



Counties Limerick & Tipperary

POP 350,000 / AREA 6989 SQ KM

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Best Places to Eat

- Restaurant 1826 Adare (p321)
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- Befani's (p332)
- Cafe Hans (p327)

Best Places to Stay

- Adare Manor (p321)
- The Boutique Hotel (p316)
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- Dunraven Arms (p321)

Why Go?

From marching ditties to rhyming puns, the names Tipperary and Limerick are part of the lexicon, but both places are relatively unexplored by visitors.

County Limerick is closely tied to its namesake city, which has a history as dramatic as Ireland's. In a nation of hard knocks, it seems to have had more than its fair share. The city's streets have tangible links to the past and a gritty, honest vibrancy, and treasures abound in its lush, green country side.

In contrast, Tipperary town is minor. But amid the county's rolling hills, rich farmland and deep valleys bordered by soaring mountains, it's a peaceful place that's perfect for following a river to its source or climbing a stile to see a lonely ruin.

In both counties, ancient Celtic sites, medieval abbeys and other relics endure in solitude, awaiting discovery. And even Limerick and Tipperary's best-known sights retain a rough, inspiring dignity.

When to Go

- As the third-largest city in Ireland, with a sizeable student population, Limerick city bustles year-round, but is at its liveliest during the warmer months, from around April to October. These are also the best months to explore the rural villages, towns and countryside of both counties, when opening hours for attractions are longest (a number close during the rest of the year) and the weather is at its best.
- Most of the counties' festivities take place from April to October too, including wonderful walking festivals in the Glen of Aherlow.

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 15km south of the city are the haunting archaeological sites around Lough Gur, while about the same distance southwest of the city is the cute thatched village of Adare.

Limerick City

POP 56,800

Limerick city straddles the Shannon's broadening tidal stream, where the river swings west to join the Shannon Estuary. Following its tough past as portrayed in Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, its medieval and Georgian architecture received a glitzy, glossy makeover during the Celtic Tiger era, but the economic downturn has hit the city hard, as evidenced by extensive empty properties and drum-tight security shutters.

The city is rejuvenating again, however. Limerick has been chosen as the country's first-ever Irish City of Culture in 2014 (a designation to be awarded to an Irish city for 12 months every two years), with a packed program of arts, cultural and sporting events. It also has an intriguing, newly renovated castle, a lively art museum and contemporary cafe culture to go with its uncompromised pubs, as well as locals who go out of their way to welcome you.

The city is compact enough to get around on foot or by bike. To walk across town from St Mary's Cathedral to the train station takes about 15 minutes.

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 AD 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 as the town's rulers. Throughout the Middle Ages the two groups remained divided.

From 1690 to 1691, Limerick acquired heroic status in the 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 until the Treaty of Limerick guaranteed religious freedom for Catholics. The English later reneged 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.

Sights

Limerick's main places of interest are clustered to the north on King's Island (the oldest part of Limerick and once part of English town), to the south around the Crescent and Pery Sq (the city's noteworthy Georgian area), and all along the riverbanks.

★ King John's Castle

CASTLE

(www.shannonheritage.com; Nicholas St; adult/child €8/4.50; ☺ 9.30am-5.30pm daily Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct-Mar) The massive curtain walls and towers of Limerick's showpiece castle 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

TRACING YOUR ANCESTORS

Genealogical centres in counties Limerick and Tipperary can help trace your ancestors; contact the centres in advance to arrange a consultation.

Limerick Genealogy (☎ 061-496 542; www.limerickgenealogy.com; Dooradoyle Rd, Lissanalta House, Dooradoyle)

Tipperary North Genealogy Centre (☎ 067-33850; www.tipperarynorth.ie/genealogy; Kickham St, the Governor's House, Nenagh)

Tipperary South Genealogy Centre (☎ 062-61122; www.comhaltas.ie; Brú Ború Heritage Centre, Cashel)

Tipperary Family History Research (☎ 062-80555; www.tfhr.org; Mitchell St, Excel Heritage Centre, Tipperary town)