



OPW Oifig na
nOibreacha Poiblí
Office of Public Works

Social Guide

A trip to the Rock of Cashel



Introduction

We are going on a trip to The Rock of Cashel.

It is one of Ireland's most well-known national monuments that boasts a 1600 year history from the 4th Century to the present day and boasts one of the most remarkable collections of Celtic art and medieval architecture to be found anywhere in Europe and is located in Cashel, Co. Tipperary.

In this story we will learn about how one would enter The Rock, access its buildings and features, make our way around the site and find out what we can expect to see during the visit.

Approach to site, Parking and Toilets



This is the view we will see as we approach the site. Note road markings for parking.



Continue to follow the road markings and enter by requesting a ticket at the machine.



You will need to keep your ticket to pay for parking at this Paystation after your visit. It is located near the carpark exit.

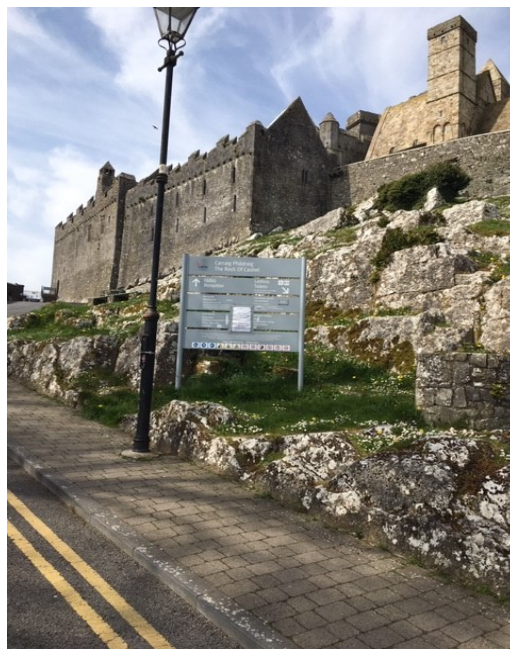


*NB- You will encounter the toilets as you exit the carpark and make your way towards the site. There are **NO** toilets on site.



Make your way up the hill towards the site entrance. Vehicles are forbidden access past this point unless prior arrangement with staff.

The hill is usually very busy with people so be sure to stay with your travelling party or family.



Halfway up the hill you will see this noticeboard. It will contain prices, opening times and general information regarding health and safety and rules and regulations.

Entrance

The Rock has two entrances.*



The General Public enter through the Hall of the Vicar's Choral, where they can purchase tickets for:

- General Admission
- Cormac's Chapel Guided Tours
- Heritage Cards



This is the Main Gate. Only large tour groups can enter here.

Everyone will exit through this gate.

This is to minimise congestion at entry.

There will be a guide at the gate to assist you if you have trouble figuring out which entrance is for you.

*These entries are for the summer season; they may differ in the winter.

Reception



This is our reception.

It is small and it can get very busy in the Summer and you may have to que for a short time before speaking to a person at the desk.

Due to the crowds, it can be very noisy in reception at times.

The desk staff are there to help you as best they can and are always very warm and approachable.

Do not hesitate to ask any of the guide staff any questions regarding any query you may have.

Guided Tours



On admission to the site, you have the option of taking a General Guided Tour (45 minutes) and/or a Tour of Cormac's Chapel (subject to availability, entry is by guided tour only, 20 minutes). Visitors are also welcome to self-guide on-site.

You will be informed about the next available public tour when you buy your tickets.

They will generally be announced from St. Patrick's Cross, seen in the photo.

Cormac's Chapel tours begin outside the chapel. Follow the path to your right.

The site will be very busy at times and groups may be large so stick with your friends or family as the guide may have to begin elsewhere.

Tours are casual and you can hop in and out of them as you please.

Self-Guiding and Audiovisual



If you decide to self-guide, you can purchase a guide booklet for a small fee at this green hut. (May be closed in winter)

This will help you navigate the site while also telling you the history here.

