

IRELAND'S ANCIENT EAST

A GUIDE FOR FOOD & DRINK VISITOR EXPERIENCES



**IRELAND'S
ANCIENT EAST®**
Wander Through Time



Fáilte Ireland
National Tourism Development Authority



Stories of our food and drink connect visitors with our place – with our landscape, our seas, our history, our heritage and our values.

This guide shows how you can help visitors have an unforgettable experience – by sharing the great stories of your food and your place, the history and the setting, the ingredients and the processes, the people, the craft and the skill.

Time-honoured traditions using the best ingredients in the world.

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Riverside dining in Kilkenny, Rivercourt Hotel

INTRODUCTION

Our purpose is to make Ireland's Ancient East the most engaging, enjoyable and accessible cultural holiday experience in Europe.

We support the development and delivery of visitor experiences that are based on best-in-class storytelling and interpretation.

By their very nature, experiences based on food and drink are amongst the most engaging and enjoyable of all. Therefore, they can become a powerful enhancement of the Ireland's Ancient East brand. They are also a core part of the tourist experience – currently food and beverage accounts for 35% of overall visitor spend in Ireland, some €2.2 billion.

Even though Ireland boasts great quality food and drinks, research shows that we have a limited world reputation in this area. Ireland's Ancient East provides a framework for developing a new story about Irish food, a consistent message that is heard from the moment our visitor arrives in the country through to every restaurant and café.

This story is all about people: the generations of farmers and fishermen, the artisan producers, the brewers and distillers, the new wave of inspired chefs and the warm, welcoming hosts that turn this great natural larder into experiences our visitors will always remember.

Our food and foodservice industries – the people who work within them and the products and services they provide – are an important and growing part of Ireland's tourism proposition. Equally, growing the tourism dimension of your food or drink business can enhance reputation, referrals and ultimately revenue.

This guide shows how to develop tourism within your business, and how to embrace the Ireland's Ancient East opportunity to create world-class visitor experiences.

Our goal is that Ireland's Ancient East is associated with world-class food and drink experiences.



1. UNDERSTANDING FOOD TOURISM

Food Tourism is any tourism experience in which one learns about, appreciates, and/or consumes food and drink that reflects the local, regional or national cuisine, heritage and culture.

Food Tourism seeks to channel the immense global interest in food and beverage experiences that are specific to a destination.

Food has an unmatched ability to communicate a unique sense of place – providing a direct connection to the place, the people and daily life.

2016 Research by the World Food Travel Association 2016 Food Travel Monitor examined the perceptions of 2,500 travellers in 10 countries, including Ireland. Important insights include:

- **77%** of holiday makers were satisfied or very satisfied with Ireland's food offering
- This satisfaction rating increased to **83%** amongst "food travellers" whose prime motivations for selecting a destination are food and drink related activities
- **93%** of those surveyed reported participating in a food activity on a recent trip
- **66%** of holiday makers and **78%** of food travellers rated food as important in their overall experience of Ireland
- Over half (**57%**) of the holiday makers agreed that food experiences are now more important than they were 5 years ago
- **49%** of holiday makers and **60%** of food travellers considered Ireland's food and drink experiences to be memorable



CONCLUSION

1. Food and beverages are an essential and growing part of the visitor experience.
2. The pursuit of unique and memorable food and beverage experiences is on the rise.

Above: Enjoying lunch at the Irish Whiskey Still, Dromineer, Co Tipperary



The research also identified the most desirable food experiences in Ireland to be:

1. Visiting a local producer or processor
2. Visiting a whiskey distillery or micro-brewery
3. Going on an urban walking food tour
4. Attending a food festival or food-related event
5. Following a food trail
6. Foraging with a local expert
7. Attending a cookery school

2. DEVELOPING AND IMPROVING OUR VISITOR EXPERIENCES



Oysters and fun at Carlingford Oyster Festival

High quality and authentic food and drink products are at the heart of Ireland's food tourism sector. They are not sufficient on their own, however, and it is widely acknowledged that a memorable experience must also be provided.

The quality of this Visitor Experience is fundamental to the tourism element of your food business – it drives reputation, recommendations and revenue.

In order to develop or improve your Visitor Experience, it is important to understand the five components that comprise world-class food and drink experiences:



Focusing on Stories and Narration in Ireland's Ancient East

Ireland's Ancient East exists to unlock Ireland's living culture and ancient heritage through story-telling. In a crowded travel marketplace, stories and story-telling are the key to making this region stand out.

