

## ***Burren / 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).

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***

This trip begins at Doolin on the west coast of Clare. After visiting the spectacular Cliffs of Moher, which fall 200m sheer into the Atlantic, you follow the Burren Way to Doolin. The following day's walk, also along the Burren Way, brings you to the village of Ballyvaughan on Clare's north coast. You will also explore the barren karst landscape to the east of Ballyvaughan.

Travelling on to Co. Galway by public bus, you will spend 3 days exploring the mountainous region of Connemara. The Western Way will bring you along the foot of the Maamturk Mountains via Lough Inagh and the village of Leenane. Some of the stages in the Burren are challenging due to the rocky terrain. The walks in Connemara remain mostly at valley, but can be quite boggy especially in wet weather.

**Day 1:** Arrive in Doolin where you will be spending your first night. On arrival at 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 Shannon or Galway Airports to Doolin. This service is available all year round.

**Day 2:** You will be driven a short distance from your guesthouse to the start of your walk at the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Centre. From here you follow the “Burren Way” along the cliff tops to Hags Head and return by the same route, but enjoying a completely different panorama. Once back at the visitor centre, you will then follow the Burren Way along old green roads and one primary road to finish back in Doolin.

Alternatively, should you wish to avail of this opportunity to visit the wonderful Aran Islands, your morning transport will take you to the pier in Doolin to avail of one of the many ferry services out and back to any of the three islands. Overnight in Doolin.

Walk Details: For Cliffs of Moher walk - Distance: 17kms. Duration: 5 hours. Max. Height: Level, descending at end of day. Some road walking, muddy and rocky grass tracks, can be wet underfoot. Boots essential. Walking close to exposed cliff edge.

**Day 3:** You will be driven a short distance from your guesthouse to the start of your walk at Ballinalacken Castle. From here you follow the Burren Way along old green roads into the heart of the Burren, with wonderful limestone pavements and walls all around you. There are fantastic views over Galway Bay and the Aran Islands as you continue on, passing the Caher Valley Nature Reserve, to Lismacsheedy. Old ring forts can be found along the way as you continue on past the impressive Newtown Castle to your overnight stay in Ballyvaughan.

Walk Details: Distance: 20 kms. Duration: 6 hours. Max. Height: 250m. Some road walking, muddy and rocky grass tracks, can be wet underfoot. Boots essential.

**Day 4:** A short drive will take you to the start of today’s walk. Walking across Moneen Mountain and continuing on over to the magnificent Turlough Hill with its Iron Age hillfort, you then descend to Corcomroe Abbey (Cistercian, 12th century) to finish your walk at Bell Harbour (Bealaclugga). Return to Ballyvaughan for overnight.

Walk Details: Distance: 18kms. Duration: 6 hours. Max. Height: 280m. Rocky walking with no clear path a lot of the way. Some road walking. Boots essential.

**Day 5:** Today you will be leaving Ballyvaughan on the daily public bus at 9.00am (approx.) to Maam Cross (bus change in Galway). On your arrival at Maam Cross (a little before 13:00) you will be taken to the start of your walk at Teernakill Bridge near the village of Maam. From there you will follow the “Western Way” over the wonderful Maumeen Pass (Mám Éan), with its ancient shrine, 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: 15kms. Duration: 5 hours. Max. Height: 250m. Grass and muddy tracks, rocky in places. Can be very wet underfoot. Some road walking - boots essential.

**Day 6:** Start from Lough Inagh and, continuing on the Western Way, walk along the foot of the Maamturk Mountains through Letterbreckau 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 walking.

**Day 7:** From Leenane, you will be driven a short distance to the western end of Lough Fee. This is the start of a very beautiful walking day along the shores of Killary Harbour – Ireland’s only fjord. Taking the road to Little Killary Bay you pass through the rare and beautiful woodland around Salrock. After the short climb to the spectacular viewpoint of Mallnalack, you join the famine road which follows the southern shore of Killary Harbour. Return via Tullyconor and the Western Way back to Leenane village. Overnight in Leenane.

Walk Details: Distance: 17kms. Duration: 5 hours. Max. Height: 150m. Grass tracks - rocky and muddy in places. Can be wet and muddy underfoot - boots essential. Some road walking.

**Day 8:** From Leenane, a taxi is required to take you to Maam Cross to join the main Galway-Clifden bus route. On arrival back at Galway Bus Station – you can then access all airports, ferryports or main cities by the excellent train or bus services offered.

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 have been given as a guideline - these may not be accurate on the day due to weather or individual walking pace.

Please note that Ireland can be a wet country both underfoot and overhead. Irish weather is unpredictable, that's one of the "joys" of walking in Ireland, and the nature of walks can change quickly and dramatically because of the weather. For all self-guided holidays you must be able to map read and navigate with a compass.

There is some roadwalking on self-guided holidays. Some parts of the walks in Ireland are very remote in places. This is true of the Burren and especially of Connemara. Very often there are no opportunities to purchase a mid-day lunch – a packed lunch is required in such locations.

### **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 take the ferry out to explore more of the Aran Islands.

Day 5: From Lough Inagh, enjoy one of the many challenging walks in the Maamturk Mountains or Twelve Bens range, 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 Connacht. Leenane is also where the academy award winning film "The Field" was filmed.

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

### ***On our SG8 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](http://www.buseireann.ie) [www.irishrail.ie](http://www.irishrail.ie).
- Weather Details, [www.met.ie](http://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.