You can also approach the guide with any queries you may have, as the desk staff may be too busy.



The door you see here on the left is the entrance to our audio-visual theatre.

‘Strongholds of the Faith’ is a 20-minute presentation on what was happening in Ireland when the buildings on the Rock of Cashel were being constructed between the 12th and 18th Centuries.

Audio-Visual is available to all visitors to the site. It is available on a first-come, first-served basis during the Winter months. From the 1st June, to the 31st August these films are on a set timetable, which cannot be changed.

A copy of this timetable is available on request. It is not possible to reserve seats in the audio-visual theatre as this is for general tourist use.

Getting Around

If you decide not to go on a tour or purchase a map, here is a general guide to getting around.

If you are going alone, please be careful when walking around as the site is uneven and there are many old broken headstones.

The site is also exposed and it can get very windy on site, even if there is no wind as you walk up the hill.

It tends to rain a lot in Ireland so be prepared for wet weather and dress accordingly.

Out of respect for the people buried here and the buildings themselves, you should not sit or climb on any objects on site.

Tower House



The first building you will see when you go on site is the Tower House.

Tower Houses are very common residential buildings found all over Ireland.

Built between the 13th-16th Centuries, they are very defensive structures built for very important people such as local lords and noblemen.

This was once the residence of the Archbishop of Cashel from the 1400's until the early 1700's.

It was built by Archbishop Richard O'Hedian and was abandoned when Archbishop Theophilous Bolton built a new residence in Cashel town, today known as the Cashel Palace Hotel.

Much of the south side of the building was destroyed during a storm in 1848.

St. Patrick's Cathedral



Beside the Tower House you will see the entrance to St. Patrick's Cathedral.



The cathedral is a large cruciform Gothic church without aisles built between 1230 and 1270. A 15th Century tower rises from the crossing between the church and the transepts.

The cathedral was crudely fitted in between three earlier features; the round tower, Cormac's Chapel and a rock-cut well. As a result, you will find that the east facing chancel area where the altar once was located is far longer than the shallow western nave that you are standing in.

This gives the impression that the building is built upside down.

The two transepts are almost identical in their size and features and their tall lancet style windows are in keeping with a previous structure.

This building was the scene of an event known as 'The siege of Cashel' where, during the Confederate Wars, close to 1000 inhabitants and Irish Catholic Confederate soldiers were massacred in 1647 by Lord Inchiquin's (Murrough O'Brien) Protestant Parliamentarian soldiers who would have been loyal to Oliver Cromwell.



When you are ready to leave, exit through this door on the north side of the nave (directly opposite where you would have entered the building).



Continue along the path that cuts through the graveyard and make your way towards The Round Tower.

On a clear day like seen here, you can see the wonderful views of The Golden Vale of Munster, some of the most fertile land in Ireland.

This graveyard is the oldest active graveyard in Ireland and people are still buried here so please remember to respect those buried by not running, leaning or climbing up on the headstones.

The Round Tower



The Round Tower is the oldest surviving building on site.

It dates from the early 12th Century and was probably completed in and around 1101, the same year the site was gifted over to the church.

The round towers of Ireland are ecclesiastical bell-towers, referred in the Irish Annals as cloicteach (bell house), and were built between the 10th and 12th centuries primarily as the church belfries of early medieval monasteries.

Round towers were free-standing and are unique in their shape and form to Ireland.

It is 28m tall from base to the top of the conical shaped stone capped roof and was made from limestone and sandstone.

Its round-headed doorway is well above ground level, a common feature among round towers, and faces south-east presumably towards the west doorway of the main church then on the site.

This was to allow quick access in time of attack.

The door was more than likely accessed through a rope ladder that could then be pulled up to deter attackers.



Continue along the path and make your way towards Cormac's Chapel.



As you turn the corner, you will see the eastern end of the chapel where the chancel is located. Follow the path until you reach the southern side of the building.

