

The Archaeology of **IRELAND**

WITH DR. DAMIAN SHIELS



**FAR
HORIZONS**
ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL TRIPS

Updated May 2025





TOUR IRELAND

with Dr. Damian Shiels



Tour Ireland and see the Skellig Michael, The Aran Islands, The Rock of Cashel, Dingle Peninsula, Burren's Megalithic Tombs, the Tomb at Newgrange, and Céide Fields

Ireland, the Emerald Isle, boasts a rich history that spans over 9,000 years, beginning with the Mesolithic hunter-gatherers. Leaving a remarkable legacy in their wake, various fascinating cultures have shaped this land over millennia.

Today, Ireland is a treasure trove of historical and archaeological sites, holding Europe's highest concentration of field monuments. These sites encompass a broad spectrum of eras, from Neolithic and Bronze Age to Early Christian, Medieval, and even Modern times, offering a unique window into the course of European history.

Join Far Horizons on an intimate 16 day Irish history tour limited to just six travelers. This adventure starts and ends in the vibrant city of Dublin, taking you around the island and staying in charming local inns.

Immerse yourself in Ireland's lush landscapes and rich cultural heritage. Explore a variety of historical landmarks, including megalithic passage tombs, cairns, stone circles, castles, churches, and abbeys. The tour features visits to Ireland's two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: Skellig Michael and Brú Na Bóinne, along with numerous other significant sites currently on the tentative UNESCO list.

Daily Itinerary

Day 1

Depart for Ireland

Depart on a flight bound for Dublin, Ireland.

Day 2

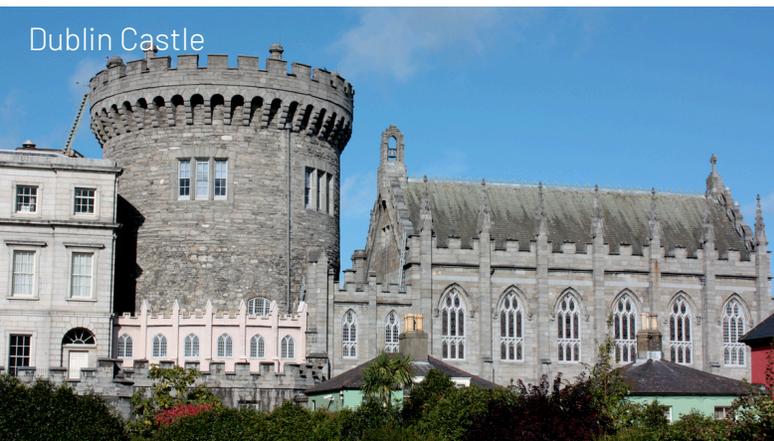
Arrive in Dublin, Dublin Castle, City Walking Tour

Arrive in Dublin in the early morning. Relax at the hotel before meeting the group in the afternoon for a walking tour. Dublin can trace its origin back more than 1,000 years, and for much of this time it has been Ireland's principal city and the cultural, educational and industrial center of the island. Beginning in the 9th century, it was a Viking settlement, until, in 1171, the Anglo-Normans took control and Dublin became the capital of the English Lordship of Ireland and was populated extensively with settlers from England and Wales.

Take a short walk to Dublin Castle, which was the seat of British rule in Ireland until 1922. Though the current incarnation dates to the 18th century, there has been a castle on this site since 1204.

Conclude the evening with a welcome dinner in a quaint pub. Overnight at the Harding Hotel in the heart of Dublin. (D)

Dublin Castle



Day 3

Kilkenny Castle, Jerpoint Abbey, Rock of Cashel

This morning's drive takes us to Ireland's finest medieval city, Kilkenny. Set high overlooking the city, magnificent Kilkenny Castle stands dramatically on a strategic height; it was initially constructed in the 12th century to control a ford in the River Nore. In the 17th century, formal gardens were created and have recently been renovated with several fountains dominating the landscape.

Move on to 12th century Jerpoint Abbey, an outstanding example of Cistercian architecture. Jerpoint is notable for its stone carvings, including one at the tomb of Felix O'Dulany, Bishop of the Diocese of Ossory. The abbey flourished until the Dissolution of the Monasteries by the English King Henry VIII. Although deserted today, much of the remains are still relatively intact with its 15th century crossing tower dominating the surrounding countryside.