This means communicating ourselves and our place through stories. It also means understanding how we can collaborate widely to ensure visitors

experience a "destination of stories" – through the people they meet, the experiences they have and the way things are presented and interpreted.

While acknowledging the importance of all five components of the Visitor Experience, this guide focuses particularly on the Story and Narration elements. It shows how our food, beverage and tourism industries can come together to develop a truly distinctive story-based approach to Ireland's Ancient East Visitor Experiences.

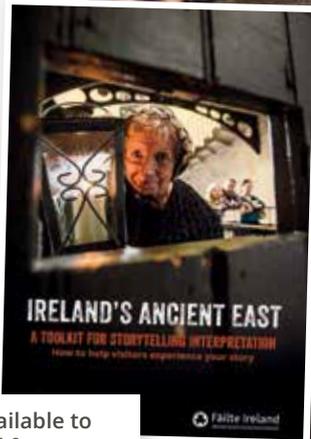
3. STORYTELLING FOR IRELAND'S ANCIENT EAST

THE STORY COMPONENT

You know your story better than anyone.
Aim for your story to be...

1. ...clear and well-defined

We have created a special **Ireland's Ancient East Toolkit for Storytelling Interpretation**. This toolkit shows you how to find your best stories and how to tell them in the best way in the best places.



This is available to download from faiteireland.ie/IrelandsAncientEast

2. ...true to Ireland's food and drink heritage

Authenticity and integrity are the most important ingredients of great food and drink experiences. Have pride in what makes us unique – our mild climate, clean waters, fertile soils and the famous rain – a combination that delivers some of the best raw ingredients in the world.

3. ...consistent with the Ireland's Ancient East Food Story

Strong food experiences are typically rooted in the unique aspects of gastronomy that can only be found in a particular location. The narrative for Ireland's Ancient East food and drink stories contains important concepts and words that distinguish it. Weave these into your own story:

- Heartfelt hospitality, bountiful nature
- Lush, green landscapes
- Rich soils
- Grain harvests
- Ancient woodlands and hedgerows
- Clean rivers, loughs and seas
- Stories, customs, traditions and skills passed from generation to generation
- Farming, fishing and foraging traditions that span millennia
- Modern menus in century-old settings
- Cuisine that connects directly to the history of the place – ancient, simple and profound
- The best storytellers in the world.

Engaging tour at Tullamore
Dew Heritage Centre,
Tullamore, Co Offaly



THE NARRATION COMPONENT

◇◇◇ Your Storytelling Chain

It is not enough to have a clear, true and consistent story. It is also vitally important to plan how your story is told. While you may define your story, you may not always be the one to tell it! Invest in the people who can tell your story with pride and passion!

Just as there is a Food Chain, so there is a Storytelling Chain. Imagine the first link. It's the raw ingredient and the story of the farmer, fisherman and grower. The second might be the artisan, brewer, distiller or chef who works with the raw ingredient, incorporating the ingredient into their product and the story into their own. Connected to these are the people who serve the food, narrating stories order-by-order, meal-by-meal. Further links represent those offering guided food tours, those educating about food and those who bring multiple stories together through food trails and festivals. So wherever you are in the chain, create the narrative – until you do, nobody else can either!

The visitor is the final and vital link in the chain. Good storytellers always have an eye on the audience and on how they are reacting and engaging. Always keep the needs of the visitor in mind and tailor your experience accordingly.

For international visitors, consider making key elements of your story available in their native language. Your story will be all the more compelling for visitors if it is in their mother tongue! Perhaps start with one language and gradually build up others over time.

Below: Renowned storyteller Joe from Jerpoint Park in Kilkenny



4. HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR IRELAND'S ANCIENT EAST VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Using a story-telling approach to deliver world class food and drink experiences



Chatting to local fisherman at Ballyhack, Co Waterford

❖❖❖ ARE YOU FARMING OR FISHING, HARVESTING FOODS FROM SOIL AND SEA?

Visiting a local producer or processor is the food experience most sought after by our visitor! You play an important role in the tourism mix.

1. Know what interests your visitor

- The people, present and past, who farmed and fished here.
- The traditions that have been preserved as well as those that have died away.
- What's different about farming or fishing in your particular place? What are the challenges, the benefits, the peculiarities?
- You, your personality and your motivations – what is your connection to this place, this community? Why do you do what you do?

