



Travel Through History at Bunratty Castle & Folk Park

Description

May you never forget what is worth remembering, nor ever remember what is best forgotten.
Irish blessing

To travel is the opportunity to experience amazing things, and Bunratty Castle & Folk Park is one of those things. One can argue what style, location, or country makes for the best Castle to see, so why Bunratty Castle? One of those amazing things you get from traveling is walking through history. Walking in the shoes of people's past and getting a whole experience out of it, not just reading plaques with facts on them, is something everyone should experience.

At Bunratty, you don't just travel to this beautiful Castle of Ireland; it is where you travel through time. Step into what is regarded as "The most complete and authentic Castle in Ireland." Not only can you walk through the Castle, but you have options to experience it in many ways that most castles do not. From authentic furnishings, complete outer buildings from different periods, animals, and, yes, a sit-in banquet dinner. Let us travel to Bunratty Castle and Folk Park, to the past, and your next excellent castle travel fix.

When was Bunratty Castle built?



Bunratty Castle in Co. Clare, Ireland Adobe Stock Image

The 15th-Century Bunratty Castle sits on a Viking trading camp from 970. Bunratty is the last of four castles built on the site. Tour this iconic fortress with your ears, eyes, and imagination while enjoying the beautiful Clare countryside. Walking to the Castle will pull you into another world and time. After you enter, you will find a gorgeously restored castle with nothing spared. Authentic whitewash brightens the stone walls, making all the art and tapestries.

We are proud Castle Hunters ourselves. Check out our Castle Hunter page [here](#).

Bunratty Castle and Folk Park location and directions

Located just off the N18 Limerick/Ennis Road (just ten minutes from Shannon Airport).

Bunratty Castle is a 2 1/2 hour drive from Dublin via M7. It is a 1-hour drive from Galway via M18.

- [Bunratty Castle & Folk Park](#)

Planning a trip to Ireland? Check out our [Ireland Travel Guide](#)

TIP

We recommend pre-booking tickets as Bunratty Castle and Folk Park is a popular destination – [CLICK HERE TO BOOK TICKETS](#).

We will begin with a history lesson and learn who lived in Bunratty Castle



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Early History

Robert De Muscegros, a Norman, built the first defensive fortress (an earthen mound with a strong wooden tower on top) in 1250.

His lands were later granted to Thomas De Clare, who built the first stone castle on the site. About this time, Bunratty became a large town of 1,000 inhabitants.

In 1318, Richard De Clare, son of Thomas, died in a battle between the Irish and the Normans. His followers were routed, and the Castle and town were completely destroyed. The Castle was restored for the King of England but was laid waste in 1332 by the Irish Chieftains of Thomond under the O'Briens and MacNamaras. It lay in ruins for 21 years until Sir Thomas Rokeby began rebuilding. But it went under attack again by the Irish, and the Castle remained in Irish hands after that.



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MacNamara and O'Brien Clans

The powerful MacNamara family built the present structure around 1425, but by 1475, it became the stronghold of the O'Briens, the largest clan in North Munster.

The chief of the Clan Culleín (which was led by the MacNamara family) was Maccon MacNamara. His father had previously conquered Quin Castle from the Normans. Having been wrecked in the process, he had donated it to the church to be converted into a Franciscan monastery. Maccon had kept up the family tradition of piety and even received personal thanks in an encyclical from Pope Eugenius IV. Perhaps inspired by the Normans, the MacNamara also built around 50 towers and castles around

Thomond during this time, and Bunratty was one such Castle. In 1475, the Castle became the property of the O'Briens – almost certainly not through conquest, as the relationship between the MacNamara and O'Brien clans was very close, but possibly through marriage or in tribute. They expanded the Castle, and before 1558, it became the capital of Thomond.



Image from Bunratty Castle Website

Earls of Thomond

Under Henry VIII's surrender and re-grant scheme, the O'Brien's were granted the title 'Earls of Thomond,' In exchange, they agreed to profess loyalty to the King of England.

