century windows. When tours are not on, you can view the castle from the busy main road, or more peacefully from the riverside footpath or the grounds of the Augustinian friary.

CELTIC THEME PARK & GARDENS

About 8km northwest of Adare there's an interesting collection of re-created 'Celtic' structures (plus a few originals) at **Celtic Park** (☎ 394 243; Kilcornan; adult/child €6/free; ☎ 9.30am–6pm mid-Mar–mid-Oct). The park is located on the site of an original Celtic settlement. There's an extensive rose garden and planting of rare local plants including orchids.

Sleeping

There's no shortage of B&Bs about. There are also a few large hotels with plenty of room for bus parking.

Adare Camping & Caravan Park (☎ 395 376; www.adarecamping.com; Adare; camp sites €20) This sheltered, uncrowded site is about 4km south of Adare off the N21 and R519. You can fondle the friendly donkey.

Smithfield House (☎ 64114; gklowe@eircom.net; Croagh, Rathkeale; r €40–70; (P)) Some 4km west of Adare on the N21, this 1780 Georgian farmhouse has four comfy rooms and a bucolic farm setting. Visit with the many dairy cows or make friendly with some of the numerous horses.

DETOUR: SCENIC N69

Narrow and generally peaceful, the N69 road follows the Shannon Estuary due west from Limerick for 65km to Listowel (see p281). You'll enjoy some great views of the water and seemingly endless rolling green hills laced with stone walls. You'll also discover a number of tiny heritage museums and gardens (most usually only open in the peak season). However, at Foynes there's a major attraction in the **Foyne's Flying Boat Museum** (☎ 069-65416; www.flyingboatmuseum.com; adult/child €8/5; ☎ 10am–6pm Apr–Oct). From 1939 to 1945 this was the landing place for the flying boats that linked North America with the British Isles. Big Pan Am Clippers – there's a replica here – would set down in the estuary and refuel. The flights were often filled with wartime intrigue.

Elm House (☎ 396 306; Mondellihy; s/d €47/68; (P)) A peaceful location behind a grove of trees adds to the friendly, relaxed atmosphere. There are four rooms, one with en suite. The B&B is located 1km north of the village

Berkeley Lodge (☎ 396 857; www.adare.org; Station Rd; r €55–80; (P)) One of several nice B&Bs on Station Rd close to the village, this six-room house has TVs in the rooms, great breakfasts and welcomes early arrivals from Shannon Airport.

Dunraven Arms (☎ 396 633; www.dunravenhotel.com; Main St; s/d €170/190; (P) ☎ ☎) The high-class choice of Adare, this 1792 inn sits discreetly behind extensive plantings. All 86 rooms have wi-fi and a high standard of traditional luxury. The leisure centre boasts a pool and other watery delights.

Eating & Drinking

Food choices lean towards the kind of twee places that one would expect in such a haven for cuteness.

Dovecot (☎ 396 449; Adare Heritage Centre, Main St; lunch €4–12; ☎ 9am–5pm) This bright and airy cafeteria packs 'em in for typical, if good, breakfast and lunch fare.

Seán Collins (☎ 396 400; Main St; meals €5–10) Adare's most traditional pub – despite a recent refurbishment – has a good menu of pub favourites that you can enjoy at the tables out front. On Sunday's there's trad music (more often in summer).

Inn Between (☎ 396 633; Main St; mains €12–22; ☎ noon–3pm & 6.30–9.30pm) In an oh-so-quiet thatched cottage across from its parent, the Dunraven Arms Hotel, the Inn Between has a creative modern Irish menu created by chef Sandra Earl. Best bets are game, roasts and local seafood.

Wild Geese (☎ 396 451; Main St; mains €20–30; ☎ 6.30–10pm Tue–Sat) In a town of tough competition in the charming cottage sweepstakes, this one may be the winner – certainly it is for food. The ever-changing menu celebrates the best of Southwest Ireland's foods, from scallops to sumptuous rack of lamb. The preparations are imaginative, the service smooth and polished.

Bill Chawke Lounge Bar (☎ 396 160; Main St) There's trad music every Thursday night and a sing-along on Friday nights (or any other night that the pints loosen up the baritones). There's a beer garden too.

Getting There & Away

Hourly buses link Adare to Limerick (€4, 25 minutes). Many continue on to Tralee (€13.50, 1¼ hours). Others serve Killarney (€13.50, 1¼ hours). Pick up a timetable from the tourist office or check at the bus stop.

COUNTY TIPPERARY

Landlocked Tipperary boasts the sort of fertile soil that farmers dream of. There's still an upper-crust gloss to traditions here. Local fox hunts are in full legal cry during the winter season and the villages can look like something out of the English shires. The central area of the county is low-lying, but rolling hills spill over from adjoining counties. There's good walking, especially in the Glen Of Aherlow near Tipperary town. Of course, the real crowd-pleasers are iconic Cashel, and the Cahir and its castle. In between, you'll find delights along pretty much any country road you choose.

TIPPERARY TOWN

☎ 062 / pop 4600

Tipperary (Tiobrad Árann) has a storied name, largely due to the WWI song. And indeed, you may find it a long road to Tipperary as the N24 and a web of regional roads converge on the centre and traffic often moves at the same speed as the armies at Verdun. The town itself has few pretensions but it's a useful stop for exploring the Slievenamuck Hills, Galtee Mountains and the Glen of Aherlow.

The **tourist office** (☎ 80520; Excel Heritage Centre, Mitchell St; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat) is reached via St Michael's St, a side street leading 200m off the northern side of Main St. There's a car park alongside the heritage centre, which also has a small gallery, movie theatre, good **genealogy centre** (☎ 80552; ☎ 9.30–4.40pm Mon–Fri) and **internet access** (per 10min €1).

Banks, ATMs, bureau de change and all manner of shops can be found along Main St. The post office is on Davis St, off the north side of Main St.

Midway along Main St, there's a **statue of Charles T Kickham** (1828–82), a local novelist (author of *Knocknagow*, a novel about rural life) and Young Irelander. He spent four years in London's Pentonville Prison in the 1860s for treason.



Sleeping

There's not a lot to choose from in Tipperary town, but standard B&Bs can be found along the N24 on either side of town.

Ach na Sheen (☎ 51298; www.achnasheen.net; Bansa Rd; r €50-90; 📍) An excellent choice, this place is on the immediate outskirts of town, on the N24 towards Bansa. It's got a lovely garden setting and the eight rooms are equipped with TVs and other niceties.

Aisling (☎ 33307; www.aislingbedandbreakfast.com; R664; r €45-65; 📍) There's a stately in the expansive gardens, and flowers in bloom much of the year. The four rooms are country-cosy and all the fresh air will ready you for a hearty breakfast. It's on the road to the Glen of Aherlow.

Eating

There's a regular food market in and around the Excel Heritage Centre's parking lot.

Tipp's Sporting Pub (☎ 51716; 50 Main St; mains €7-15) Also known as the Kirkham House in honour of the local patriot, this old pub has carvery lunches that include smoked haddock and cod pie. On Tuesday nights there are trad music sessions.