2. Be available to visitors

- Create a time and place where you can tell your story to visitors.
- Host farm or pier visits. Start small, perhaps selecting just one set day, afternoon or even just an hour per week. Stick with it and make yourself available at a time that others can depend on. It may take time to build up knowledge that you are available.
- Participate in farmers markets in your local area.
- Host seasonal or monthly events on site.

3. Build relationships with other visitor experiences that may tell your story

- Just as your raw ingredient becomes part of another's product, so too can your story become part of another visitor experience. Likely re-tellers of your story are food retailers, processors, speciality shops, chefs, foodservice staff, cookery school teachers.
- Invite your story-tellers to work with you and to experience your production process first-hand.
- Provide them with the words and enthusiasm that do justice to your story.
- Meet with their teams and with the people who deal with visitors on a day-to-day basis.

Tell your story:

on your farm or boat, on your website and social media, at farmers markets, during special events, at your clients' place of business.



ST. TOLA IRISH GOAT CHEESE

Food tourism can help revenue and marketing. The producers of St. Tola Irish Goat Cheese offer a weekly public tour of their working farm, sharing their story of sustainable farming and the cheese-making process. Private tours are possible by appointment and visitors can browse the *Economusée* visitor centre and shop at the farmyard. Building strong relationships with restaurants sees the St. Tola brand featured on many menus.

ARE YOU PRODUCING ARTISAN FOOD?

Artisan producers and processors promise a connection with real food and real people, giving visitors a highly tangible expression of the culture and heritage of Ireland's Ancient East.

Focus on:

1. **Your ingredients:** explain the uniqueness of each ingredient, highlighting the freshness and novelty of your end product. If you do not produce all of the ingredients yourself, visit your suppliers, hear their story and incorporate it into your own.
2. **Your craft:** describe the craft – its origins, the traditions that surround it, the nature of the process, and how has it been passed from one generation to the next.
3. **Yourself:** let visitors know a little something of yourself, your motivations, your food philosophy. Let them know how you learned your craft and from whom. Perhaps you have talented hands, a creative mind or expert know-how? In family businesses, many characters with different skills and passions can be included, adding depth and personality to the story.
4. **Your Place:** how can your story pair your food with the ingredients of landscape, culture and heritage? What are the ancestral traditions of food in this place? How have you come to be here and how do you express your connection to your place?
5. **Your Passion:** Tell visitors why you do what you do. Ensure your team live and breathe that passion for your craft and the end product.

Tell your story:

where you produce, on packaging, in your retail unit, on shelving, in-store signs, chalkboards, leaflets, websites, on social media, at food festivals and farmers markets.





BARRONS BAKERY WATERFORD

Barron's Bakery started baking bread in Cappoquin in 1887. Today's generation still uses the same Scotch brick ovens to bake their crusty bread. The loaf is shaped by hand and the bread is proved naturally and slowly. Possibly the last bakery in Ireland to use these type of ovens, the bread has a unique taste, flavour and crust. Esther Barron shares her bread and her story at Dungarvan farmers market. Bakery tours are also available by advance booking.

SAGE RESTAURANT MIDLETON

Sage Restaurant promises "great produce sourced from within 12 miles of our front door". A photo gallery of local producers, proudly displayed in the restaurant, brings personality and life to their story.





SMITHWICK'S EXPERIENCE KILKENNY

Using cutting-edge digital interpretation, Smithwick's Experience Kilkenny takes visitors on a highly interactive, multisensory journey from medieval times through to today. The tour is fully guided by a local guide but the balance of the human touch with digital interpretation provides plenty of surprises along the way.

"The effects throughout the tour just make it all the more interesting and personal and make you feel like you're a part of it all."
– TripAdvisor review.

BOANN DISTILLERY

Named after a legendary Irish goddess, Boann Distillery is the passion of the Cooney family. Their story offers many points of connection for visitors – the legend of Boann, the various family members, the ancient heritage and bounty of the Boyne Valley.

BRIGID'S ALE

Brigid's Ale is a celebration of Kildare and the sacred heritage of St. Brigid, the patron saint of brewing. Kildare sisters, Judith and Susan Boyle, combine their knowledge of both brewing and heritage to deliver a dramatic visitor experience that combines drink tasting with storytelling.