As part of the conditions of this, his family abandoned Irish traditions and renounced the Catholic faith, becoming adherents of the new Anglican church.

They ruled the territory of North Munster and lived in great splendor. Beautiful gardens surrounded the Castle, and it was reputed to have a herd of 3,000 deer. The reign of the O'Briens ended with the arrival of the Cromwellian troops, and the Castle and its grounds were surrendered. The O'Briens never returned to Bunratty but later built a beautiful residence at Dromoland Castle, now a luxury 5-star hotel.

Bunratty Collection



Bunratty Castle sat in ruins until the mid-20th century, in danger of being torn down for stone.

Viscount Gort, a mediaevalist, bought the Castle in 1953 for a nominal sum, saving it for posterity. Encouraged by a small group of individuals, including the archaeologist John Hunt, they returned the Castle to its former splendor. Lord and Lady Gort always had a deep interest in early furniture and works of art.

The Castle welcomes thousands of visitors daily all year round and also provides the unique location for the world-renowned Bunratty Medieval Castle Banquets, which occur in the Castle nightly at 5.30 pm & 8.45 pm year round.

With guidance and advice from the internationally renowned experts on medieval art, John and Putzel Hunt, Gort re-acquired the family estate at Lough Cutra in 1952 and shortly afterward purchased Bunratty Castle. In conjunction with the Office of Public Works and Bord Failte and again working closely with John Hunt as his leading advisor, Lord Gort set about restoring the National Monument that was Bunratty Castle as a place where the public could enjoy a sense of life in the Castle as it was in medieval times.



Parallel with restoring the Castle, Gort, and Hunt also filled its rooms with the furniture, artworks, and everyday objects of the era when the Castle was the home of the McNamara and O'Brien chieftains. In the setting at Bunratty Castle, this extensive collection, sourced mainly from continental Europe, now constitutes the most comprehensive showcase anywhere in Ireland of the late medieval and early Renaissance period.

Plantation Families



Image from Bunratty Castle Website

Bunratty Castle and its lands were granted to various Plantation families, the last of whom was the Studdart family.

They left the Castle in 1804 (allowing it to fall into disrepair) to reside in the more comfortable and modern Bunratty House, which is open to the public on the grounds of the Folk Park.

Bunratty returned to its former splendor when Viscount Lord Gort purchased it in 1954. Open to the public in 1962 as a National Monument, it welcomes visitors year-round. It is the most complete and authentically restored and furnished castle in Ireland.

Time to Visit Bunratty Castle and Folk Park



Bunratty Castle and Folk Park Hours

Bunratty Castle and Folk Park will open 7 days per week – from 9 am to 5.30 pm
Please note the last admission to Bunratty Castle is at 4 pm

Bunratty Castle Medieval Banquets operate nightly at 5.30 pm and 8.30 pm, subject to availability.

Ceili in the Kitchen Show operates on Tuesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays at 7 pm, subject to availability

Bunratty tickets prices

Bunratty Visit Adult
€15.25

Bunratty Visit Chd 4-18yrs
€11.50

Bunratty Visit Child 0-3yrs
€0.00

Bunratty Visit Family (2&2)
€40.85

Bunratty Senior/Student Ticket
€11.50

Bunratty Family (2AD+6CH)
€61.50

Ticket Information

Tickets include full access to the Castle, farmhouses, village street, playground, fairy trail, walled gardens, playground, and more.

Annual Pass Holders

Bunratty Castle and Folk Park Annual Pass Holders do not have to book tickets in advance. Present your membership card and a valid ID at admissions on arrival to gain entry.

Membership is **FAMILY PASS – €150** annually and **INDIVIDUAL PASS – €100**

Rewards of membership

- Day visit admission to Bunratty Castle and Folk Park
- 10% Discount on admission to other Shannon Heritage Attractions
- 10% Discount in the Bunratty Retail Store
- 10% Discount in all food outlets, including Mr. O'Regan's Café
- Free Parking
- Priority booking options for all events – additional fees apply for Easter, Halloween, and Christmas events.
- 10% discount on Shannon Heritage Evening Entertainment Shows

The Folk Village



Experience village life in 19th-century Ireland!