Entertainment

Tipperary Racecourse (☎ 51537; www.tipperaryraces.com; Limerick Rd) One of Ireland's leading tracks, it's 3km out of town and has regular meetings during the year. See the local press for details. The course is within walking distance of Limerick Junction station. On race days there are minibus pick-ups from Tipperary town; phone for details.

Getting There & Away BUS

Most buses stop on Abbey St beside the river. Bus Éireann runs up to eight buses daily on the Limerick–Waterford route (€8.10, two hours) via Cahir and Clonmel. Service is also frequent to Limerick (€4.50, 40 minutes). **Bernard Kavanagh** (☎ 51563; www.bkavcoaches.com) runs one morning service, Monday to Saturday, to Dublin via Cahir and Cashel (€6, 50 minutes). Buses leave at 7.40am from outside the Marian Hall at the northern end of St Michael's St.

Rafferty Travel (☎ 51555; Main St) does bookings for Bus Éireann and for Iarnród Éireann.

TRAIN

To get to the train station, head south along Bridge St. Tipperary is on the Waterford–

Limerick Junction line. There are two daily services to Cahir (25 minutes), Clonmel, Carrick-on-Suir, Waterford and Rosslare Harbour, and multiple connections to Cork, Kerry and Dublin from **Limerick Junction** (☎ 51406), barely 3km from Tipperary station along the Limerick road.

Getting Around

BICYCLE

Springhouse Bicycle Hire (☎ 31329; gmrbailey@eircom.net; Kilshane; rental day/week €20/80) has bikes and can offer cycling advice for the region. They also have a small B&B and are located on the N24, just southeast of Tipperary.

GLEN OF AHERLOW & GALTEE MOUNTAINS

South of Tipperary are the shapely Slievenamuck Hills and Galtee Mountains, separated by the broad, chequered valley of the Glen of Aherlow. A 25km scenic drive through the Glen is signposted from Tipperary town. At the eastern end of the Glen, between Tipperary and Cahir, is Bansa (An Bháinseach). The village marks the start of a 20km trip west to Galbally, an easy bike ride or scenic drive along the R663 that takes in the best of the county's landscapes.

The R663 and the R664 south from Tipperary converge at Newtown at the **Coach Road Inn** (☎ 56240), a fine old pub that's popular with walkers and a good source of information on the area. Another good resource is the local visitor information website (www.aherlow.com). The terrain through the area ranges from the lush riverbanks of the Aherlow River to pine forests in the hills and windswept, rocky grasslands that seem to stretch on forever.

There's also excellent walking throughout the area and the views from the hills across the Glen are always spectacular (when it's not raining that is). There's a popular **look-out** and historic **statue of Christ** just north of Newtown on the R664.

Sleeping

The B&Bs near Tipperary (left) are all convenient to the Glen. In addition there's a good range of rural accommodation – much of it catering to walkers. Most places also have self-catering accommodation for longer stays.

Ballynacourty House Camping Park & B&B (☎ 56559; www.camping.ie; Glen of Aherlow; camp sites €18, r €45-80; 📍 mid-Apr–Sep; 📍) Set against a great backdrop of the Galtees, this attractive site is

10km west from Bansha, and past Newtown. It has excellent facilities, as well as a fine garden, restaurant, wine bar and tennis court. An old, stone house has been renovated and now offers B&B accommodation.

Bansha House (☎ 54194; www.tipp.ie/banshahs.htm; Bansha; s/d €50/90; (P)) Period elegance and high ceilings characterise this Georgian country house in spacious grounds. Set amidst farmland and close to walking paths, it's a great getaway. The house is signposted and is 250m along a lane at the western entrance to Bansha.

Rathellen House (☎ 54376; www.rathellenhouse.com; Raheen, Bansha; r €90-190; (P)) This purpose-built Georgian-style guesthouse is just south of Bansha and east of the N24. It's open grounds are surrounded by beautiful stone walls, and it's set in the midst of verdant farm country. The seven rooms have heated bathroom floors and numerous other luxuries. Breakfast is a bounteous thing of beauty.

Aherlow House Hotel (☎ 56153; www.aherlowhouse.ie; Newtown; s/d €105/180; (P)) This 1928 mansion was originally a mountain retreat and guesthouse. In the 1970s it was developed into a hotel and later self-catering cabins were added. It's often the host to local walking festivals.

Getting There & Away

The frequent Bus Éireann link from Tipperary to Waterford stops in Bansha. From here it's a walk or bike ride into the hills. See p309 for bike rental information, otherwise a rental car will let you explore far and wide between walks.

CASHEL

☎ 062 / pop 2500

Cashel (Caiseal Mumhan) owes its great popularity to the dramatic Rock of Cashel and the clutch of historical religious buildings that crowns its breezy summit like a magical extension of the rocky landscape itself. This Irish icon draws visitors by the droves but Cashel manages to maintain a certain charm as a smallish market town. Still, benefits from the hordes include a great range of eating and sleeping places.

Orientation

A bypass on the Dublin–Cork route has eased some of the town's congestion by diverting

heavy lorries (and has given hope to places like Tipperary that are waiting for their by-passes). The Rock and its inspiring buildings stand loftily above it all. Reasonable photo opportunities for framing the Rock can be had on the road into town from the Dublin Rd roundabout or the little roads just west of the centre. Much better is to shoot from inside the ruins of Hore Abbey (see opposite).

Parking in Cashel can be tight. Avoid the parking lot closest to the Rock as it's a bit of a scam—you have but one option for parking: €3 for all day and no option for less time. Better are the street spots nearby and throughout town that allow you to only pay for as much time as you need.

Information

AD Weblink (☎ 63304; 102a Main St; per 20min €1;

☎ 10am-7pm) On the backside of Main St.

Book Nook (☎ 64947; 79 Main St) Has a good selection of local interest, general and travel books.

Cashel Heritage Town Centre (☎ 62511; www.cashel.ie; Town Hall, Main St; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm mid-Mar–Sep, closed weekends Oct–mid-Mar) Helpful and outgoing staff make this a great place to get information. It also has a museum.

Police station (☎ 62866) Behind the post office at the bottom of Main St.

Sights

ROCK OF CASHEL

The **Rock of Cashel** (☎ 61437; www.heritageireland.com; adult/child €5.30/2.10; ☎ 9am-7pm mid-Jun–mid-Sep, to 4.30pm mid-Sep–mid-Mar, to 5.30pm mid-Mar–mid-Jun, final admission 45min before closing) is one of Ireland's most spectacular archaeological sites. The 'Rock' is a prominent green hill, banded with limestone outcrops. It rises from a grassy plain on the outskirts of the town and bristles with ancient fortifications – the word 'cashel' is an anglicised version of the Irish word *caiseal*, meaning 'fortress'. Sturdy walls circle an enclosure that contains a complete round tower, a roofless abbey and the finest 12th-century Romanesque chapel in Ireland. For more than 1000 years the Rock of Cashel was a symbol of power, the seat of kings and churchmen who ruled over the region.