Craft your own unique Gin at Listoke Gin School, Co Louth

ARE YOU BREWING OR DISTILLING?

People choose drinks that they know more about. They choose drinks based on their personality as well as their taste.

Key components of your story may include:

1. **Landscape:** tell visitors about
 - a. the origin of the grains
 - b. the nature of the soil
 - c. the time of the harvest
 - d. the role of grain farming in Ireland
 - e. the terroir: the soils and climatic conditions and the impact they have on the raw ingredient and the end product.
2. **Culture:** immerse the visitor in the culture of brewing or distilling in Ireland's Ancient East – the rise and fall of the industry, as well as its current resurgence.
3. **People:** present your drink as an extension or reflection of the people who make it. Tell your visitors about the founders and forefathers, as well as the brewers and distillers of today.
4. **Process:** more and more visitors want to know how their drink is made – so tell them! For beers, tell visitors about hop variety used, how long the beer has been aged and its taste profile. For spirits, let them know the base starch of your vodka, the barley mixture of your whiskey or the botanicals used in your gin. When it comes to ciders, stories may be about the crushing, pressing and fermentation processes. And remember – make it fun!
5. **Food Connection:** pair your drink with local foods or delicacies and create the narrative that allows visitors appreciate the interaction of the tastes and flavours.
6. **Availability:** let the story live longer by letting visitors know where can they buy your drink during the rest of their holiday and where they can get it once they get home.

Tell your story:

at the brewery or distillery, on labels and websites, during tasting tours, at food festivals and special events.



◆◆ ARE YOU A RESTAURANT OR COOKERY SCHOOL, PREPARING AND SERVING FOOD?

A truly memorable Ireland's Ancient East dining experience goes beyond using local, seasonal food from passionate producers. It goes beyond the use of traditional recipes and regional specialities. It's the story and how it's told that elevates a dish to an experience and a memory.

1. Recipes & Menus:

- a. Give a brief history of why each recipe was created.
- b. Focus on Ireland's culinary staples e.g. potato, meats, dairy, fish and seafood.
- c. Concentrate on simple, traditional recipes that are distinctively Irish.
- d. List suppliers and even food miles on your menu or ingredients list.
- e. Develop a signature dish that is created from ingredients that are 100% local.

2. Provenance:

Focus on the ingredients and the land and people that produce them.

- a. Cultivate relationships with farmers, growers and artisan producers. Know their story and incorporate it into your narrative.
- b. Learn about the farming methods in the local area and understand the terroir.
- c. Be creative in allowing your guests get a sense of this relationship – through photo walls, featured suppliers, social media, guest appearances, for example.

3. People:

- a. Ensure all staff know their role as storytellers and brand ambassadors (both for your business and also for Ireland's Ancient East).
- b. Enable staff to visit and meet suppliers.
- c. Provide quality training on recipes, ingredient selection, terroir and the preparation process.



BALLYMALOE COOKERY SCHOOL, ORGANIC FARM AND GARDENS

Myrtle Allen of Ballymaloe first made a name for herself by designing her daily menu based on fresh produce available in the locality. Her ethos was simple yet ahead of its time: local produce, in season, full of flavour and simply cooked. This remains the story of Ballymaloe Cookery School, a sustainable food project in the midst of a 100 acre organic farm, founded in 1983. It is now ranked as one of the world's top cookery schools, where students travel to learn not only to cook but also to work in harmony with the landscape and to tune into the seasons.

RESTAURANT STORY, LONDON

Michelin-starred chef Tom Sellers tells his story and the story of British food through an ever-evolving tasting menu of seasonal dishes.

"...it was a truly delightful evening with lots of twists and turns and gastronomic experiences. It's definitely a place where all senses are explored and goes beyond just eating food....each dish is presented with a brief story and history of why it was created which just added more depth and meaning to the courses."
- TripAdvisor review.



Ballymaloe Cookery School

Tell your story:

on menus and chalkboards, on websites and social media, through a photo wall of producers, during cookery demos and explanations, at the point of service, during tasting tours or chef-led tours to suppliers, through restaurant design.