The village sits on 26 beautiful acres of the Irish countryside in Clare. There are over 30 buildings in Bunratty Folk Park, and they create a realistic 'living' village setting.

Rural farmhouses, village shops, and streets are recreated and furnished as they would be at the time according to their social standing. From the poorest one-roomed dwelling to Bunratty House, a fine example of a Georgian residence built in 1804 home of the Studdarts, the last family to occupy Bunratty Castle.

Bunratty is home to some of Ireland's cuddliest and cutest residents. Bunratty's Folk Park Paddocks

and Pa's Pet Farm are home to various friendly animals. From Irish red deer and Irish Wolfhounds to pigmy goats and Connemara ponies, there's lots of fun to have, whatever the weather – indoors and outdoors. Children and adults can learn about animals in a safe environment where education and fun combine for an exciting and unforgettable experience.

Village Street



The Village Street is the epicenter of Bunratty Folk Park. A collection of brightly colored shops and buildings sit side by side while sweet sounds of traditional Irish music play. The village characters, including the schoolteacher, policeman, and village doctor, are on hand to entertain and enthrall all who visit.

The village houses and shops in the Folk Park have been chosen from many different areas to form a collection of typical 19th-century urban Irish buildings, including the School, Doctor's House, Pawnbrokers, Pub, Drapery, Printworks, Grocery, Hardware shop, Pottery, and a Post Office.

In the early 19th century, country people provided for most of their needs in food, clothing, and supplies and bought only luxuries such as sugar, salt, and tea. Fairs and markets in the Village allowed the farmers and the rural artisans to sell their products for cash, while shops provided for the rural resident's needs. However, exciting new products were becoming available in the local shops during this time, rivaling and eventually replacing home production.

The Village existed at a time of fundamental change in Irish society. As such, it illustrates the growing money-orientated lifestyle of many villagers alongside the traditional, self-sufficient rural culture.

Download a copy of our [Map of the Park for your convenience](#)

TIP

There are many special events and functions at Bunratty Castle and Folk Park. Check their schedule before you go – [CLICK HERE FOR THEIR EVENT SCHEDULE](#).

Buildings of the Bunratty Village



THE PUBLIC HOUSE, MACNAMARA, AND SONS, at the top of the village street, is a fully licensed working pub in an old-fashioned hotel bar style and provides modern catering facilities. Be sure to drop into Mac's for a pint! The pub furnishings reflect the lifestyle of the time and the fact that the publican not only sold drinks in former times but also traded in groceries and hardware.

BYRE DWELLING An example from County Mayo of a dwelling occupied by humans and their milking cows. There is a pigsty nearby.

CASHEN FISHERMAN'S HOUSE A simple two-roomed North Kerry Salmon Fisherman home. Much of the timber in this house would have been salvaged from the sea. The floor is made of rammed clay.

Farmhouses

MOUNTAIN FARMHOUSE A poor farmer's house of a type found on the borders of Limerick and Kerry. It has a loft for extra sleeping space.

LOOP HEAD FARMHOUSE The house of small fisher-farming folk. The thatch is roped down to protect it against the Atlantic Gales. Here, you will observe the Bean a Ti (woman of the house) traditionally baking bread.

SHANNON FARMHOUSE The first farmhouse to be reconstructed on the site, which marks the beginning of the development of Bunratty Folk Park. The house was removed from where it originally stood on the current runway at Shannon Airport.



BOTHAN SCÓIR FARMHOUSE A one-roomed dwelling of a poor landless laborer. Many of these fell into disrepair or were destroyed during the great famine of 1845-1847.

NORTH CLARE FARMHOUSE Reflects the building style and materials of the Moher area of North Clare. This house was near the Cliffs of Moher in Co. Clare. The local stone, a thick flagstone, is used as a multi-purpose building material for homes, outbuildings, etc.