It's a five-minute stroll from the town centre to the rock and you can take some pretty paths including the Bishop's Walk, which ends in the gardens of the Cashel Palace Hotel. There are a couple of parking spaces for visitors with disabilities at the top of the approach road to

the ticket office; otherwise see Orientation, opposite, for details on Cashel parking. The Rock is a major draw for coach parties for most of the year and is extremely busy during July and August. The sweeping views allow you to see a tour bus approaching from any direction. The scaffolding moves from place to place each year as part of the never ending struggle to keep the Rock caulked.

History

In the 4th century the Rock of Cashel was chosen as a base by the Eóghanachta clan from Wales, who went on to conquer much of Munster and become kings of the region. For some 400 years it rivalled Tara (see p549) as a centre of power in Ireland. The clan was associated with St Patrick, hence the Rock's alternative name of St Patrick's Rock.

In the 10th century the Eóghanachta lost possession of the rock to the O'Brien (or Dál gCais) tribe under Brian Ború's leadership. In 1101 King Muircheartach O'Brien presented the Rock to the Church, a move designed to curry favour with the powerful bishops and to end secular rivalry over possession of the Rock with the Eóghanachta, by now known as the MacCarthy's. Numerous buildings must have occupied the Rock over the years, but it is the ecclesiastical relics that have survived even the depredations of the Cromwellian army in 1647.

Hall of the Vicars Choral

The entrance to the Rock of Cashel is through this 15th-century building, once home to the male choristers who sang in the cathedral. It houses the ticket office. The exhibits in the adjoining undercroft include some very rare silverware, Bronze Age axes and St Patrick's Cross – an impressive, although eroded, 12th-century crutched cross with a crucifixion scene on one face and animals on the other. A replica stands outside, in the castle courtyard. The kitchen and dining hall upstairs contain some period furniture, tapestries and paintings beneath a fine carved-oak roof and gallery. A 20-minute audiovisual presentation on the Rock's history runs every half hour. Showings are in English, French, German and Italian.

The Cathedral

This 13th-century Gothic structure overshadows the other ruins. Entry is through a small

porch facing the Hall of the Vicars Choral. The cathedral's western location is formed by the **Archbishop's Residence**, a 15th-century, four-storey castle that had its great hall built over the nave. Soaring above the centre of the cathedral is a huge, square tower with a turret on the southwestern corner.

Scattered throughout are monuments, panels from 16th-century altar tombs and coats of arms. If you have binoculars, look for the numerous stone heads on capitals and corbels high above the ground.

Round Tower

On the northeastern corner of the cathedral is an 11th- or 12th-century round tower, the earliest building on the Rock of Cashel. It's 28m tall and the doorway is 3.5m above the ground – perhaps for structural rather than defensive reasons.

Cormac's Chapel

If the Rock of Cashel boasted only Cormac's Chapel, it would still be an outstanding place. This compelling building dates from 1127, and the medieval integrity of its trans-European architecture survives. It was probably the first Romanesque church in Ireland. The style of the square towers that flank it to either side may reflect Germanic influences, but there are haunting similarities in its steep stone roof to the 'boat-hull' shape of older Irish buildings, such as the Gallarus Oratory in County Clare and the beehive huts of the Dingle Peninsula.

The true Romanesque splendour is in the detail of the exquisite doorway arches, the grand chancel arch and ribbed barrel vault, and the outstanding carved vignettes that include a trefoil-tailed grotesque and a Norman-helmeted centaur firing an arrow at a rampaging lion. The chapel's interior is tantalisingly dark, but linger for a while and your eyes adjust. Inside the main door, on the left, is the sarcophagus said to house King Cormac, dating from between 1125 and 1150. Frescoes once covered the walls, but only vestigial elements of these survive. The southern tower leads to a stone-roofed vault and a croft above the nave (no access).

HORE ABBEY

Cashel throws in another bonus for the heritage lover. This is the formidable ruin of 13th-century Hore Abbey, located in

flat farmland just under 1km north of the Rock. Originally Benedictine and settled by monks from Glastonbury in England at the end of the 12th century, it later became a Cistercian house, gifted to the order by a 13th-century archbishop who expelled the Benedictine monks after dreaming that they planned to murder him. The complex is enjoyably gloomy, and from its interior there are superb photo ops of the Rock of Cashel with creative foregrounds, if you get it right.

BRÚ BORÚ

Cashel's heritage and cultural centre, **Brú Ború** (☎ 61122; www.comhaltas.ie; 🕒 9am-5pm Jun-Sep, closed weekends Oct-May) is in a modern building next to the car park below the Rock of Cashel. The centre offers an absorbing insight into Irish traditional music, dance and song. It has a shop and café, but its main daytime attraction is **Sounds of History**, an exhibition in a subterranean chamber where the story of Ireland and its music is told through imaginative audio displays. In the summer there is a traditional show at night in the centre's theatre. There are also daytime theatrical performances. Admission to events varies from €10 for daytime events to over €40 for the dinner shows.

OTHER SIGHTS

The **Cashel Heritage Town Centre** (☎ 62511; www.casheltc.ie; Town Hall, Main St; admission free; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm mid-Mar-Sep, closed weekends Oct-mid-Mar) is located in the town hall. It has a model and displays showing how Cashel looked in the 1640s.

The **Cashel Folk Village** (☎ 62525; Dominic St; adult/child €4/2; 🕒 9.30am-7.30pm May-Oct, 10am-6pm Mar & Apr) is an engaging exhibition of old buildings and shopfronts from around

the town, plus local memorabilia and an IRA museum.

The **Bolton Library** (☎ 61944; John St; adult/child €3/2; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) is in a forbidding 1836 stone building, and houses a splendid collection of books, maps and manuscripts from the dawn of printing onwards. There are works by writers from Chaucer to Swift.

Sleeping

BUDGET

O'Brien's Holiday Lodge & Camping Park (☎ 61003; www.cashel-lodge.com; Dundrum Rd; camp sites per person €8, dm €18, s €40, d €55-60; 📍) This first-class IHH hostel, in a converted coach house northwest of town, is friendly, relaxing and well equipped. It has high-standard dorms and rooms, and a camp site. Terrific views of the Rock and Hore Abbey are bonuses, as is the attractive bare stone and wood interior.

Cashel Holiday Hostel (☎ 62330; www.cashelhostel.com; 6 John St; dm €16-18, s €25, d €40) This is a friendly, central, budget option in a quiet, three-storey Georgian terrace off Main St. It has 52 beds in four- to eight-bed rooms as well as a recreation room, kitchen and laundry.

MIDRANGE

The sweet spot for Cashel accommodation is right in the middle of town, and you'll find a huge range of choices, all an easy walk to town and the Rock.

Kearney's Castle Hotel (☎ 61044; Main St; s/d €40/70) Right across from the Cashel Heritage Town Centre, the owners modestly dismiss their building as 'just an old house' even though parts comprise a medieval fortified tower. The 12 simple rooms are sprightly decorated in blue and beige, and have TVs.