This can be quite a busy area as this is a very important building so stay with your family or travelling party.

Remember, you will need to have purchased Cormac's Chapel tickets and received tickets to go inside this building as it is guided tour **only**.

Cormac's Chapel



Cormac's Chapel was built between 1127-1134 by King-Bishop Cormac Mac Carthaig, making it the second oldest building on site (12th Century).

It is the only complete surviving building in Ireland built in Hiberno-Romanesque style.

The building houses the fragmented remains of the only surviving fresco paintings in Ireland and along with its unique blend of Irish and European architecture, makes it one of Ireland's most important historical buildings.

Chapel Tour Information

You will be informed at reception that the inside is guided tour only due to the conservation and preservation of the interior.

Tickets are sold on a first-come first-serve basis and tours generally begin on the hour (open to change, ask at reception).

Tours will begin from outside the south doorway and will last about 20/25 minutes.

Wristbands are colour coded and you will **not** be given entry if you do not have one or if it is for the wrong tour.

Tour will be in English but is translated on information sheets inside in a number of languages. Must return at end of tour.

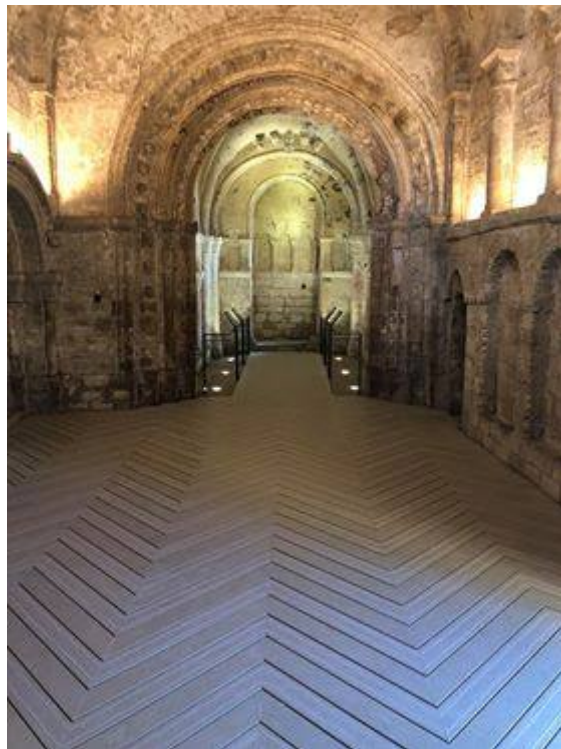
It is up to the visitor to be on time for their respective tour but if you miss your time, return to reception and inform the guides. You may be able to join another group.

The guide will tend to speak from outside for 5/10 minutes before entering as all groups are limited to **15 minutes inside**.

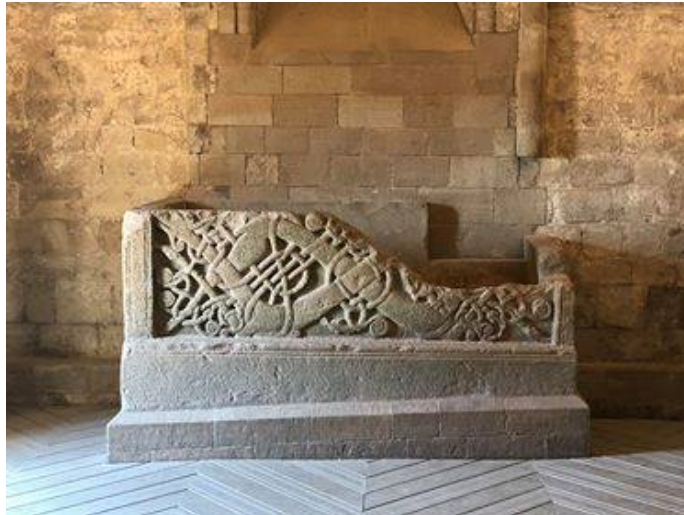
Once the group is inside the door will not be open for that timeframe, unless you have a genuine reason for needing to leave.

