

Guided West Cork & Islands (Beara)



The West Cork Peninsula of Beara is one of the four long fingers of land jutting out into the Atlantic from the South-West ... Ireland's toes!! The peninsula is a haven of tranquillity, far away from 'coach-tour' country and therefore has long been popular with the more discerning traveller. A haven for hikers. A secret location.

West Cork's breathtaking panoramas are dominated by mountains and sea. The Caha Mountains and Slieve Miskish Mountains form the spine of the peninsula which is washed by Kenmare Bay to the north and Bantry Bay to the south. The folding of the rock strata throughout millennia has left the swirling wave-like patterns across the mountains which are so characteristic of the Beara landscape. Few roads cross this massive natural barrier, and those which do are spectacular feats of engineering: the 'Tunnels Road' via Turner's Rock and the Healy Pass road with its series of hairpin bends, as dramatic and challenging as any alpine pass.

All of West Cork's peninsula towns and villages are dotted along the coastal road which loops around the peninsula. The largest is Castletownbere (or Castletown Bearhaven), a major fishing port located on one of the deepest natural harbours in Ireland. Picturesque villages such as Eyeries and Allihies are renowned for their rows of brightly contrasting houses featuring every shade of the rainbow, where every house competes with its neighbours to be the most colourful.

At the head of Bantry Bay is the village of Glengarriff, from where you can take a short boat trip to Garinish Island, famous for its Italianate Gardens with their sub-tropical flora. At the tip of the peninsula is Dursey Island, now home to only five souls, and connected to the mainland by Ireland's only cable car – capacity: 6 people or 1 cow!

Beara Peninsula is rich in history, pre-history, folklore and archaeology. Copper and other metals have been mined around Allihies since the Bronze Age. The earliest inhabitants made their mark, leaving numerous tombs, standing stones and stone circles dotted across the landscape. The region is rich in mythology: it was the home of the Hag of Beara, a powerful sovereignty goddess whose reputation extends across the whole country. The Bull Rock, lying off Dursey Island, is reputed to be the site of Teach Doinn ('the house of Donn' - Irish God of the underworld) and it is here that souls wait to enter his domain.

Near the tiny village of Allihies is reputed, by folklore, to be the spot where the four Children of Lír came ashore after spending 300 years adrift on the Atlantic. According to legend, they had been turned into swans and banished by their evil stepmother. Stepping onto 'terra firma', they became human once again, but aged immediately. They died soon after, but not before being converted to the new religion of Christianity, which had arrived in Ireland since their enchantment with St. Patrick. Beara is an ancient, magical region where the power of the past is ever-present and the present just blooms with welcome for you the visitor.

Trip Outline

This guided walking tour of the West Cork & Islands loops around this rugged coastline, with occasional forays into the mountainous interior of the Beara Peninsula, making extensive use of the Beara Way Long Distance Walking trail and open mountain tops. Starting on the south coast of the Peninsula, the village of Glengarriff at the head of Bantry Bay is your base for the first three nights. Moving West along the rugged Peninsula your next three nights your accommodation is in the fishing port of Castletownbere, from where you will also explore historic Bere Island with its military history. On your “free day,” weather permitting, you discover the desolate beauty of Dursey Island at the tip of the peninsula, and the “picture post-card” village of Allihies, before returning to Castletownbere your overnight accommodation. “Hungry Hill” dominates the landscape of the peninsula and is a “must do” walk.

It's the people of this peninsula, coupled with the rugged, wild beauty that make this area “heaven on earth”. A visit to “McCarthy's Bar” is a must where you can experience the warmth of the local people. On your last walking day, you bid farewell to West Cork and Islands, with a morning transfer to the picturesque town of Kenmare and en route enjoy a walk on the north side of the Caha Mountains. Your final night's accommodation is in this colourful heritage town. After breakfast, there is a transfer to the Killarney Rail/Bus station for your onward journey.

Day 1 Courtesy Airport Collection is available from Cork Airport at 12:00 noon. Arrive at your first Guesthouse in Glengarriff where you will stay for our first 3 nights before moving further “West” along this wonderful and historical peninsula. Evening meal together and a general chat about the coming week.

Day 2 You follow an old track to the legendary Priest's Leap and continue along this spectacular mountain range - the Caha Mountains, enjoying views north over the MacGillycuddy's Reeks and South over Bantry Bay. Return to your accommodation for dinner and overnight.
Walk Details - Distance: 16kms. Duration: 5 hours. Max. Ascent: 500m. Rocky tracks and open mountain with no tracks. Bogland and some road walking. Boots essential.