In the afternoon, continue west to see the imposing Rock of Cashel, one of Ireland's most spectacular archaeological sites. Rising 300-feet from the surrounding plain, this was a symbol of power and the seat of kings and churchmen who ruled over the region for more than 1000 years. Fortification walls encircle a round tower, a 13th century Gothic cathedral and Cormack's Chapel, the finest 12th century Romanesque chapel in Ireland.

Continue to Cork, built on an island in the River Lee, and connected to the sea by the city's harbor. Overnight for one night in the Imperial Hotel located in the heart of the city. (B/D)

Day 4

Cork City Gaol, Charles Fort

Begin the morning with a walk through Cork City Gaol. Now a museum, the lovely Victorian exterior hides the reality of life for the 19th century prisoners, many waiting to be shipped to Australia. The cells contain wax figures revealing the wretched conditions for the inmates.

Then it's on to Charles Fort, a star-shaped military fortress constructed between 1677 and 1682, during the reign of King Charles II. As one of the largest military forts in the country, it has played a role in some of the most significant events in Irish history.

Overnight for two nights in The Victoria House Hotel in Killarney. (B/D)

Day 5

Skellig Michael, Valentia Island

Travel by boat to the rocky island of Skellig Michael. [A UNESCO World Heritage Site](#), this ancient monastic complex has been resolutely gripping the steep sides of this islet since the 7th century. The bare, exposed topography and the austere structures on Skellig Michael illustrate the extremes of the Christian monastic existence adopted by the first Irish Christians.

Time permitting, continue the day on Valentia Island and view Tetrapod imprints that date to Devonian times, some 350 to 370 million years ago. In the evening, return to Killarney with dinner on our own. NOTE: The boat crossing to Skellig Michael is dependent upon the weather, if rough seas prohibit the visit, alternative arrangements will be made. (B/L)

Day 6

Muckross Estate: Friary, House & Gardens, Gallarus Oratory, Kilmalkedar

Begin today at the Muckross Estate, built in 1839 for Henry Arthur Herbert and his wife, the watercolorist Mary Balfour Herbert. Wander through rooms furnished in period style that portray the elegant lifestyle of the 19th century landowning class. During the 1850s, the Herberts updated the estate gardens in preparation for a visit by Queen Victoria's. Located within the park, Muckross Friary was established (or possibly re-founded) under the patronage of Donal 'an Diamh' MacCarthy around 1440.

After exploring the extensive grounds and gardens of the estate, move on to Ross Island. Actually a peninsula, this site is an important copper extraction and smelting camp believed to be the source of the earliest known Irish Pre-Bronze Age metalwork. In the afternoon, drive west to the Dingle Peninsula, and observe Gallarus Oratory, a dry-stone chapel that was used for private worship. This church was constructed using building methods similar to those used in the Bronze Age burial chamber at Newgrange.

Nearby, see Kilmalkedar, one of the most important ecclesiastical sites in the area.

Overnight at Skellig Hotel in Dingle. (B/D)



Day 7

Lough Gur Heritage Centre, Grange Stone Circle

At the heart of a dramatic archaeological landscape, the enchanting lake of Lough Gur is surrounded by sites from every major period of human history in Ireland. Begin at the Lough Gur Heritage Centre, which lays out the area's 6,000 year past.

Not far is Grange Stone Circle, also known as The Lios, the largest standing stone circle in Ireland consisting of 113 standing monoliths. Due to its alignment with the sun on summer solstice, it is thought that the site had a ritual purpose.

This evening, move on to Ennis and overnight for two nights at the Temple Gate Hotel, formerly a 19th century Convent of Mercy. (B/D)



Day 8

The Burren: Megalithic Tombs & Monuments

Today explore the stark and stony landscape of the Burren, where megalithic tombs and monuments that predate the pyramids can be found. Begin at the Burren Centre, which outlines the history of the area.

Then see the surrounding sites, starting with Kilfenora Cathedral. Dating to the late 12th century, the structure now houses three of the five original high crosses in its nave.

Next, on the edge of a craggy plateau, view the Baur South wedge tomb. This well-preserved construction was built with limestone slabs typical of the area and, uniquely, contains a chamber within a chamber.

Move on to the Neolithic portal tomb of Poulnabrone Dolmen followed by the Parknabinnia Wedge Tombs. See Cahercommaun, the remains of a triple stone ringfort where one of the most impressive collections of Iron Age artifacts in Ireland was uncovered.