Foraging tours at Fore Abbey, Co Westmeath

IRISH SEAWEED KITCHEN

Dr. Prannie Rhatigan has translated her extensive knowledge of sea vegetables into illuminating guided walks and tours that immerse visitors in the touch, taste and smell of Sligo's Atlantic shoreline. The experience with Prannie lives on for visitors through her *Guide to Edible Seaweeds* and *The Irish Seaweed Kitchen*.



◇◇◇ ARE YOU AN EXPERT GUIDE, LEADING URBAN TOURS OR FORAGING EXPERIENCES?

Experiences like yours, in which the visitor takes an active role in the story, make for holiday highlights. While you are a food expert, you must also be expert in the art of storytelling and the creation of food narratives.

Urban Tours:

Walking tours promise visitors that precious contact with locals and an insight into the genuine character of the place. Each stop on the tour is like a chapter of the story. In linking many elements together, urban tours can really deliver 'the bigger picture', the wider story of the place and region.

1. Ensure those you visit are aware of their role as storytellers. Enable them to tell their chapter of your story, taking steps to achieve consistency and authenticity.
2. Ensure the relationship you enjoy with them is extended to your guests. This is the key to letting visitors 'live like a local' for a while.
3. Respond to visitor needs throughout – listen and observe and adapt the tour accordingly.
4. Integrate the wider story of the region and the Ireland's Ancient East themes (see irelandsancienteast.com) into the overall narrative.

Foraging Experiences:

This is immersive exploration at its best, triggering all the senses as your visitors explore and taste the hedgerows, by-roads, green fields and shorelines of Ireland's Ancient East.

1. Tell the story of our ancestral cuisine, our survival instincts and traditions.
2. Translate your expertise into an individual story of each food that grows wild in Ireland.
3. Share your own particular relationship with the foods you find – associations with your childhood, your education, your holidays, your mealtimes.
4. Create a reference book of the wild edibles – it lets the story live on for your visitors and can be a good source of revenue.
5. Go a step further and produce a recipe book based on wild ingredients.
6. Incorporate a picnic made from locally foraged produce.

FAB FOOD TRAILS CORK

Fab Food Trails Cork aim to give both locals and visitors an insight into the best food Cork has to offer. Led by an experienced guide, visitors get to meet the inspiring people behind the food as well as sample local produce, carefully chosen to reflect both the traditional and contemporary Irish Table.

Tell your story:

You yourself embody the story and its narration. Support this on social media and websites, through an expert blog or guest appearances, during cookery demos, in recipe leaflets or books.

5. LINKING FOOD AND DRINK VISITOR EXPERIENCES

Making it easy for visitors to really taste the place

Visitors seek a mix of activities and events while on holiday. Think about how the various food and drink experiences in your area can be brought together in the visitor's mind.



Savouring the flavour at
The Long Table Dinner,
Cork Midsummer Festival

TRAILS

The word 'trail' leads the visitor to expect a defined, well-planned route with clear directions as well as a story. Trails such as this, that go beyond a simple directory of all that's edible in the area, are rare. In seeking to create one:

1. Use storytelling in the overall trail, as well as at the individual stops along the route. The story of the trail should connect it to the place and be reflected by each trail member.
2. Establish common standards for all stops on the route.
3. At each stop, have a clearly defined, recognisable point of arrival so the visitor knows they're in the right place.
4. Reinforce the connecting story at each location – through signage, leaflets, wall displays or through direct storytelling by people on site.

The Ireland's Ancient East Toolkit for Storytelling Interpretation provides detailed guidelines for designing trails. It's available to download from failteireland.ie/IrelandsAncientEast.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

A festival is a wonderful opportunity for visitors to meet makers, growers, artisans, brewers, distillers, chefs, authors, critics all in one place at one time.

1. View your festival or event as a Visitor Experience. Think about product, service, place, story and narrative.
2. Have a central theme (story) reflected in a narrative that is easily understood by all participants. Ireland's Ancient East has 9 signature stories, which can provide themes and context for festivals and events. You can read these on irelandsancienteast.com.
3. Ideally the theme connects the visitor closely to the place and local produce.
4. Ensure everyone participating in the festival or event understands the theme and is encouraged to embrace it.

Make sure that you send in the details of your festival or event through our dedicated website failteirelandevents.ie. It can then be promoted on the Ireland's Ancient East website.