Day 3 After a morning transfer to Adrigole, you walk along the along the Beara Way, back to Glengarriff with magnificent views over Bantry Bay and Sheeps Head to the South. Whiddy Island is standing proud, guarding the entrance to Bantry Harbour. Return to Glengarriff for accommodation, dinner and overnight.
Walk Details - Distance: 18kms. Duration: 6 hours. Max. Ascent: 250m. Mountain tracks and open roads. Can be wet - boots essential. Some road walking.

Day 4 Today you visit Bere Island. You take the very short sea crossing to this island steeped in history and famous for its part in modern Irish history as it hosts the many Army garrisons and Navy fleets who protected the entrance to Bantry Bay. A walk around this rugged and wild island shore is a must. Return by ferry to Castletownbere and enjoy your evening meal in one of the many town's excellent local restaurants. Overnight and dinner in Castletownbere.
Walk Details - Distance: 15kms. Duration: 5 hours. Max. Ascent: 260m. Grass tracks and rocky pathways. Some road walking. Boots recommended.

Day 5 This is your ‘free day’ to allow you to partake in other activities if you wish – such as cycling, horseriding, canoeing or just laze about with a book! If weather/time permits, we may organise a trip to the glorious Dursey Island, just at the very tip of the Beara Peninsula ... crossing over on Ireland's only Cable Car service. This is a step back in time and gives you an opportunity to walk “West” to the end of land!! Another must on this holiday. Return to Castletownbere for overnight and evening dinner.
Walk Details – Distance 10km. Duration on island about 5 hrs. Height gain 150mts. Open hillside and small paths and island road.

Day 6 Going west again, you walk part of the Beara Way as it winds its way towards the hamlet of Allihies. Here you follow in the footsteps of the Copper Miners as you walk around the hills surrounding Allihies, dotted with closed mine shafts and memories of great times and people gone. This is area steeped in Irish legion and history. The stunning views from the open mountain tops have to be seen to be believed, sea, land and wild beauty at its best. Return to Castletownbere for evening meal and overnight
Walk Details - Distance: 18kms. Duration: 6 hours. Max. Ascent: 500m. Tracks, open mountain, some rocky terrain and some small road walking. Boots essential.

Day 7 Today's morning transfer takes you to the picturesque heritage town of Kenmare, known locally as Neidin (Little Nest). En route, we walk part of the Beara Way and Gleninchaquin Valley on the north side of the Caha Mountains. Great views abound over Kenmare Bay and the Kerry Peninsula to our north. The day's walking is dotted with archaeological sites and evidence of days gone by. A fitting walk to complete a spectacular week in

the most beautiful part of Ireland – an experience not to be missed! Overnight and farewell dinner in Kenmare. Walk Details - Distance: 16kms. Duration: 5 hours. Max. Ascent: 350mts. Open hillside, mountain tracks and small green roads. Boots essential.

Day 8 After Breakfast at approx 09.00hrs, we offer a courtesy transfer to Killarney Bus/Rail Station. From here there is an excellent Public Bus/Rail service to all parts of Ireland be it city or airport.

Holiday Includes – 7 Nights bed and breakfast. Private bathroom. Full Irish breakfast. Picnic lunch (on walking days only), 7 Evening Dinners, 6 days walking with expert Irish Guide who is with the group for the duration of the holiday. Transport to/from each days walking locations. Luggage transfers when required. Courtesy Airport Collection to the start of the holiday and first nights B+B (as per our transfer timetable). Transfers to nearest bus/train station at end of holiday (also within our timetable). Public Bus Service may be used.

Not Included: any boat trips, personal drinks, entrance fees to theatres, parks or museums etc. or gratuities.

Courtesy Airport Collection: Saturdays only - Cork Airport at 12.00 noon. If you do not wish to avail of the Courtesy Airport Collection, please make your own way to the first accommodation, where your guide will meet you at 18.00 hrs. for a Briefing Session followed by dinner with the group at 19.00 hrs.

Should you require extra night's accommodation before or after your holiday, please advise us at the time of booking.

www.irishrail.ie www.buseireann.ie

Please note that Ireland can be a bit 'damp' both underfoot and overhead, with some liquid sunshine! Irish weather is unpredictable and the nature of walks can change quickly and dramatically because of the weather. This is one of the many pleasant aspects of walking in Ireland. We reserve the right to alter this itinerary due to weather conditions or the walking ability of each group.

West Cork & Islands (Beara) Guided Dates for 2012:

May 19 - 26

June 23 - 30

July 21 - 28

September 1 - 8

Difficulty of Walk: 2 Boot

Recommended Reading: "McCarthy's Bar" - Pete McCarthy

Transfers offered from: Shannon & Cork Airports