Finally, conclude the day at the restored Dysert O'Dea Castle, noted as the site of an epic battle where, in 1318, the O'Dea clan defeated Richard de Clare and his English army and secured the area for Ireland for another 200 years. (B/D)

Day 9

Kilmacduagh Monastery, Thoor Ballylee, Clonmacnoise Monastery, Galway Walking Tour

Sited on the edge of the Burren and dominating the rural landscape, Kilmacduagh Monastery endured repeated plundering but went on to be one of the most important monasteries in the region until the Reformation. Within the complex is an eye catching round tower, which stands 112-feet tall and leans two feet out of perpendicular. The south chapel is believed to be the mortuary chapel of the historic O'Shaughnessy family. A highlight is the chancel with high quality sculptural details that are characteristic of a group of masons, known as the 'School of the West', who were working on ecclesiastical buildings in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Next, visit Thoor Ballylee, a fine tower house that was once the home of the poet W. B. Yeats.

Continue on to Clonmacnoise Monastery, founded in 544 by St. Ciarán. Its location made it a major hub for religion, scholarship and trade. Many of the high kings of Tara and Connacht were buried here.

Finish the day by exploring Galway and overnight for two nights at the Hotel Meyrick. (B/D)



Kilmacduagh Monastery

Day 10

Ferry to Inis Mór, Dun Ducathair, un Eoghanacht, Dun Aengus

Travel by ferry to Inis Mór, the largest of the three Aran Islands. This island is fascinating not only because Gaelic is still widely spoken here, but also because it boasts some of the best examples of Iron Age ring forts that can be found.

Explore Dun Ducathair and the circular fortress of Dun Eoghanacht before seeing the massive fort of Dun Aengus. Perched precariously on the edge of a 200-foot cliff, this fortification is protected by two defensive walls, a third outer wall enclosing eleven acres, and is further surrounded by chevaux-de-frise: a barrier of sharp, stone stakes set upright in the ground to deter attack by enemies and still standing just as they were originally placed over three millennia ago.

Continue to Na Seacht Teampaill, a monastic settlement dedicated to St. Breacan and dating to the 8th-century. (B/D)

Day 11

Drive to Clifden, Kylemore Castle

A scenic drive takes us to Clifden, famous for its high-quality wool tweeds. After a stop to shop, continue north towards Kylemore Castle built in the late 1800s by Mitchell Henry MP, a wealthy businessman and liberal politician. Today it is owned and run by a community of Benedictine Nuns. The nuns have been in residence here since 1920, after evacuating from Belgium during World War I. They converted the structure into an abbey which also functions as an international school for girls. Enjoy the Victorian walled garden that lies outside.

Overnight for one night in the Knockranny House Hotel in Westport. (B/D)

Day 12

Céide Fields, Rathlacken Court Tomb, Carrowkeel Megalithic Cemetery

Céide Fields is a truly unique archaeological discovery in an area mostly blanketed by peat bog. Hidden beneath the turf lies a prehistoric landscape of farms, settlements and tombs that, when taken together, make up the most extensive Stone Age settlement in the world. The creation and development of the Céide Fields can be dated back some five and a half thousand years and little by little these ancient features are being revealed as the peat is cut away for fuel, exposing a setting which has changed perceptions of our Stone Age ancestors.

A short distance away is Rathlacken, a collection of Neolithic structures including a very well preserved three-chambered court tomb.

Our final stop will be the Carrowkeel Megalithic Cemetery, a collection of passage tombs that predate the Giza Pyramids in Egypt.

Overnight for two nights in the Coach House Hotel in Ballymote. Overshadowing this medieval market town are the remains of Ballymote Castle, built in 1300 for Richard de Burgh. (B/D)

Day 13

Boyle Abbey, Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery, Creevykeel Court Cairn

Our morning departure takes us to Boyle Abbey, founded in the 12th century under the patronage of the McDermott family. Today, only small parts of the cloister remain, as the Elizabethans converted it into barracks in 1592 and the Cromwellians besieged it in 1645. Despite its ruined state, the abbey continues to be an excellent example of Ireland's early Cistercian foundations.

Continue to Sligo and see Neolithic sites including the Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery, the largest group of megalithic tombs in Ireland as well as Creevykeel Court Cairn, one of the finest and best-preserved examples of a full-court tomb. (B/D)

Day 14

Abbey of Kells, Brú na Bóinne: Newgrange, Knowth, and Dowth

Long before the coming of Christianity, Kells was a royal residence associated with the legendary Conns Céadchatach (Conn of the Hundred Battles) and Cormac mac Airt. In 550, St. Columba, also known as St. Colmcille, established a religious settlement at Kells. The first church at Kells was completed by 814 and in 878 the relics of St. Columba were brought here. The most famous treasure created by the community of St. Columba is the Book of Kells, a highly ornate version of the four gospels in Latin. Today, the 9th century abbey is noted for its round tower and five large Celtic crosses.

