

Burren and Connemara Guided Holiday



The Burren and Connemara face each other across Galway Bay, and yet it is hard to imagine two more contrasting landscapes. 'Burren' is derived from the Irish word *boireann* meaning 'place of stone', and the name could not be more apt. There is no part of Ireland where rock so obviously dominates the landscape as it does in the north-west corner of County Clare. The Burren covers an area of some 260 square kilometres and is famous for its bare limestone pavements dissected by deep crevices and traversed by countless stone walls. Almost devoid of trees and surface water, it has been described as 'lunar' in its appearance, an ancient limestone plateau beneath which is a labyrinth of pot-holes, caves, streams and lakes. Surprisingly, this bizarre and apparently hostile environment is a botanist's paradise as around three quarters of Ireland's plant species are found in the Burren (more than in any other region).

Connemara is an imposing landscape of lakes, moorland and rugged mountains. It has some of the most extensive areas of blanket bog in Europe and is home to many heathland and bogland plants such as the Insectivorous Sundew and Butterwort and a rich variety of heaths and heathers. Great tracts of lake, mountain and moorland stretch as far as the eye can see, across its northern boundaries, and to the south lie deep, rugged bays filled with tiny islands and fringed by orange and black seaweed. Along the way are delightful little villages, like Roundstone and Letterfrack, and pretty coastal towns, of which Clifden is the most charming. Between Clifden and Galway there are fine views of the Maamturk Mountains, the Twelve Bens range and the islands on Lough Corrib. On a clear day, you can also see across to the celebrated Aran Islands.

At its Northern frontier Co. Galway is separated from Co. Mayo by the long, deep inlet of Killary Harbour, Ireland's only fjord. There are numerous islands dotted around the Connemara coast. Inishbofin is one of the largest of these, with a population of around 200, and is rich in history and archaeology. St. Colman founded a monastery here in 665 A.D. In the plantation era the island became a prison-camp for Catholic priests rounded up by Cromwell's forces. The harbour is dominated by the Cromwellian star-shaped fort.

Trip Outline

The tour begins in village of Ballyvaughan on the south shore of Galway Bay and on the edge of the Burren, where we spend the first three nights. From here we explore the limestone pavements near Black Head, with a dazzling array of wild plants and a wealth of archaeological remains. Our second walk is a spectacular one over Turlough Hill. On day 4 we move via Galway City on to Connemara, completing an afternoon walk on to Lough Inagh on the Western Way, where we spend our next two nights. Day 5 walk is along the shores of Killary Harbour, Ireland's only fjord, a spectacular walk along the "famine trail" We spend our last two nights in Clifden, the capital town of Connemara. Day 6 sees us with a trip to the island of Inishbofin. (The island of the white cow) while on Day 7 we visit Roundstone Bog and Errisbeg/Dogs Bay.

Day 1 Courtesy Airport Collection from Shannon Airport at 12.00 noon. Arrive at first guesthouse in Ballyvaughan where we stay for the next three nights. Evening meal together and a general chat about the coming week's walks.

Day 2 Our first walk takes us over the spectacular Gleninagh Mountain to explore several stone forts before descending to Black Head. There are wonderful views across Galway Bay to Connemara's Maamturk and Twelve Bens mountain ranges and across to the famous Aran Islands. Transfer back to Ballyvaughan for dinner and overnight.

Walk Details - Distance: 16kms. Duration: 5 hours. Max. Height: 320m. Rocky tracks and open mountain with no tracks. Some road walking. Boots are essential.

Day 3 From Ballyvaughan, we enjoy a spectacular walk over Turlough Hill with glorious views over to Abbey Hill and Galway beyond. This is a wonderful walk which gives a really true feeling for the Burren at its best. Transfer back to Ballyvaughan for dinner and overnight.

Walk Details - Distance: 20kms. Duration: 6 hours. Max. Height: 350m. Green roads and rocky mountains with no tracks. Some road walking – boots are essential.

Day 4 Transfer from Ballyvaughan to Leenane via Galway. A short time in Galway gives an opportunity to explore this historical city before driving on into the heart of Connemara to enjoy a walk on Maamean between Maamturks and Twelve Bens. Dinner and overnight in Lough Inagh which will be our base for the next two nights.

Walk Details - Distance: 12kms. Duration: 4 hours. Max. Height: 300m. Grass tracks and rough mountain with no tracks. Rocky terrain and can be wet underfoot - boots are essential.

Day 5 Our walk takes us along the shores of the magnificent Killary Harbour, Ireland's only fjord - a very spectacular walk with many historical stories to tell. This walk is along the "famine Trail". Return to Lough Inagh for our overnight and evening dinner.

Walk Details - Distance: 16kms. Duration: 5.5 hours. Max. Height: 350m. Grass and rocky tracks, open bogland and mountain. Some road walking – boots are essential.

Day 6 This is your 'free day' in this colourful town to allow you to partake in other activities if you wish – such as cycling, horseriding, canoeing or just laze about with a book! Weather permitting, we may organise a trip to glorious Inishbofin, one of the largest islands off the Connemara coast. It has a population of around 200 and is rich in history and archaeology. Return to Clifden for dinner and overnight.

Walk Details - Distance: 10kms. Duration: 4 hours. Max. Height: 100m. Grass tracks with rocky sections and some road walking. Boots are essential.

Day 7 Errisbeg Mountain/Dogs Bay Beach is our route for today, overlooking the famous Rounstone Bog and the musical village of Roundstone. A great days walking to conclude our visit to this "wild" corner of Ireland. Return to Clifden for our O/n and farewell Evening Dinner.

Walk Details.- Distance 14kms. Duration 5 hrs. Open hill walking, across Bog ground and sandy beach ... opportunity for a swim! Boots essential

Day 8 Departures

After breakfast at approx 09:30 we transfer you to Galway Bus/Rail Station for your onward journey. There are excellent connections to Airports and cities from here. Galway to Shannon Airport takes 2 hrs.15 mins approx by bus.

Recommended reading: 'West of Ireland Walks' by Kevin Corcoran; 'Wild Plants of the Burren and the Aran Islands' by Charles Nelson; 'The Beauty Queen of Leenane and Other Plays' by Martin McDonagh.

Holiday Includes: 7 night's bed in room with private shower/ bathroom. Full Irish breakfast each morning. Picnic lunch (walking days), 7 Evening Dinners, 6 days walking with expert Irish Guide, who accompanies the group for the duration of the holiday. Transfer to/from Inishbofin Island Ferry Terminal at Cleggan. Transport to/from each days walking locations. Luggage transfers when required. Collection from Shannon Airport to the start of the holiday and first nights B+B at Ballyvaughan. Transfer back to Galway Bus and Rail station after the walking holiday.

Not Included: Personal drinks, entrance fees to theatres, parks or museums etc. or gratuities.

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.

Courtesy Airport Collection: Saturdays only - Shannon at 12 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.

www.irishrail.ie www.buseireann.ie

Dates 2012:

May 12 - 19

June 16 - 23

July 7 - 14

August 11 - 18

September 22 - 29

Difficulty of Walks: 2 Boot