BARRELS BOTTLES & BREWS TRAIL

Craft brewers and distillers in Windsor Essex, the birthplace of whisky in Canada, have come together to create this new visitor experience. The trail tells the story of Canadian Whisky and Prohibition at up to 10 locations. At each one, visitors can sample local craft beer or ultra-premium local spirits which earns them a stamp for their Barrels Bottles & Brews Passport. A full passport can be redeemed at the local tourism office for a free takeaway gift.

GALWAY INTERNATIONAL OYSTER & SEAFOOD FESTIVAL

This festival is held on the last weekend of September to celebrate Galway's rich annual oyster harvest. Running for over 60 years, it is consistently lauded as one of the best festivals in the world and as a virtual 'gourmet extravaganza'. A strong, consistent theme that's easily communicated and experienced in a number of different ways has undoubtedly helped it gain this reputation.

WORKING WITH THE WIDER TOURISM INDUSTRY

From a visitor's perspective, food and drink experiences are part of a much larger holiday mix. The mix includes accommodation, visitor attractions, entertainment, engagement with locals, the arts, public spaces and the natural landscapes and seascapes. It makes sense to link with the tourism experiences that fill the rest of the visitor's day in your area.

1. Join a local tourism network.
2. Seek out partnerships that integrate meals, tours, tastings, accommodation, education or entertainment.
3. Become part of a package. For example, partner with a walking guide or a local accommodation provider.
4. Become advocates for other experiences in your area – actively cross-sell and promote each other so that the visitor is encouraged to stay longer in your area.



Networking at a corporate event in Cork City Gaol

BOYNE VALLEY FOOD SERIES

The Boyne Valley Food Series combines up to 40 events that showcase not only food, but also its links with the heritage, culture, outdoor pursuits and daily life of the Boyne Valley region.

Importantly, on a practical level, the events are bookable: dates, times, prices and locations are all agreed and publicised well in advance. This makes it easy for trade partners to promote the events and for visitors to buy them.

"The Ireland's Ancient East brand has been great for us. We've looked at how it promotes our part of Ireland to visitors and then added our own narrative to that. It has served as the perfect framework for telling the great food stories of The Boyne Valley - our rich farming heritage, our lush landscape, our wonderful producers. It has helped our members realise the opportunities that exist with providing immersive food experiences."

- Olivia Duff, Boyne Valley Food Series



Above: A Boyne Valley Food Series event takes place at Listoke Distillery & Gin School

Right: Boyne Valley leverages the Ireland's Ancient East brand to tell its own food story at the "Food & Landscape" Showcase Dinner at Oxford Symposium of Food & Cookery



6. SALES AND MARKETING CHANNELS FOR TOURISM EXPERIENCES

Once you have defined your visitor experience, the key task is to make sure that visitors can find out about you, not only while on holiday but also at the time that they are planning and researching their visit.

- How do visitors find out about your product?
- Where do they do their holiday research?
- Where do they make bookings?

Fáilte Ireland has developed a range of practical business supports to help you grow overseas sales revenue. These tourism resources are designed, in the first instance, to build your overseas selling capability, and then give you greater access to key overseas markets and targeted buyers. For more information, see the *Understanding Routes to Market* section at failteireland.ie/internationalsales.

Our research has shown that potential visitors to Ireland use multiple options to book their holidays. As a tourism provider, you should therefore aim to use multiple distribution channels to ensure your offering is visible to the visitor. Distribution channels are either Direct or Indirect, as shown on the right.



Negotiating with international buyers at Meitheal, Ireland's biggest tourism trade event

FOOD & DRINK VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Farm visit, food tour, speciality retail, brewery, distillery, food trail, festivals and events, packages that include accommodation and attractions

DIRECT

Online

- Brand website
- Email
- Internet booking engine
- Mobile
- Social media

Offline

- Phone
- Walk-in

OR

INDIRECT

- Tour operators
- Incoming tour operators
- Retail travel agents
- Handling agents
- Destination management companies
- Professional conference organisers
- Online travel agents / 3rd party websites etc

YOUR VISITOR

FOOD & DRINK EXPERIENCES

SHARING STORIES THAT CONNECT THE VISITOR WITH THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE AND HAVE LIVED IN IRELAND'S ANCIENT EAST

If you have questions, get in touch with the Ireland's Ancient East Team – email us at info@irelandsancienteast.ie

The Walled Garden at Colclough, Tintern Abbey, Co. Wexford



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ANCIENT EAST®**
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Fáilte Ireland
National Tourism Development Authority