Continue to Brú na Bóinne, an archaeological complex including the sites of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth. This UNESCO World Heritage site is Europe's largest and most important concentration of prehistoric megalithic art.

Return to Dublin and overnight for two nights at the Harding Hotel. Dinner is on our own to discover one of Dublin's excellent restaurants. (B/L)



Newgrange

Daily Itinerary *(cont'd)*

Day 15

Christ Church Cathedral, Trinity College Library, National Museum of Archaeology

Explore Dublin beginning at the nearby Christ Church Cathedral, the oldest medieval cathedral in the city and a place of pilgrimage for almost 1,000 years. Today, it houses the important Treasures of Christ Church, which features manuscripts and ancient artifacts as well as a spectacular exhibition of original 16th century costumes which inspired the designs for the historical series 'The Tudors'.

Continue to the Trinity College Library to view the famous Book of Kells, created in the 9th century and containing the four Gospels in Latin. Also, see the Book of Durrow, a medieval illuminated manuscript gospel book that predates the Book of Kells by over one hundred years.

Enter the National Museum of Archaeology to see the interesting collection of artifacts on display. In the afternoon, enjoy a private tour of the current projects of Grassroots Archaeology, a local nonprofit organization. (B/D)

Day 16

Depart Ireland

Independent transfers to the airport for our flights home. (B)

PLEASE NOTE: This is a sample itinerary that is typical of our trip offerings. In general, you can expect a very similar program, though days may be swapped depending on availability, opening hours, and other affecting factors.

Pre and Post Trip Extensions

Far Horizons offers pre or post extensions for many of our trips. We can also arrange extra nights at the arrival and departure hotel should you wish to arrive early or depart later. Please contact us for details.

Why Take This Tour?

Spend one day on Inis Mór, the largest of the three Aran Islands

Visit both of Ireland's UNESCO World Heritage Sites: Skellig Michael and Brú Na Bóinne

Private tours of St. Doulagh's Church, an Anglo-Norman castle and Martello Tower with the director of Grassroots Archaeology

Maximum 6 participants
This can be a private tour on your desired dates with a minimum of five friends



Trinity College, Dublin



Tour Information

Pricing

For current pricing, please visit farhorizons.com and navigate to our trip page.

Inclusions

Price based on double occupancy and includes:

- Internal flights during the trip (if applicable/unless otherwise noted)
- The accompaniment of your scholar throughout the entire trip
- Local English-speaking guide
- Hotel accommodations (3 or 4 stars; or best available based in the area)
- Ground transportation
- Airport transfers for arrivals and departures
- Most meals as noted in the itinerary
- Entry fees to all included sites and museums
- Gratuities to guides, drivers, and restaurant and hotel staff
- Coordination for any private presentations or tours

Trip prices are based on a minimum number of participants. If this minimum number is not met, trip prices are subject to change. Should the prices need to change, Far Horizons will reach out to registered guests to discuss directly.

Single Supplement

Should a roommate be requested and one not be available, the single supplement will be charged.

Exclusions

- International round trip airfare
- A separate donation check of \$150.00 per person to a designated donation project
- Passport or visa fees
- Required vaccines or tests
- Airport or departure taxes
- Alcoholic drinks, beverages or food not included on set menus
- Excess baggage charges
- Personal tips and hotel incidental expenses
- Laundry or other items of a personal nature

Donation Checks

As a tour company that benefits from the cultural and natural riches of our destinations, we have a policy of donating to the scientific and cultural sites and projects which we visit. This has created a bond between Far Horizons and the academic and local communities that has helped us establish an extensive list of lecturers and contacts in each of our destinations. We ask that each participant donate to the noteworthy project we designate. The donation amount is \$150.00 per person. Note that the donation is required as part of your registration for the trip and that it is non-refundable.

Exchange Rate Fluctuations

Prices are based on currency exchange rates keeping below a projected level. While it is unlikely, if the exchange rates should change substantially, Far Horizons reserves the right to charge an additional amount to the trip cost.

Registration

A deposit of \$1000 per person is required along with your registration & health forms, which will be linked in the email confirmation you receive once you pay your deposit on our booking platform. Final payment is due 120 days before departure. Prior to departure, you will be sent a reading list and a tour bulletin containing travel information.



Cancellation

Cancellations received in writing at least 120 days before departure will receive a refund less a \$500 per person administrative fee.