Bruden Fidelma Bed & Breakfast (☎ 62330; www.sisterfidelmabandb.com; 5 John St; s/d €50/80; 📍) 'The chief poet of the tribe earns 21 cows...' is but

one of the multitude of old Irish bromides that adorns the walls of this seven-room B&B which has a snazzy new décor that in some rooms includes huge soaking tubs. As you may have surmised, the B&B is officially sanctioned to exploit Cashel's fictional crime-fighting nun Sister Fidelma (see boxed text, opposite). It is run by the same cheerful management as the Cashel Holiday Hostel next door.

Ladyswell House (☎ 62985; www.ladyswellhouse.com; Ladyswell St; r €50-80) Barely a five-minute walk to the Abbey, this five-room B&B is spotless. Some bathrooms have skylights. The owners are total charmers and will organise custom tours as well as Shannon Airport pick-ups.

Ashmore House (☎ 61286; www.ashmorehouse.com; John St; s/d €60/70; 📍) Look for the vivid yellow door on this Georgian town house. There are five big, high-ceilinged rooms and gardens out back. It's located on a quiet street just off Main St.

Hill House (☎ 61277; www.hillhousecashel.com; Palmershill; r €60-100; 📍) It actually could be called Amazing View House, as this Georgian charmer has magnificent views across to the Rock. Set back in gardens, the house is about 400m uphill from Main St. The extraordinary breakfasts made with locally sourced foods may make you forget the Rock entirely.

TOP END

Baileys of Cashel (☎ 61937; www.baileys-ireland.com; Main St; s/d €95/150; 📍 📺) This elegant 1709 building has 19 rooms, all with wi-fi and featuring soaking tubs and an elegant modern design blending dark woods with light walls. There's a good candle-lit wine bar in the basement, a fine restaurant and a leisure centre.

Cashel Palace Hotel (☎ 62707; www.cashel-palace.ie; Main St; r €140-280; 📍 📺) The Cashel Palace, a handsome red-brick, late-Queen Anne house, is a local landmark. Fully restored, it has 23 rooms (some with wi-fi) oozing with luxuries like trouser presses (as if you wouldn't have someone else attend to that). Built in 1732 for a Protestant archbishop, the rooms are in the gracious main building or quaint mews.

Eating

Cashel is an excellent place for a meal, even if you're just passing through. Locals favour the €10 bar lunch specials at the Cashel Palace Hotel (see above). Look for the excellent local blue cheese on many menus.

Henry's Fine Foods (☎ 086 894 3707; 5 Main St; meals from €5; 🕒 9am-6pm) And fine it is. Local ham and cheese features in many a lunch item; definitely partake. The eggs are free-range and there's housemade jellies, jams and chutneys for sale.

Bake House (☎ 61680; 7 Main St; meals €5-8; 🕒 9am-5.30pm) Head for this busy café for tea and coffee, breakfast or a light lunch. Try the tasty Cashel blue-cheese quiche. Across from the Cashel Heritage Town Centre, ponder the passing parade at tables out front.

our pick Café Hans (☎ 63660; Dominic St; mains €8-14; 🕒 noon-5.30pm Tue-Sat) Competition for the 32 seats is fierce at this casual café run by the same family who run Chez Hans (below). There's a terrific selection of salads, open sandwiches and fish, shellfish, lamb and vegetarian dishes, with a discerning wine selection and eye-watering desserts. Get there early or after the rush, or expect to queue.

Chez Hans (☎ 61177; Dominic St; 3 courses €33; 🕒 6-10pm Tue-Sat) Since 1968 this former church has been a place of worship for foodies from all over Ireland and, for that matter, the world. Still as fresh and inventive as ever, this superb restaurant gives its blessing to all manner of local foods with dishes like its renowned seafood cassoulet and various preparations of local meats. Vegetarian menus are heavenly. Little touches abound, including the homemade chocolates with your coffee. Book ahead.

Drinking

Cashel has a number of quality pubs.

Davern's (☎ 61121; 20 Main St) This bar is popular for a good chat. There's live music some nights, which you may or may not hear tucked away in one of the many crags and corners of this old, old pub.

Ryan's (☎ 62688; Ladywell St) Locals chew the fat, share the gossip and gulp the pint at this congenial place with a beer garden.

Getting There & Away

Bus Éireann runs eight buses daily between Cashel and Cork (€9.50, 1½ hours, eight daily) via Cahir (€3.90, 15 minutes) and Fermoy. There are three buses daily to Roscrea (€8.80, 1¼ hours) and Birr. The bus stop for Cork is outside the Bake House on Main St. The Dublin stop (€9.50, three hours, six daily) is opposite. Tickets are available from the nearby Spar shop or you can buy them on the bus.

CASHEL'S CRIME-FIGHTING NUN

'There seems to be some sort of scuffle taking place beneath the abbey wall,' says Sister Fidelma, master of the banal and Cashel's claim to fictional fame. The creation of Canadian author Peter Tremayne (real name Peter Berresford Ellis), the virtuous Fidelma travels 7th-century Ireland from her base in Cashel. Along the way this Miss Marple of the Dark Ages solves mysteries, murders and crimes. In 17 novels (starting with *Absolution by Murder*, quoted here) she preaches law, figures out who offed errant monks and enjoys the company of vaguely oafish Brother Eadulf. Cashelites are used to breathless tourists asking where Sister Fidelma lived and you can buy the books all over town. Soon you too can be thrilling to lines like: 'And I can see why the brethren chose this place to perform their defecations. It is continually washed by the sea.'

Bernard Kavanagh (☎ 51563; www.bkavcoaches.com) runs one evening service Monday to Saturday to Tipperary (€6, 50 minutes).

The nearest train stations are at Cahir, where there are bus connections to Cashel.

AROUND CASHEL

The atmospheric – and delightfully creepy at dusk – ruins of **Athassel Priory** sit in the shallow and verdant River Suir Valley, 7km southwest of Cashel. The original buildings date from 1205, and Athassel became one of the richest and most important monasteries in Ireland. What survives is substantial: the gatehouse and portcullis gateway, the cloister and stretches of walled enclosure, as well as some medieval tomb effigies.

To get there take the N74 to the village of **Golden**, then head south, along the narrow road signed Athassel Abbey, for 2km. Roadside parking is limited and very tight. The Priory is reached across often-muddy fields.

CAHIR

☎ 052 / pop 2850

Every bit as worth a stop as Cashel, Cahir (An Cathair; pronounced care) is a compact and attractive town that encircles its namesake castle. Replete with towers, a moat and various battlements, it's everything a castle fanatic could ask for. There's a town square lined with pubs and cafés, and good walking paths along the banks of the River Suir.

WALK: TIPPERARY HERITAGE WAY

Extending a distance of 55km from a place called The Vee in the south to Cashel in the north, the **Tipperary Heritage Trail** takes in some beautiful river valleys and ruins. The 30km segment running north from Cahir to Cashel is the best segment as it takes in the verdant lands around the River Suir and passes close to highlights such as Athassel Priory. The best stretches around Golden are off roads. Expect to see a fair amount of wildlife as the paths and very minor roads follow the waters and pass through woodlands. There's an excellent website (www.tipperaryway.com) that has downloadable maps for the entire route. You can also use public transport to return to either Cashel or Cahir when you're done.

