

# Irish Castles, Guardians Of History, Myth And Legend [B2]

Dalle roccaforti alle rovine spazzate dal vento: l'Irlanda abbonda di castelli medievali, alcuni dei quali sono tra le attrazioni più affascinanti del Paese

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It resembles a scene from a [fairy tale](#): a medieval castle on the top of a hill, surrounded by [rolling green hills](#) that [stretch](#) as far as the eye can see. Yet this type of dramatic rural landscape is typical of Ireland, a small country of over thirty thousand castles or castle ruins. These were once grand buildings, fortresses and residences, all of which stood as symbols of power.

## NORMAN STRONGHOLDS

The Normans (originally Vikings) introduced castles to Ireland in the 12th century, constructing them to defend the country from attack. Over the following centuries, Gaelic [chieftains](#), who were leaders of their clans, and other clan members and families built their own castles. [These latter](#) castles were often in the form of [tower houses](#), which were smaller and more compact than the Norman structures. They were normally strategically positioned, on elevated terrain, [waterways](#) or islands. This gave their occupants control over commercial routes, access to resources, and provided a natural defence against attack.

## GHOST STORIES

Because they were built from stone, many of Ireland's medieval castles survived the passage of time, and have been restored in recent years. Some are inhabited by families, while others have been transformed into hotels or tourist attractions. Visitors can explore their buildings and grounds, while hearing the history, myths and legends associated with them, and watch out for the ghosts that [allegedly haunt](#) them to this day! Here are five of Ireland's most magnificent castles:

## MALAHIDE CASTLE

Irish castles often changed owners, but Malahide Castle was owned by the Talbot Family for almost eight hundred years. Its oldest buildings were built in the 12th century, and it is situated on over 260 acres [105 hectares] of parkland, in Malahide, [Co.](#) Dublin. Behind the castle are the Talbot Botanic Gardens, which have over five thousand species and varieties of plants, a walled garden and seven [glasshouses](#), including an elegant Victorian [conservatory](#). People say Malahide Castle is one of the most [haunted](#) castles in Ireland, with at least five ghosts in residence. One of them is that of Miles Corbet, a loyalist of English statesman Oliver Cromwell. Corbet occupied the castle in the mid-1600s. He was later [hung, drawn,](#) and [quartered](#) for the crime of regicide. His ghost appears as a soldier in armour who disintegrates when seen.

## DUNLUCE CASTLE

Once the site of an ancient fort, a tall rock in [Co.](#) Antrim, Northern Ireland, has been the site of Dunluce Castle since the 13th century. Richard Óg de Burgh, the 2nd [Earl](#) of Ulster, built this quintessential medieval castle. It was later occupied by the McQuillan clan, and then the MacDonnell clan, who displaced them. In 1588, the Spanish Armada galleon La Girona was [wrecked](#) on the coast near the castle. The chief of the MacDonnell clan [allegedly](#) took the ship's cannon and installed it in the castle. You can see a plaque commemorating the ship's [crew members](#) in the local [graveyard](#), where MacDonnell ordered that they be buried. Perhaps because of its fairy-tale appearance, Dunluce Castle is believed to have inspired the fictional Cair Paravel castle in the author C. S. Lewis' famous series The Chronicles of Narnia. In more modern times, the castle was used as the fictional Pyke Castle in the TV series Game of Thrones.

## ROSS CASTLE

On the edge of Lough Leane in Killarney, [Co.](#) Kerry, is Ross Castle, a [tower house](#) and keep built in the 15th century. Originally the home of the

chiefs of the Clan O'Donoghue, the castle later became an important military site. It was one of the last castles in Ireland to surrender to the Cromwell Army in the Irish Confederate Wars (1641-1653). It was prophesied that the castle could only be conquered by ship. When the leader of the army heard this, he successfully attacked the castle from the lake, so fulfilling the prophecy. If you visit the castle, watch out for the ghost of the Irish chieftain O'Donoghue Mór. Legend has it that he jumped or fell from a window at the top of the castle and now lives in a palace at the bottom of the lake. Every seven years, on the first morning of May, he emerges from the lake on his horse, and anyone who sees him is guaranteed good fortune.

## **DUNGUAIRE CASTLE**

One of numerous fortifications built by the O'Hynes clan, Dunguaire Castle is a 16th-century [tower house](#) on the coast of Galway Bay in [Co.](#) Galway. It is named after King Guaire, the legendary king who is believed to have lived in a palace on the site of the castle in the 7th century. King Guaire was known for his generosity, and legend says that he often helped a local [beggar](#). After the king died, the [beggar](#) visited his grave and said, "King Guaire, even you cannot help me now." At that, the king [reached](#) his skeletal hand from the grave and dropped gold coins at the [beggar's](#) feet. Thanks to King Guaire's intervention, it is said that if you ask a question at the [front gate](#) of Dunguaire Castle, you will have an answer to your question by the end of the day!

## **MCDERMOTT'S CASTLE**

Primarily built in the 19th century, McDermott's Castle is on Castle Island in Lough Key, [Co.](#) Roscommon. Although the castle is relatively modern, the island has been the site of a fortification since at least the 13th century. Much of the current Gothic-style castle was built by the Kings, an Anglo-Irish aristocratic family. However, it is named after the McDermott family, who governed the area and lived on the island for hundreds of years. The castle cannot be visited by tourists because of its protected status, but it can be seen by boat from the lake. Like all Irish castles, McDermott's Castle is

allegedly haunted, in this case by a woman named Úna McDermott. Legend says that Úna fell in love with a commoner, who tragically drowned while trying to visit her on the island, and that she still haunts it to this day.

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# Glossary

- **wrecked** = naufragare
- **crew members** = membri dell'equipaggio
- **commoner** = plebeo
- **rolling green hills** = dolci colline verdi
- **quartered** = squartare
- **Earl** = conte
- **front gate** = cancello principale
- **drowned** = annegare
- **chieftains** = capoclan
- **allegedly** = presuntamente
- **beggar** = mendicante
- **Co.** = abbr. di 'County', contea
- **glasshouses** = serre
- **stretch** = distendersi
- **waterways** = corsi d'acqua
- **haunt** = infestare
- **hung** = impiccare
- **drawn** = trascinare
- **graveyard** = cimitero
- **tower house** = casatorre
- **reached** = allungare
- **fairy tale** = favola
- **These latter** = questi ultimi
- **conservatory** = giardino d'inverno