Cancellations received less than 120 days before the departure date will not receive a refund. If for any reason you are unable to complete the trip, Far Horizons will not reimburse any fees. Upon registering for the tour, the purchase of travel protection with both trip cancellation and emergency evacuation is strongly advised. Links to recommended insurance policies will be included in the email you receive confirming receipt of your deposit.

Expectations During Travel

Our trips are designed for flexible, energetic people who like to be active, have a spirit of adventure and a positive attitude. We have designed this trip to be as comfortable as possible, while also aiming to visit some remote or unique sites that other companies do not attempt to include in their itineraries. There may be days where we have very long drives and the conditions of the roads may vary. Hotels and transportation in some remote areas may not be up to western standards. There may be times when no bellhops are available; please pack with the understanding that you need to be able to handle your own luggage at times. Sometimes we may be walking over uneven trails for a mile or more; hiking boots are strongly recommended. Not every meal will be haute cuisine and several lunches may be picnics or box lunches. By maintaining a flexible attitude we will soon be captivated by the beauty of the natural scenery, the hospitality of the local people, and the fascinating sites we will see. Your flexibility and patience will be appreciated.

Air Ticketing

International round trip flights are not included in the cost of the trip. If Far Horizons must change the trip dates or cancel the trip for any reason, Far Horizons is not responsible for any air ticket you may have purchased. Please send your complete air schedule as soon as you have it. NOTE: Please contact Far Horizons if you would like for us to handle your air ticketing.

Private Tours and Talks

The private tours of archaeological sites and talks by specialists are scheduled in advance and include a donation to each. Specialists working at these sites are excited about showing their work to interested enthusiasts. However, please be aware that there may be times when the director or a member of the staff may not be on site when our groups arrive due to other commitments.

Walking and Standing

Far Horizons expects all participants to be physically active and able to walk and climb independently throughout the full touring days. This includes walking over uneven terrain (uphill and downhill) for 2 miles or more at each site. You should expect to be on your feet for much of each day, averaging as much as 5 miles of walking per day. **As such, each participant should be able to walk unaided at a pace of 3 miles per hour for at least an hour at a time, and to stand unsupported for at least 60 minutes.** Bearing this in mind, we suggest that, if you have not already done so, you begin walking several miles every day, ideally including stairs and hills. If you have questions about your ability to keep up with the group or the strenuous nature of this trip, please contact the Far Horizons staff.



Travel Insurance

We strongly recommend that you consider purchasing travel insurance. Should illness or an unforeseen event force you to cancel your travel plans after your final payment or during your trip, it would be doubly unfortunate to incur a significant financial loss. Trip cancellation protection will enable you to be reimbursed for the loss of your payment if you are unable to travel for any of the covered reasons in the "Outline of Coverage" section, or should you have an accident or suffer from any medical conditions during the trip.

Far Horizons offers customized protection plans through Travel Insured International (a Crum & Forster Company) with the following benefits:

- Trip Cancellation and Trip Interruption for covered reasons
- Trip Delay
- Baggage Loss and Baggage Delay
- Emergency Medical Expenses and Emergency Medical Evacuation
- 24-Hour Accidental Death & Dismemberment
- 24-Hour Travel Assistance & Concierge Services
- Option to upgrade to 'Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR)

We recommend reviewing the language in detail so you are aware of specific parameters; Depending on the policy, to waive the Pre-Existing Medical Condition Exclusion or to upgrade to CFAR coverage, the plan must be purchased within 14 to 21 days of the initial trip deposit, full trip cost must be insured, and traveler is medically fit at time of plan purchase. Otherwise, coverage may be purchased at any time prior to departure.