Cahir is 15km south of Cashel, at the eastern tip of the Galtee Mountains.

Orientation

Buses stop in Castle St near a large car park alongside the river and castle (car parking here costs €1 for two hours). East of Castle St is the centre of town, eponymously named the Square. There's street parking throughout the town.

Information

AIB (Castle St) Has an ATM and bureau de change.

Cahir Communications (☎ 42555; the Square; per 15min €1; ☎ 10am–9pm) Internet access and services.

Post office (Church St) North of the Square.

Public toilets Located next to the tourist office.

Tourist office (☎ 41453; Main St; ☎ 9.30am–6pm Mon–Sat Apr–Sep) Has leaflets and information about the town and region.

Sights

CAHIR CASTLE

Cahir's awesome **castle** (☎ 41011; www.heritageireland.ie; Castle St; adult/child €2.90/1.30; ☎ 9am–7pm mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 9.30am–5.30pm Apr–mid-Jun & mid-Sep–mid-Oct, to 4.30pm mid-Oct–Mar) is feudal fantasy in a big way. A river-island site, rocky foundations, massive walls, turrets and towers, defences and dungeons are all there. This castle is one of Ireland's largest. Founded by Conor O'Brien in 1142, it was passed to the Butler family in 1375. In 1599 it lost the arms race of its day when the Earl of Essex used cannons to shatter the walls, an event explained with a huge model.

The castle was surrendered to Cromwell in 1650 without a struggle; its future usefulness may have discouraged the usual Cromwellian 'deconstruction'. It is largely intact and formidable still, and was restored in the 1840s and again in the 1960s when it came under state ownership.

There's a 15-minute audiovisual show that puts Cahir in context with other Irish castles. The buildings within the castle are sparsely furnished, although there are good displays. The real rewards come from simply wandering through this remarkable survivor of Ireland's medieval past. There are frequent guided tours, and several good guides are for sale at the entrance.

SWISS COTTAGE

A pleasant riverside path from behind the town car park meanders 2km south to Cahir Park

and the **Swiss Cottage** (☎ 41144; www.heritageireland.ie; Cahir Park; adult/child €2.90/1.30; ☎ 10am–6pm mid-Apr–mid-Oct, 10am–1pm & 2–6pm Tue–Sun mid-Mar–mid-Apr, to 4.30pm Tue–Sun mid-Oct–mid-Nov). This place is an exquisite, thatched-cottage fantasy, surrounded by roses, lavender and honeysuckle. It is the best in Ireland, and was built in 1810 as a retreat for Richard Butler, 12th Baron Caher, and his wife. The design was by London architect John Nash, creator of the Royal Pavilion at Brighton and London's Regent's Park. The cottage-orné style emerged during the late 18th and early 19th centuries in England in response to the prevailing taste for the picturesque. Thatched roofs, natural wood and carved weatherboarding were characteristics, and most were built as ornamental features on estates.

There could not be a more lavish example of Regency Picturesque than the Swiss Cottage. It is more of a sizable house than a cottage and has extensive facilities. The 30-minute (compulsory) guided tours are thoroughly enjoyable, although you may have to wait for one in the busier summer months. Note that at the time of research, the cottage was closed while locals quarrelled over bridge access, so check locally before visiting.

Sleeping

Apple Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 41459; www.theapplefarm.com; Moorstown; camp site per adult/child €6/4; ☎ May–Sep) This quiet and spacious camp site on a farm of apple orchards is on the N24 between Cahir (6km) and Clonmel (9km). The place has a delightful fruity ambience and there's free use of a tennis court and racquets.

Lisakyle (☎ 41963; Ardfinnan Rd; dm/s/d €14/18/36; ☎) Some 2km south of town, past the Swiss Cottage on the R670, this charmer of a hostel also offers tent space (€8) amidst pretty gardens. Maurice offers a warm welcome and 21 beds.

Tinsley House (☎ 41947; www.tinsleyhouse.com; The Square; r€35–65; ☎ May–Sep) This mannered house has a great location and four well-furnished rooms. There's a roof garden and the owner, Liam Roche, is an expert on local history and can recommend walks and other activities.

Cahir House Hotel (☎ 43000; www.cahirhousehotel.ie; the Square; €90–130; ☎) On a prominent corner of the centre, this landmark hotel has a relaxed vibe. The 42 rooms have wi-fi and a rather bold yellow-and-red décor – think of it as a visual wake-up call.

Eating

Lazy Bean Café (☎ 42038; the Square; snacks €3–7; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, 10.30am–6pm Sun) Busy, breezy little café that dishes out loads of tasty sandwiches, snacks and ice cream. A sign says: 'Chocolates, coffee, men. Some things are just better rich.'

River House (☎ 41951; 1 Castle St; meals €7–12; ☎ 9am–5pm) Fortify yourself for an assault on the castle across the street at this modern and very appealing lunch spot. There's a wide selection of cold and hot dishes as well as a large selection of cookbooks (obviously the better ones are in use in the kitchen).

Cahir's **farmers market** (Craft Yard; ☎ 9am–1pm Sat) boasts several stalls of organic food.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Cahir is a hub for several Bus Éireann routes, including Dublin–Cork, Limerick–Waterford, Galway–Waterford, Kilkenny–Cork and Cork–Athlone. There are eight buses per day Monday to Saturday, and six buses on Sunday to Cashel (€3.90, 15 minutes). Buses stop in the car park beside the tourist office.

TRAIN

From Monday to Saturday, the Limerick Junction–Waterford train stops three times daily in each direction.

MITCHELSTOWN CAVES

While the Galtee Mountains are mainly sandstone, a narrow band of limestone along the southern side has given rise to the **Mitchelstown Caves** (☎ 052-67246; Burncourt; adult/child €5/2.50; ☎ 10am–6pm). Superior to Kilkenny's Dunmore Cave (p337) and yet less developed for tourists, these caves are among the most extensive in the country with nearly 3km of passages, and spectacular chambers full of textbook formations with names such as the Pipe Organ, Tower of Babel, House of Commons and Eagle's Wing. Tours take about 30 minutes.

The caves are near Burncourt, 16km southwest of Cahir and signposted on the N8 to Mitchelstown (Baile Mhístéala).

Sleeping

Mountain Lodge Hostel (☎ 052-67277; www.anoige.ie; Burncourt; dm €11–15; ☎ Apr–Sep; ☎) This 24-bed An Óige hostel (housed in an attractive,

one-time shooting lodge), is 6km north of the caves, and is a handy base for exploring the Galtee Mountains. It lies to the north of the N8 Mitchelstown–Cahir road.

Getting There & Away

Daily **Bus Éireann** (☎ 062-51555) buses from Dublin to Cork or Athlone drop off at the Mountain Lodge Hostel gate.