If you are late, you will not be able to gain access so please be at the Chapel on time.

The interior is small and there can be up to 100 people on one tour so it can be claustrophobic for some. There will be a separate guide at the entrance to let you out in this case.



Cormac's interior showing Nave and smaller Chancel



12th Century Sarcophagus



Chapel chancel with view of fresco paintings



Fragmented fresco paintings with view of rib-barrel vaulted roof of nave.

The best surviving piece of the fresco is shown here in the western quadrant of the chancel roof.

It possibly depicts The Magi, where Christ was gifted Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh by the Three Kings.

The entire chancel may have once been painted in a similar fashion, possibly telling stories of the life of Christ.

The altar would have been here and hundreds of candles may have once illuminated these wonderful paintings along with the interior.



North doorway to chapel

Above is the original entrance to the chapel. It was blocked off after the construction of St. Patrick's Cathedral (13th C.).

This area has been mostly sheltered to The Rock's harsh climate meaning that a great deal of its features have survived almost unchanged for close to 900 years.

Hall of the Vicar's Choral



When you leave the chapel you will once again see the building you entered from. The middle door seen from this picture is where you will go next.



This entrance will bring you to the upstairs entrance. Remember to be careful as the doors are low in this building.



Restored Kitchen

In the early 15th Century Archbishop Richard O'Hedian built the hall and later the dormitory to the east, to house the Vicars Choral, a group of men, both lay and cleric, appointed to sing during services.

This is the youngest building on site and also the only restored one. It was restored between 1975-82, using contemporary methods.



The fireplace and external walls are mostly original but the roof and furniture inside are not.

The furniture is mostly 17th Century including a Flemish tapestry. It depicts the Queen of Sheba submitting to King Solomon at Jerusalem.

This building is also quite small and is **self-guiding only**. This is for all visitors **AND** tour leaders. Groups can visit individually inside.

This is for the health and safety of all visitors and staff.



Once you are finished, make your way through the building and exit this way. Mind your head and be careful of people coming against you.



Carefully make your way down the steps and beneath them enter the museum.

Museum



Inside the museum you will find a number of artefacts associated with The Rock.

This room is small and may be crowded and loud at times.

Please do not touch the glass or any of the artefacts.

The large stone abject at the back if the museum is the original St. Patricks Cross.

The replica is where we started our visit.



St Patrick's Cross is unusual among Irish high crosses in not having a ring around the cross head and in having had supports at each side of the shaft although only one survives.

A clothed Jesus Christ on the main pillar while the smaller pillars could have represented the two thieves crucified either side of Christ.



On the back of the cross is believed to be a carving of a bishop, possible St. Patrick himself.

St. Patrick is believed to have come to Cashel in the middle of the 5th Century to baptise Cashel's last pagan king, King Óengus (Aengus), into the Christian faith.

Exit



When you are ready to leave, please go out this door once again.

Be careful as the reception may still be loud and busy.

Watch for people on your left who are just entering the site.



Once outside, follow this path to your left.

Tours may be starting here and it will still be busy so staying on the path will lead you straight to the exit.



This gate will be open for you to exit. (May be closed in off season)

Remember it is also the group entrance so stick with your family or travelling party until you are at the bottom of the hill.

Please watch your children and advise them not to go climbing the rocks down the hill on the left as it can be dangerous.

*This is a general outline to for you to follow when visiting The Rock of Cashel. Although the rules and regulations must be followed, how you make your way around the site is up to you. You may have bought guide books that follow a different route and that is ok. We would recommend doing a tour or using one of our self-guiding maps but this may help you if you decide to go without either

More Information

For more information regarding The Rock of Cashel please visit

heritageireland.ie

or visit our Facebook page

facebook.com/therockofcashel