

Traditional Ireland - Guided Holiday



The tour focuses on two key areas rich in tradition: North Kerry and the Burren. It also gives you the opportunity to visit one of the Aran Islands on a day excursion. The influence of music, song, dance and the customs that have lived on in these two very different regions combine to make this a wonderful and very different holiday.

North Kerry, being less mountainous than the rest of the county, is good agricultural land. It is rich in historical sites such as the castles of Ballyheigue, Rahoneen, Carrigafoyle) and the abbeys of Ardfert, Rattoo, Lislaughtin). Historically the most important site is Ardfert, a missionary centre found by St. Erc in the 5th century. St. Brendan was educated here and also established a monastery here. It has a 13th century cathedral, along with several other ecclesiastical buildings, and remained a diocesan centre until 1660. The cliff scenery around Kerry Head, near Ballyheigue, rivals anything that Dingle has to offer, but is much less frequented.

Nearby is Tobar na Súil ('well of the eyes'), one of the finest holy wells which abound in the area. Listowel is the largest town in the area and is noted for its writers' festival and for horse-racing. Listowel produced a number of literary talents, most notably the playwright and novelist John B. Keane who ran a bar in the town. His plays, which rapidly became the staple fare of Irish amateur dramatic societies, include *Sive*, *Big Maggie* and *The Field*. Bryan MacMahon, known as 'the Master' (he was a schoolteacher), was the author of *The Honey Spike* and he translated *Peig* into English. The poet and academic Brendan Kennelly is a native of the nearby village of Ballylongford.

'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 any other region). Doolin, where you will be staying, is the cradle of traditional Irish music.

Trip Outline

The first three nights are spent at the market town of Listowel, located in North Kerry, half an hour's drive from Tralee. Our walks explore the coastal scenery near Ardfert and Ballyheigue. On Day 4 we then cross the Shannon and move on to Clare, where we spend the afternoon walking at the Cliffs of Moher. Doolin will our base for the next four nights. Day 5 is your free day and you have the chance to visit one of the Aran Islands, weather permitting. Usually this is Inisheer, the easternmost island of the group. On Days 6 and 7 we explore the Burren landscape with walks at Black Head and on the slopes of Slieve Elva.

Day 1 Courtesy Airport Collection from Shannon Airport at 12:00 noon and Kerry Airport at 16:00 hrs. Our first three nights are spent in Listowel, a busy market town, made famous by its many writers, including John B. Keane, author of *The Field*, and Bryan MacMahon, known as 'The Master'. Evening meal together and a general chat about the coming week's walks.

Day 2 Drive over to Ballyheigue and enjoy a wonderful coastal walk around Kerry Head - taking time to enjoy this magnificent coast line on the shores of the Shannon Estuary. Transfer back to Listowel for dinner and overnight.

Walk Details: Distance: 16kms. Duration: 4 hours. Max. Height: 150m. Mountain tracks and open roads. Can be wet - boots essential. Some road walking.

Day 3 After breakfast morning transfer to Ardfert Cathedral which had such a tremendous influence on the history of this region. After this wonderful visit, we move to Banna Strand and walk this magnificent beach to Ballyheigue. Return to Listowel for overnight and dinner.

Walk Details: Distance: 10kms. Duration: 4 hours. Max. Height: level. Beach & sand dune walk. Can be wet - boots essential.

Day 4 Transfer from Listowel to Tarbert - taking the Tarbert to Killimer ferry across the Shannon River (the longest river in the British Isles) into Co. Clare. Drive on through this unspoilt region of Clare to the famous Cliff of Moher and enjoy a walk along the full length of these breath-taking Cliffs. Overnight and evening meal in Doolin our base for the next four nights.

Walk Details - Distance: 14kms. Duration: 4 hours. Max. Height: 180m. Grass tracks and rocky pathways (level walk along abrupt cliff-tops). Some road walking. Boots recommended.

Day 5 This is your Free Day - but weather permitting - we will arrange a visit to one of the famous Aran Islands, usually Inisheer, the Eastern island. Overnight and evening meal in Doolin. Excellent evening music can be enjoyed in the local pubs!

Day 6 Walk along the Burren Way from Ballinalacken to Formoyle finishing beside the beautiful Caher River and the 'Khyber Pass'. This is a wonderful walk giving the true experience of the Burren and its fascinating limestone landscape. Overnight and evening meal in Doolin.

Walk Details - Distance: 16kms. Duration: 5 hours. Max. Height: 300m. Tracks, open mountain, some rocky terrain and some road walking. Boots essential.

Day 7 Starting in the Gleninagh Valley, the walk then ascends across open mountain to join an old green road around the spectacular Black Head with views across Galway Bay to Connemara. Throughout the day we will have the opportunity to examine some of the flora and fauna that is unique to this region. Overnight and final evening meal in Doolin with plenty of opportunity to enjoy more wonderful music in this great little place.

Walk Details: Distance: 16kms. Duration: 5 hours. Max. Height: 320m. Grass and rocky tracks, open bogland and mountain. Some road walking - boots essential.

Day 8 Departures. After breakfast, at approx 09:00hrs, we will arrange a transfer to Ennis Bus/Rail station. From Ennis there are excellent bus and train services to all major towns, cities and Shannon. A bus to Shannon Airport takes 45 mins. approx.

Recommended reading: 'West of Ireland Walks' by Kevin Corcoran; 'Wild Plants of the Burren and the Aran Islands' by Charles Nelson; 'The Playboy of the Western World' by John Millington Synge. 'The Field' by John B. Keane.

Holiday Includes:

- 7 nights bed in room with private shower/ bathroom
- Full Irish breakfast each morning
- Picnic lunch (on walking days only), 7 Evening Dinners, 6 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
- Courtesy airport transfer from airport 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 – except Shannon Ferry (eg. Aran Islands), personal drinks, entrance fees to theatres, parks or museums etc. or gratuities.

Courtesy Airport Collection: Saturdays Only Shannon at 12.00 noon / Kerry at 16.00 hrs.

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

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 5 - 12
June 23 - 30
July 7 - 14
September 8 - 15

Difficulty of Walks: 1 Boot