CLONMEL

☎ 052 / pop 15,900

Clonmel (Cluain Meala; 'Meadows of Honey') is Tipperary's largest and most commercial town. It's worth a stop for a quick stroll or for supplies. Laurence Sterne (1713–68), author of *A Sentimental Journey* and *Tristram Shandy*, was a native of the town. However, the commercial cheerleader for Clonmel was Italian-born Charles Bianconi (1786–1875), who, at the precocious age of 16, was sent to Ireland by his father in an attempt to break his liaison with a woman. Bianconi later channelled all his frustrated passion into setting up a coach service between Clonmel and Cahir; his company quickly grew to become a nationwide passenger and mail carrier. For putting Clonmel on the map, Bianconi was twice elected mayor.

Orientation

Clonmel's centre lies on the northern bank of the River Suir. Set back from the quays and running parallel to the river, the main street runs east–west, starting off as Parnell St and becoming Mitchell St and O'Connell St before passing under West Gate, where it changes to Irishtown and Abbey Rd. Running north from this long thoroughfare is Gladstone St, which has hotels and pubs.

There's a confounding system of one-way streets; you'll find refuge in the vast parking lot off Gladstone and Mary Sts.

Information

Allied Irish Bank (AIB; O'Connell St) Has an ATM and bureau de change.

Circles Internet (☎ 23315; 16 Market St; per 10min €1; ☎ 11am–11pm) Speedy connections will divert you from the acerbic staff.

Post office (Emmet St)

Sophie's Bookshop (☎ 80752; 15 Mitchell St) Cute; has a good selection of general and travel books, as well as books of local interest.

Tourist office (☎ 22960; www.clonmel.ie; St Mary's Church, Mary St; ☎ 9.30am–1pm & 2–4.30pm Mon–Fri) Set in quiet church grounds; ask for the *Clonmel Heritage Trail* map.

Sights

At the junction of Mitchell and Sarsfield Sts is the beautifully restored **Main Guard** (☎ 27484; www.heritageireland.ie; Sarsfield St; adult/child €2.10/1.10; ☎ 9.30am–6pm mid–Mar–Oct), a Butler courthouse dating from 1675 and based on a design by Christopher Wren. The columned porticos are once again open (after renovations) and exhibits include the ubiquitous model of Clonmel as a walled 17th-century town.

In Nelson St, south of Parnell St, is the refurbished **County Courthouse**, designed by Richard Morrison in 1802. It was here that the Young Irishlanders of 1848, including Thomas Francis Meagher, were tried and sentenced to transportation to Australia.

West along Mitchell St (past the town hall with its statue commemorating the 1798 Rising) and south down Abbey St is the **Franciscan friary**. Inside, near the door, is a 1533 Butler tomb depicting a knight and his lady. There's some fine modern stained glass, especially in St Anthony's Chapel to the north.

Turn south down Bridge St and cross the river, following the road round until it opens out at **Lady Blessington's Bath**, a picturesque stretch of the river that is just right for picnicking.

The **County Museum South Tipperary** (☎ 25399; The Borstal, Market Place; admission free; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sat) has displays on the history of County Tipperary from Neolithic times to the present, and hosts changing exhibitions.

Sleeping

There are several B&Bs on Marlfield Rd, due west of the centre.

Fennessy's Hotel (☎ 23680; fennessyshotel.com; Gladstone St; r €50–120; (P)) Saints Peter & Paul Church, across from this hotel, will provide courage should you have immoral thoughts in any of the 10 rooms at this attractive four-story central hotel. Extras include room safes and whirlpool tubs in some rooms.

Mulcahy's Hotel (☎ 25054; www.mulcahy.ie; 47 Gladstone St; r €55–95; (P)) Centrally located. The 10 rooms have wi-fi and are part of a com-

plex of bars and bistros. It's good value but beware of weekend noise.

our pick Hotel Minella (☎ 22388; www.hotelminella.ie; Coleville Rd; r €120–250; (P) (Q) (R)) What can you say about a luxury hotel that has a sheep dog named Sparky to greet you at the door, but 'cool!' Unpretentious yet refined, this family-run hotel sits amidst extensive grounds on the south bank of the River Suir, 2km east of the centre. The 90 rooms are divided between those in an 1863 mansion and those in a new wing. The latter boast almost every kind of convenience, including sybaritic private hot tubs on terraces overlooking the river.

Eating

O'Gorman's Bakery (☎ 21380; 61–62 O'Connell St; lunch €5–7; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon–Sat) The scones sell out early at this locally beloved bakery. Get sandwiches to go or tuck into some warming shepherd's pie in the tearoom.

Mulcahy's (☎ 25054; 47 Gladstone St; meals €7–20; ☎ carvery 8.30am–9.30pm) This vast, rambling pub has a carvery at lunch and a more trad restaurant at dinner.

Angela's (☎ 26899; 14 Abbey St; meals €7–10; ☎ 9am–5.30pm Mon–Sat) The full coffee bar draws people all day at this always buzzing café in the centre. Hot and cold meals feature organic and locally grown ingredients. Salads, soups, sandwiches and hot dishes such as casseroles and pasta are delightfully creative.

Befani's (☎ 77893; 6 Sarsfield St; meals €10–30; ☎ 9am–9.30pm) Just down the street from the Main Guard, Befani's brings the Mediterranean to Clonmel. Brightly flavoured dishes delight at lunch and dinner. Through the day there's a long tapas menu, perfect for accompanying a sherry hailed from the small bar. Breakfasts are a cure for the black-pudding blues.

Drinking

The main bar at Mulcahy's (see above) is dark enough for a boozy assignation even at midday. You may not need a room upstairs.

Two traditional pubs almost next to each other on Parnell St (near Nelson St) are the diminutive **Phil Carroll** (☎ 25215), Clonmel's most atmospheric old boozier and **The Coachman** (☎ 21299), which has also escaped the crimes of modernisation.

Entertainment

Clonmel has a fast-changing line-up of clubs. Ask around for which one's hot.

There's an excellent programme of art exhibitions, plays and films at the **South Tipperary Arts Centre** (☎ 27877; Nelson St), the focus of the arts in Tipperary.

North of town is the **Powerstown Park Racecourse** (☎ 21422; www.powerstownpark.com; Powerstown Park). It holds 13 meetings a year on its 1¼-mile track.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Bus Éireann has buses to Cahir (€4.20, 30 minutes, eight daily); Cork (€13.50, two hours, three daily); Kilkenny (€6.80, one hour, 12 daily); Waterford (€5.40, one hour, eight daily); and a number of other places. Tickets can be bought at the train station on Prior Park Rd, where the buses stop.

TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ 21982) is on Prior Park Rd. Head 1km north along Gladstone St, past the Oakville Shopping Centre and it's just after the petrol station. Monday to Saturday, the Limerick Junction–Waterford train stops three times daily in each direction.

AROUND CLONMEL

Directly south of Clonmel, over the border in County Waterford, are the Comeragh Mountains. There's a scenic route south to Ballymacarby and the Nire Valley. For more details, see p198.

