

Burren / Aran / Connemara 8-day Self-Guiding 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 Northwest 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 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*.

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. The two main mountain groups – the Twelve Bens of Connemara and the Maamturk Mountains – are separated by the deep valley in which Lough Inagh lies.

One of the most typical Connemara scenes is to see the jagged peaks glistening with quartz reflected in the still waters of a bogland pool. At its northern frontier Co. Galway is separated from Co. Mayo by the long, deep inlet of Killary Harbour, Ireland's only fjord.

Trip Outline

Day 1: Arrive to Doolin where you will be spending your next two nights. On arrival to your first accommodation, your hostess will give you your full Detailed Information pack. She will also be able to recommend some of the excellent local restaurants and suggest some of the pubs where you will find great traditional Irish music.

Access for this holiday is made by a taxi or bus connection from Galway or Shannon Airports to Doolin. This service is available all year round.

An excellent Bus Service is available from Dublin Airport to Galway City with connections to Doolin.

Day 2: You will be driven a short distance from your guesthouse to the start of your walk at "Green Road" near Fanore Beach. From here you follow the old green road into the heart of the Black Head mountain, with wonderful limestone pavements and stone walls all around. There are fantastic views over Galway Bay and the Aran Islands as you continue on, over Gleninagh Mountain. We join the Burren Way to drop down into the Caher Valley, climbing again to pass under/around Slieve Elva and finish the day's walk at Craggagh. Collection and return back to Doolin is arranged. Overnight Doolin.

Walk Details: Distance: 18 kms. Duration: 6 hours. Max. Ascent: 320m. Little road walking, rocky grass tracks, open hill top, limestone pavement. Boots essential.

Day 3: For today's walk you will be driven a short distance from the B&B to the start of your walk at the Cliffs of Moher. Luggage will be transferred to the Doolin/Aran Ferry Office. Follow the Cliff top to "Hags Head" & return the same route but enjoying a completely different panorama. Continue the walk, returning on the Burren Way to arrive at the Ferry Terminal for the 1300hrs ferry. Allow 2.5 hrs. On arrival at Inis Mor you will be met and taken to the B&B for the overnight. Ferry journey approx 1.5hrs. Ferry may call to Inis Oirr on the way.

Walk Details; Distance 12/14km. Duration 4 hrs. No ascent. Cliff top Walk, small roads.

Day 4: A good day's walking today on the largest of the Aran Islands, Inis Mor. From our accommodation we walk to the world famous cliff top stone fort of Dun Aonghasa. The stone chevaux-de-frise of this fort are still visible and the whole experience has been described ... "as the most magnificent barbaric monument in Europe". Gaelic is still spoken as the everyday language of this island people. Return to our accommodation at Cill Ronan for overnight.

Walk details. Distance 17kms. Duration 6 hrs. Max Ascent. 150m. Small road walking and paths. Open Cliff top. Boots Optional

Day 5: The morning Ferry from Cill Ronan will take you to Rossaveel where you will be transferred to the start of the day's walk. At Teernakill Bridge near the village of Maam. Your luggage will be transferred to the B&B. From there you will follow the "Western Way" over the wonderful Maumeen Pass (Mám Éan), with its ancient shrine to St. Patrick, stations and holy well, still frequented by the faithful. Descend from the pass and continue along quiet country roads to your overnight accommodation at Lough Inagh.

Walk Details: Distance: 14kms. Duration: 4 hours. Max. Height: 250m. Grass and muddy tracks, rocky in places. Can be very wet underfoot. Some road walking - boots essential.

Day 6: Starting from Lough Inagh and, continuing on the Western Way, walk along the foot of the Maamturk Mountains through Letterbreckaun to Tullyconor to the shores of the spectacular Killary Harbour to finish in the little village of Leenane. Overnight in Leenane.

Walk Details: Distance: 16kms. Duration: 5 hours. Max. Height: 150m. Grass tracks - rocky and muddy in places. Can be wet underfoot - boots essential. Some road/track walking.

Day 7: From Leenane you will be taken, a short trip, to the north shore of Lough Fee. This is the start of a very beautiful walking day along Killary Harbour – Ireland's only fjord.

You will walk to the end of this little Peninsula, to the tiny hamlet of Rosroe. Returning along the

southern shores on the fjord, on the old famine road, to the end of the harbour. Joining the Western Way at Tullyconor Bridge, we return again along the route above the fjord to finish in Leenane village. Overnight in Leenane.

Walk Details: Distance: 20kms. Duration: 6 hours. Max. Ascent: 150m. Grass tracks - rocky and muddy in places. Can be wet underfoot - boots essential. Some road walking.

Day 8: From Leenane, if you are returning to Galway City for onward journey, a taxi is required to take you to Maam Cross to join the main Galway-Clifden bus route. Your hostess will arrange/book this for you. At Galway Bus/Rail Station – you can then access all airports, ferryports or main cities by the excellent train/ bus services offered. A private Bus service also serves Shannon and Dublin Airports/Dublin City direct from outside the Tourist Office.

We reserve the right to alter this itinerary due to weather conditions, the conditions of the walks, or the ability of clients. The above Walk Details is only a guideline - these may not be accurate on the day due to weather or individual walking pace.

OPTIONS:

Should you wish to extend your holiday - we recommend the following extra days, which are suitable for rest days or to add a little more walking to your holiday:-

Day 1: Stay an extra day in Doolin and visit the numerous caves and historical sites in the area.

Day 5: From Lough Inagh, enjoy one of the many challenging walks in the Mammturk or Twelve Ben mountains or – why not just take some more time to relax in this wonderful area.

Day 7: Stay on in Leenane to climb the exhilarating Mweelrea Mountain overlooking Killary Harbour – the highest mountain in Connemara. Leenane is also where the academy award winning film - “The Field” was filmed.

Day 8: Continue the Western Way, north from Leenane, under Croagh Patrick and on to Westport town. Should you choose this option we will NOT be moving the luggage to Westport as part of the holiday package, nor will be giving you the route directions or instructions. It can be followed as outlined on the OS map. The first 5km are on the road and at times this road can be very busy be careful. Talk with us if you want to take this option ... Its a good days walking.

Make enquiries when booking and we can organise the extra reservations and transport necessary to do these options.

On our Self-guided programme we offer....

- 7 night's Bed and Breakfast. Full Irish Breakfast. Private bathrooms
- 6 days walking. Varied and interesting each day.
- Move your luggage each walking day.
- Give you full walking details and maps of the area.
- Full walking descriptions of each walking day.
- 24 hrs Emergency/Information contact number.
- Airport transfers arranged/booked if required.
- Public transport details, www.buseireann.ie www.irishrail.ie.
- Weather Details, www.met.ie
- Full pre-departure information pack to allow you to fully plan for your holiday and so get the most from this Irish walking experience.
- Extra days/nights booking with Travel/Tourism advice service.
- A "mighty" holiday guaranteed.