GOLDEN VALE FARMHOUSE A prosperous farmer's home from the rich lands in the Golden Vale of counties Limerick and Tipperary. It has stables, byres, and a corn barn. Bean a Ti's bake brown bread,

porter cake, apple tart, and griddle bread.

People of the Village

BEAN AN TI You will see the Bean an Ti (woman of the house) hard at work preparing soda bread, griddle cake, or apple tart. You may even receive a sample!

Join the Bean an Ti's in the Golden Vale Farmhouse to watch them prepare Irish Wholemeal Brown Bread, delicious Fruit Scones, Griddle Cake, and Soda Bread. Some are cooked at the hearth, on the griddle, or in a 'Bastible' (covered pot), where embers are raked under and over to create a hot oven.

RIC POLICEMAN The RIC (Royal Irish Constabulary) police officers were the police force in Ireland from the early nineteenth century until 1922. You will see RIC Policemen patrolling the village street, ensuring all our visitors are safe!

SCHOOL TEACHER See the local school teacher giving lessons in the local school located on Village Street. Experience what school was like in early 19th-century Ireland.

LOCAL MUSICIAN Ireland has a rich heritage of music and dance, which will become immediately evident as soon as you hear the local musician play traditional Irish music throughout the Folk Park!

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A safe & enjoyable experience for children at the Farm

Named in memory of Pa Crowe, the person responsible for first introducing animals to the folk park in the 1960s, Pa's Pet Farm is Bunratty Castle and Folk Park's newest attraction! Visitors can meet baby lambs, rabbits, ducks, goats, chickens, and much more, all under the supervision of our expert farmers. Say hello to our beautiful Falabella pony, Frank, adopted rescue donkeys Millie & Tillie, and Irish Wolfhounds Saoirse and Meabh, who visit their farm friends daily.

Find the animals



Image from Bunratty Castle website

The brand new Pa's Pet Farm Paddock Trail is across from Bunratty Castle and Folk Park.

Follow the trail around the 26 acres and find your favorite animals while enjoying all the park's delights.

For younger visitors, download their animal adventure checklist before your visit. [Download the attachment](#), bring it along to Bunratty Castle and Folk Park, and see how many of our adorable animals you can spot during your visit.



Image from Bunratty Castle website

Conservation of rare breeds

Pa's Pet Farm proudly showcases animals in their natural environment, allowing them to graze in the Folk Park paddocks.

A visit to Bunratty Castle and Folk Park offers the unique opportunity to learn about these beautiful animals – the care they receive, their feeding routines, and how we ensure they experience the best care and comfort while residing at Bunratty.

Learn how they play a part in preserving breeds of animals native to Ireland, particularly indigenous breeds of sheep, goats, cows, pigs, ponies, and poultry, which would have been popular in the early 1900s, the period on which the folk park is based.

Irish Wolfhounds



Snooxing wolfhounds they are huge!

Irish Wolfhounds have inhabited Ireland long before the arrival of Christianity and the written word. They are known for being gentle, friendly, and very intelligent. Their two resident Irish Wolfhounds, Meabh and Saoirse, are proof of this, and all who visit love them!

The Garden

There is a beautiful walled garden at Bunratty House. It is a surviving part of the demesne originally formed around Bunratty Castle, built for the house around 1804. A large garden within the demesne, located north of the Castle, would have functioned as a kitchen garden for Bunratty House.



Image from the Bunratty Castle website

The garden was on the east side of the house, beyond the stables, protected from the westerly winds. Four original stone walls forming an irregular space circle the garden. Apart from the walls, no original features remain except for a disused entrance to the south wall near the house and an entrance near the southeast corner, with original Iron Gates. Views from the garden to the east overlook the reclaimed salt marshes of the Owengarney River Valley and to the south toward the River Shannon Estuary.