The East Munster Way (see p699) passes through Clonmel. Heading east towards Carrick-on-Suir, the way follows the old towpath along the River Suir. At Sir Thomas Bridge it cuts south away from the river and into the Comeraghs and through Gurteen Wood to Harney's Crossroads. It rejoins the River Suir again at Kilsheelan Bridge, from where it follows the towpath all the way to Carrick-on-Suir. Going west from Clonmel, the way first leads south into the hills and then descends to Newcastle and the river once more. The route east is pleasant for a short there-and-back outing from Clonmel.

FETHARD

☎ 052 / pop 1400

Fethard (Fiodh Ard) is a quiet, cute little village with a surprising number of medieval

ruins scattered about its compact centre. Located 14km north of Clonmel on the River Clashawley, it has a good slice of its old walls still intact. Driving north on the R689 you cross a small ridge and see Fethard in the emerald valley below, looking much as it would have to travellers centuries ago. Its wide main street testifies to its historic role as an important market town.

You can get information and local info from the cheery office of the **Tirry Community Centre** (☎ 31000; Barrack St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri). Ask for the walking-tour leaflet. You can also find good information at www.fethard.ie.

The post office is on Main St, and there's an ATM in Kenny's Foodmarket, about 50m northeast along the road from the Tirry Community Centre.

Sights

Fethard's **Holy Trinity Church** and **churchyard** (☎ 26643; Main St; admission free) lie within a captivating little time warp. The church is right off Main St and is reached through a cast-iron gateway. Getting inside is part of the adventure: get the keys from the XL Stop & Shop (aka Whyte's) on Main St, 50m west of the gate.

The main part of the building dates from the 13th century, but its ancient walls have been rather blighted by being covered with mortar for weatherproofing. The handsome west tower was added later and has had its sturdy stonework uncovered. It looks more like a fortified tower house and has savage-looking finials on its corner turrets. The interior of the church has an aisled nave and a chancel of typical medieval style, but it is sparsely furnished. A ruined chapel and sacristy adjoin the south end of the church. It is the context of the entire churchyard that is the real winner. Old gravestones descend in ranks to a refurbished stretch of medieval wall complete with a guard tower and a parapet, from where you can look down on the gentle River Clashawley between its horse-trod banks.

Close to the church in Main St is the 17th-century **town hall**, with some fine coats of arms mounted on the façade.

Fethard's main concentration of medieval remains (some of which have been incorporated into later buildings) are just south of the church at the end of Watergate St. Beside Castle Inn are the ruins of several fortified 17th-century **tower houses**. Just under the archway

to the river bank and Watergate Bridge is a fine **sheila-na-gig** (a sexually explicit medieval depiction of a woman) embedded in the wall to your left. You can stroll the river bank, provided the resident geese are feeling copasetic. From here, the backs of the Abbey St houses, although much added to and knocked about in places, once again display the pleasing irregularities of typical medieval building style.

East along Abbey St is the 14th-century **Augustinian friary**, which is now a Catholic church, with some fine, medieval stained glass and another in-your-face **sheila-na-gig** in its east wall.

Sleeping & Eating

Gateway (☎ 31701, 087-780 6842; www.gatewaybandb.com; Rocklow Rd; r €30-60; (P)) Tucked away just north of Main St, alongside the ruined 15th-century North Gate, this little house is a pleasant stopover with a sunny breakfast room. Rooms are eclectic.

McCarthy's (☎ 31149; Main St; lunch €3-8) A classic that deserves national acclaim and preservation, McCarthy's proclaims itself as Pub, Restaurant and Undertaker – and not necessarily in that order. This timeless joint has closely spaced wooden booths and tables amidst a thicket of treasures dating back to 1840 that will prod your imagination. And yes, it is an efficient set-up for wakes; arrangements are made downstairs.

Sadels (☎ 31176; Main St; mains €12-22; ☎ 5-9pm Wed-Sun) An offshoot of McCarthy's, this classy dinner spot has an ambitious French-influenced menu and a prim setting of white tablecloths and candles.

Getting There & Away

There's no public transport to Fethard but it would make a pleasant cycle from Cashel (p310), 15km to the west.

CARRICK-ON-SUIR

☎ 051 / pop 5700

The unassuming market town of Carrick-on-Suir (Carraig na Siúire), 20km east of Clonmel, boasted twice its present population during the late-medieval period when it was a centre of the brewing and wool industries. The modern town makes a good pit stop – if for no other reason than to escape the local traffic and Byzantine traffic patterns.

Carrick-on-Suir was quick to honour local boy Sean Kelly, one of the world's greatest

cyclists, in the late 1980s. The town square bears his name, as does the sports centre. Carrick is also the birthplace of the singing Clancy Brothers, who, with Tommy Makem and assorted Aran Island sweaters, did much to popularise folk music in the 1960s.

From Carrick-on-Suir, the East Munster Way (p699) winds west to Clonmel before heading south into Waterford.

Information

Main St has banks, ATMs and other services.

The **Splash & Chat** (☎ 649 911; 86 Main St; per hr €5; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) has internet access and a laundry. Email old flames while your undies come clean.

The **Tourist office** (☎ 640 200; www.carrickonsuir.ie; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri May-Sep, to 4pm Tue-Fri Oct-Apr) is off Main St, through a narrow entranceway. An old church houses this helpful office as well as a Heritage Centre.

Sights

Carrick-on-Suir was once the property of the Butlers, the Earls of Ormond, who built the **Ormond Castle** (☎ 640 787; www.heritageireland.ie; Castle St; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm mid-Jun-early Sep) on the banks of the river in the 14th century. Anne Boleyn, the second of Henry VIII's wives, may have been born here, though other castles also claim this worthy distinction, possibly hoping to boost their own sales of knick-knacks celebrating the beheaded. The Elizabethan mansion next to the castle was built by the 10th Earl of Ormond, Black Tom Butler, in long-term anticipation of a visit by his cousin, Queen Elizabeth I, who rather thoughtlessly never turned up.

Some rooms in this Dúchas-owned edifice have fine 16th-century stuccowork, especially the Long Gallery with its depictions of Elizabeth and the Butler coat of arms.

Sleeping & Eating

Main St has numerous lunch joints, and pubs with food.

Fatima House (☎ 640 298; www.fatimahouse.com; John St; s/d €36/68; (P)) Located about 500m west of the Greenside bus stop, this B&B is housed in a 100-year-old farmhouse. Furnishings have been accumulating in the rooms for that entire time.

Bell & Salmon Arms (☎ 641 293; www.bellsalmonhotel.com; Main St; s/d €50/90, meals €8-15; (P)) The

13 rooms here have a simple, pink-accented décor and are modern. The pub boasts trad music some Mondays and Wednesdays; later in the week there's live rock and DJs. Meat, seafood and bowls of boiled potatoes may just cause you to lose your head at – we're not making this up – Anne Boleyn's Restaurant.

Getting There & Away

BUS
Buses stop at Greenside, the park beside the N24 road. Follow New St north from Main St, then turn right.

Bus Éireann (☎ 879 000) has numerous buses serving Carrick-on-Suir. The Limerick-Waterford line serves Cahir and Clonmel (€4.50, 25 minutes) up to nine times daily. There's also a frequent service to Kilkenny (€6.80, 45 minutes).

