

Burren Aran Mini-break 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 $\frac{3}{4}$ of Ireland's plant species are found in the Burren (more than in any other region).

The Aran Islands, Inisheer, (near island), Inishmaan, (middle island), and Inishmore, (big island) are unique amongst the islands of Ireland. Geologically they are similar to the Burren, many of the fields consisting of little more than bare limestone. The islanders have eked out a living by improving the soil over generations with sand and seaweed. Aran's flora is as rich and exotic as that of the Burren. Aran is also a bastion of Irish culture. Irish is still the everyday language of most islanders, making it the strongest Gaeltacht in the country.

Many traditions that have been lost on the mainland have been maintained here. It also has a wealth of archaeological and historical remains, notably its prehistoric stone forts and Early Christian sites. Aran has been a mecca for scholars and discerning travellers ever since John Millington Synge's brilliant depiction of the islanders' life in *The Playboy of the Western World*.

Trip Outline

The two centres for this tour are Doolin on the North-West coast of Clare and Kilronan on Inishmore, the largest of the three Aran Islands. We spend two nights at Doolin. Our first full walk on Day 2 allows us to discover the bizarre landscape of the Burren. On the morning of Day 3 we walk along the famous Cliffs of Moher and then catch a midday ferry to Inishmore, where we spend the next two nights. Here we have time for a short afternoon walk.

On Day 4 we spend a full day exploring some of the most spectacular sights of Inishmore, including the cliff-top fort of Dún Aonghusa. On the final morning of the tour we walk to the hamlet of Cill Éinne to discover its ecclesiastical ruins and beautiful coastal scenery. At lunchtime we take a ferry back to Doolin.

Day 1 Arrive at first guesthouse in Doolin where we stay for the next two nights. Evening meal together and a general chat about the coming days walks. A visit to one of the three local pubs is a must, Music and "Craic" everywhere! Overnight in Doolin, with a short walk after dinner.

Day 2 Our first walk takes to Black Head. We explore several stone forts, see the famous flora and fauna at first hand, before descending to Black Head. Wonderful views across Galway Bay to Connemara's Maamturk and Twelve Bens mountain ranges and westward to the famous Aran Islands. Transfer back to Doolin for dinner and overnight. Another visit to the Pubs for that famous Doolin music!

Walk Details - Distance: 15kms. Duration: 5 hours. Max. Height: 220m. Rocky tracks and open mountain with no tracks. Some road walking. Boots essential.

Day 3 From Doolin we travel to the Cliffs of Moher for a morning walk along the cliff-tops to Hag's Head, returning by the same route but with completely different vistas. We then return to Doolin pier to catch the mid-day ferry to Inishmore, the largest of the Aran Islands. After checking in at our accommodation, we have time for a short afternoon walk to Dún Dúchathair, a spectacular cliff-top stone fort on the southern (Atlantic) coast of Inishmore. We walk back to our accommodation for our evening meal and overnight.

Walk Details - Cliffs of Moher: Distance: 8kms. Duration: 2½ hours. Max. Height: 180m (level walk along abrupt cliff-tops). Inishmore: Distance: 8kms. Duration: 2 hours. Max. Height: 50m (walk along minor road to rugged cliffs). Boots essential for both walks. Ferry crossing approx. 1.75 hrs.

Day 4 Today's walk takes us westwards along the spine of Inishmore on tracks and minor roads. We visit the enigmatic rectangular pool known as Poll na bPéist or the Worm Hole, where turbulent waters surge and gurgle noisily at high tide. We then continue along the cliff-top to Dún Aonghusa, Ireland's most famous stone fort. From here we return to Kilronan along the north coast, visiting the beach at Port Mhuirbhígh and the early church of Teampall Chiaráin. Evening meal and overnight.

Walk Details - Distance: 18kms. Duration: 5½ hours. Max. Height: 100m. Mainly along minor roads and tracks, with some sections over rough limestone blocks near edge of cliffs. Boots essential.

Day 5 Departures On our final walk we explore the eastern end of the island. We visit the hamlet of Cill Éinne, named after St. Enda, the 6th century saint who brought Christianity to Aran. Historical sites here include the round tower and well at the monastery, the tiny but well-preserved church of Teampall Bhéanáin and the church of Teaghlach Einne, half buried in the sand dunes.

At lunchtime we take a ferry back to Doolin. From here you can get connections to Shannon Airport or to various cities. Alternatively, you may decide to take the ferry to Rossaveal in Connemara, from where you can continue by road, either private or public bus service to Galway.

Walk Details - Distance: 10kms. Duration: 3 hours. Max. Height: 60m. Mainly along minor roads and tracks.

Recommended reading: 'West of Ireland Walks' by Kevin Corcoran; 'Wild Plants of the Burren and the Aran Islands' by Charles Nelson; 'Field and Shore: Daily Life and Traditions, Aran Islands 1900'; 'The Playboy of the Western World' by John Millington Synge.

Holiday Includes:

- 4 nights bed in room with private shower/ bathroom
- Full Irish breakfast each morning
- Picnic lunch (on walking days only), 4 Evening Dinners, 4 days walking with expert Irish Guide who accompanies the group for the duration of the holiday
- Transport to/from each day's walking locations. Luggage transfers when required. Ferry transfer to/from Doolin/Inis Mor

Not Included: Transfer from airport to first night's accommodation, departure transfers, any boat trips (apart from ferry to and from Inis Mor), personal drinks, entrance fees to theatres, parks or museums etc. or gratuities.

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Please make your own way to the first accommodation, where your guide will meet you at 17.00 hrs. for a Briefing Session followed by dinner with the group at 19.00 hrs.

• Should you wish us to arrange transport to your first accommodation in Doolin, we would be happy to do so at an additional cost.

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

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.

2012 Tour Dates:

May 15 – 19

July 10 – 14

September 4 – 8

Difficulty of Walks: 1 Boot