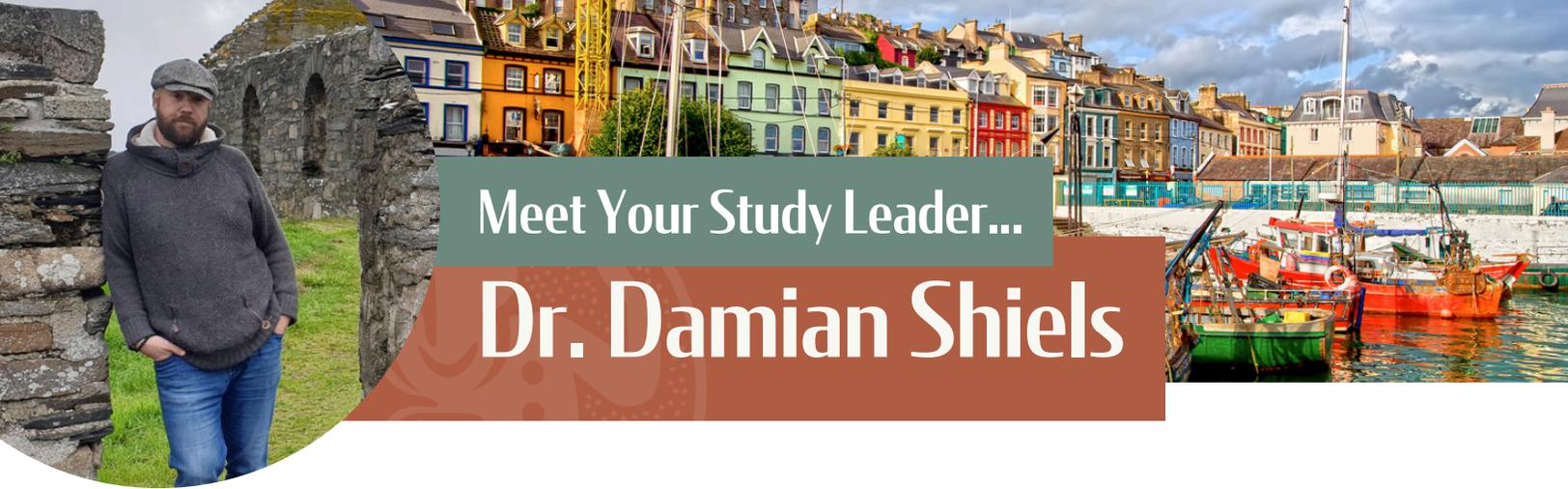
To obtain a personalized quote and/or purchase a plan through Far Horizons/Travel Insured International, simply click [HERE](#). For specific questions regarding the Worldwide Protector Plan, please contact Travel Insured International's Customer Care Center at 1-800-243-3174 or by email at customercare@travelinsured.com, and refer to Far Horizons' account number: 54070.

Itinerary Changes

Changes in our itinerary, accommodations, and transportation schedules may occur while traveling. While we are committed to keeping as close to the published details as possible, sometimes it is simply not possible. Weather events, government affairs, or other factors out of our control sometimes come into play. A good book to read as well as patience, flexible attitude, and a sense of humor are essential.



Cork City Gaol



Meet Your Study Leader...

Dr. Damian Shiels

Damian Shiels received his BA in archaeology from University College Cork, an MA in archaeology and heritage management from the University of Leicester and a PhD in history from Northumbria University.

He has over twenty years' experience in archaeology and heritage, holding positions from curator in the National Museum of Ireland to company director at Rubicon Heritage Services Ltd., one of Ireland and Britain's largest archaeological firms.

Damian is a specialist in conflict archaeology, post-medieval archaeology and heritage interpretation and has been a regular contributor to tv and radio discussing Irish archaeology and history. He pioneered the application of conflict archaeology in the Republic of Ireland, leading projects at famous battlefields such as Kinsale, Co. Cork (1601) and Vinegar Hill, Co. Wexford (1798).

Damian has published and lectured widely in Ireland, Britain, Europe and the United States on Irish archaeological and historical topics stretching from prehistory through to the modern-day. His knowledge of Ireland's vast and intricate history and his gracious charm make him an ideal study leader and traveling companion.

Rock of Cashel





Why Travel with Far Horizons?

With over forty years of experience, and an 85% customer return rate, we have stood the test of time. Remind yourself what makes Far Horizons so unique.

✦ Scholar Led Tours

Every tour is led by a well-respected PhD scholar with expertise in the subject & regions we visit.

✦ Trusted Partnerships

Trusted Partnerships: Every tour is led by a well-respected PhD scholar with expertise in the subject & regions we visit.

✦ Behind the Scenes Access

Our groups have private access to closed areas and on-site specialists.

✦ Unique Trips

Our itineraries are designed to showcase sites that are off-the-beaten path; we explore places that many travelers never see.

✦ Personalized Service

We love knowing our guests and helping with the decision process. We are here to assist you.

✦ Small Groups

Our tours have a maximum of 14 travelers. So you can trust that you will have a boutique experience every time.

Clonmacnoise Monastic Site



READY TO TRAVEL WITH US? IRELAND

WITH DR. DAMIAN SHIELS

Email with Questions

journeys@farhorizons.com

Book Now

[click to visit our booking page](#)

See Full Details

farhorizons.com



FAR HORIZONS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL TRIPS