TRAIN

The station is north of Greenside, off Cregg Rd. From Monday to Saturday, the Limerick Junction-Waterford train stops three times daily in each direction.

THURLES & AROUND

☎ 0504 / pop 6900

Thurles (Durlas) is a busy market town, 22km north of Cashel. It was founded by the Butler family during the 13th century. It is a down-to-earth place and holds little reason for an inordinate pause. In 1884 the *Cumann Lúthchleas Gael* (Gaelic Athletic Association; GAA) was founded, and today the town's famous Semple Stadium rivals Croke Park Stadium in Dublin as a holy ground of Gaelic sports like hurling and Gaelic football.

The centre of town is the long, spacious and traffic-choked Liberty Square. Tourist information can be found at **Lár na Páirc** (☎ 22702; <http://tipperary.gaa.ie>; Slievenamon Rd), the shop of the GAA, which is redolent in the blue, black and gold of the local team. The **visitor centre** (exhibits adult/child €4/2; ☎ 10am-5.30pm) is fully dedicated to sport but offers free regional info as well.

The highlight of the area is the Cistercian **Holy Cross Abbey** (☎ 9am-8pm), 6km southwest of Thurles beside the River Suir. The large buildings that survive today date from the 15th century, although the abbey was founded in 1168. Look for the ornately carved 'Sedelia' near the altar and pause to appreciate the early form of 'stadium seating'. The abbey contains two

relics of the True Cross of varying pedigree. A bookshop is open irregular hours.

ROSCREA

☎ 0505 / pop 5600

The pleasant little town of Roscrea (Ros Cré) is a useful pit stop on the journey between Dublin and the west. It has some interesting ruins and couple of good places for a bite to eat.

Roscrea owes its beginnings to a 5th-century monk, St Crónán, who set up a way station for the travelling poor. Most of the historical structures are on or near the main street, Castle St.

The Bank of Ireland on Castle St has an ATM. The town is protected from the busy traffic of the N7 by a bypass.

Sights

Roscrea Castle, a 13th-century stone edifice right in the town centre, was started in 1213 and is remarkably intact. There's two fortified stone towers, surrounded by walls. Look closely and you can see where the original drawbridge was installed. Inside the courtyard stands **Damer House**, the Queen Anne-style residence of the Damer family. Built in the early-18th century, it no doubt had few problems with burglars owing to its location.

Inside you'll find the **Roscrea Heritage Centre** (☎ 21850; Castle St; adult/concession €3.70/1.30; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4.30pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar). The centre contains some interesting exhibitions, including one on the medieval monasteries of the midlands and another on early-20th-century farming life. There's a peaceful walled garden by the house.

Sleeping & Eating

Quigley's Bakery (☎ 23313; Roscrea Shopping Centre; Castle St; meals from €3) Does great sandwiches and other snacks for picnicking.

Tower (☎ 21774; www.thetower.ie; Church St; s/d €42/75; 📍) The Tower is an excellent choice for a pause lasting through lunch or overnight. The 10 rooms have full facilities and are attractive yet unpretentious. The restaurant wins plaudits for its careful cooking of Irish standards such as roasts and seafood. The pub looks out onto the castle and has good casual lunches.

Getting There & Away

Up to 12 Bus Éireann buses stop at Roscrea between Dublin (€9.30, 2½ hours) and

Limerick (€6.80, 1½ hours). There are three buses daily to Cashel (€8.80, 1¼ hours).

Dublin trains require a connection in Ballybrophy. Limerick trains (€8.30, 1½ hours) stop at Roscrea twice a day from Monday to Saturday, and once on Sunday.

AROUND ROSCREA

In the hinterlands southwest of Roscrea, **Fiacri Country House Restaurant** (☎ 43017; www.fiacrihouse.com; set menu €50; 🕒 7-9pm Wed-Sat) is a pink-hued oasis among the peat bogs and dairy farms. There's a high order of cooking here, using local ingredients in creative and ever-changing ways. Meats, seafood and vegetables (vegetarians will do well here) are prepared simply yet with bold and interesting flavours. The setting, like the hosts, is relaxed yet correct. View the garden from the impeccably set dining area.

There's also a **cookery school** (€60; 🕒 10am-2pm Tue). Phone ahead to confirm course times. To get here, look for signs and expect to ask for directions.

NENAGH & AROUND

Nenagh is a pretty place with a violent past. It was a garrison town in the 19th century and before that it was the site of a dominant castle. You can see evidence of all this just north of the centre on O'Rahilly St; look for the tall steeple of St Mary's of the Rosary church. **Nenagh Castle** looks like the prototype for the rook in chess and is surrounded by cawing crows and coughing teens. The tower dates from the 13th century and has walls 30m thick.

DETOUR: FAMINE WARHOUSE

From Roscrea, take the R491 10km to Shinrone, then continue on over smaller roads for another 10km to tiny Ballygarry. Here is a relic of one of Ireland's darkest chapters, the **Famine Warhouse** (☎ 087-908 9972; www.heritageireland.ie; admission free; 🕒 2.30-5.30pm Wed-Sun Apr-Sep, 2-4pm Sat & Sun Oct-Mar), the site of the 1848 rebellion when rebels besieged police who had barricaded themselves inside, taking children hostage. Exhibits put the events in context. Afterwards, you can take the N52 to Nenagh or Birr.

Nearby, the civic centre is an imposing complex of dark-stone buildings from the 19th century. The one that looks like an old **gaol** is just that. Next door, there's a prison of a different kind: an old convent is home to the 1840 **Round House**, a pretty stone building that now houses the **Nenagh Heritage Centre** (☎ 31610; 🕒 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri), which has tourist info and genealogy services.

There are a couple of good lunch spots in town. **Cinnamon Alley** (☎ 33923; Hanly's Place; meals €5-9; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) is on a little alley just west of the castle and gaol. It has creative sandwiches, soups and hot dishes, plus a full coffee bar.

Country House (☎ 32596; 25 Kenyon St; meals €6-12; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) is a place of pilgrimage for lovers of really great Irish artisan foods. You can sample a delightful lunch menu in the café or browse the extensive deli area with

housemade preserves, cheeses and other treats. Can you spell p-i-c-n-i-c?

Nenagh is the gateway to the eastern shore of **Lough Derg**, a popular boating and fishing area. About 9km northwest on the R495, is the waterfront hamlet of **Dromineer**, a good place to sample lakeside life. There are plenty of visiting boats in summer and you can swim, fish or charter a yacht. Inquire at **Shannon Sailing** (☎ 067-24499; www.shannonsailing.com).

The **Dromineer Bay Hotel** (☎ 067-24114; www.dromineerbay.com; r €60-130; 📍) is a busy and attractive lakeside place with 20 bright rooms that feature wi-fi. The hotel's bar does good sandwiches for €4 and the upstairs **Gillies Restaurant** (mains €15-35) offers more complex fish and meat dishes.

An interesting, scenic lakeside drive from Nenagh is the 24km R494 that winds around to Killaloe and Ballina (see p378).

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