The Bunratty Folk Park gardens have been restored with the assistance of an ERDF grant through the Great Gardens of Ireland Restoration program. Each garden plot of the dwellings has also been restored. They paid particular attention to planting and land use of the period. The gardens and environs portray the everyday lives of the inhabitants of the houses and Bunratty's heritage. The concept creates a unique experience in Ireland and the rest of Europe.

Fairy Trail and Fairy Village



Image from the Bunratty Castle website

The Fairy Trail and Fairy Village are in a lovely woodland section of this historic landmark. Ireland is famed for these magical creatures of myth and legend. The mystical creatures inhabiting the little fairy houses at Bunratty Folk Park have been here for quite some time, living quiet yet productive lives.

Discover all its secrets in the surroundings of the magical forest trail.

Trail Highlights

The Fairy Trail at Bunratty Folk Park brings visitors on a whirlwind adventure through some of the park's most picturesque locations.

Visit the Fairy Travel Centre and see where fairies like to go on their holidays. Drop by the Fairy University or Fairy Library and read from the magical book of spells.

Try on a set of fairy wings for size, or walk through the enchanted woods and uncover the Fairy Shopping Village, their magical dummy tree, and fairy water wheel.

With so much to discover, the Fairy Trail at Bunratty Folk Park will be a magical experience for all ages!



Image from Bunratty Castle website

FREE INTERACTIVE FAIRY TRAIL GUIDE

Download our [Fairy Trail booklet](#) before your visit and follow the clues and trail to make your stay memorable.

Check out the [official website](#) of Bunratty Castle and Folk Park

The Medieval Feast



Capture

Now for the final treat of the impressive Bunratty Castle, the medieval feast. What better setting to have a banquet than a majestic 15th-century Castle? Taste your glass of delicious Bunratty Mead as characters in full attire play beautiful medieval music. First, The Earl's Butler will welcome you by toasting an era of great Irish tradition and food. Learn a brief history of the Castle as you begin. Throughout the night, The Earl of Thomond will entertain you. Continue your meal with excellent food and fine wine. This is an experience you will never forget. We will be back to try this; we were unaware of it during our visit. We plan to take Ryan's young son with us next time. What an introduction to international travel that will be!

Spend an evening “immersed” in the world of medieval dining

Menu

Bunratty Mead

Spiced Parsnip Soup

Spare Ribs with Honey & Whiskey Sauce

Pan-fried supreme of Chicken, Fresh Garden Vegetables, Baby Roast Potato, Bordelaise Sauce

Rastin Bramley Apple & Cinnamon Crunch, Chantilly Cream

Coffee / Tea

Adults – €66.00 4-10 – €37.50 Under – 4 Free

From their Traditional Irish Night to the Medieval Banquet, Bunratty has world-class musicians who play everything from the fiddle to the harp and are sure to entertain! You may also hear them play Traditional Irish music in the Folk Park throughout the day!



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Are you heading to the Scottish Highlands? Check out our article on the [Isle Of Skye](#).

Where to stay when visiting Bunratty Castle and Folk Park



One of the historic rooms on display at Bunratty.

Our visit to Bunratty came on our last day in Ireland. The next day, we flew to London. When we return, we will surely make it a longer stay. Shannon airport is nearby with some lovely hotels and BnB's. The links below will help you find accommodations. Make sure to read the most recent reviews.

We believe it is important to price out properties on various sites. [Expedia](#) is a US-based company, whereas [Booking.com](#) is Europe-based. Not all properties appear on both. If the establishment has a website, check the price there as well.

Final thoughts



Bunratty Castle delivers a unique and memorable experience. It truly has something for everyone. You can step back in time and explore the Castle, its architecture, and how others lived in mighty structures like this. Walk the trails with your kids or let them meet the many different animals and characters around the park.

Stay more than a day to experience all the characters, buildings, music, and charm. Grab a beer in the pub or have a good dinner. Treat yourself to the medieval banquet or join in some activities. Are you traveling solo, with your family, or with someone hard to please? This is a complete destination for all travelers, explorers, knowledge seekers, and wanderers.

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