

Ireland: Cliffs of Moher, the Burren & Aran Islands

Tour-Only Itinerary

Across the channel, the Cliffs of Moher plummet into the Atlantic, marking Ireland's precipitous western edge. Meanwhile, here on Inis Oirr, a gentler landscape unfolds. As you walk country lanes framed by stone walls, you're enveloped in flower-strewn island greenery, the tranquility broken only by the clippity-clop of an occasional pony and trap. Pleasures in Ireland are simple: exploring a hilltop castle, communing with seals by the harbor, and getting local insight from your innkeepers about the day's walk. Tonight you've got other fish to fry: sipping pints, swept up in the joyful strains of fiddles and pipes at a village pub in Doolin. This hiking tour of the west coast is the perfect beginning to your lifelong love affair with Ireland.



Highlights

- Walk along the spectacularly scenic Cliffs of Moher as the roiling Atlantic surf crashes up to 700 feet below.
- Explore the lunar-like rockscapes of the Burren National Park, a barren but beautiful expanse of limestone karst stretching some 100 square miles.
- Ferry to Inisheer, the smallest of the Aran Islands, to spend a day strolling a stunning coast rich in old Gaelic culture.
- Stay three nights in the fishing village of Doolin, center of Ireland's trad (traditional) music scene and home to some of its most authentic pubs.
- Indulge in the luxuries and gourmet cuisine of properties steeped in character, from a boutique-style, eco-award-winning hotel to an 18th-century manor house.

On all Self-Guided Adventures you can count on ...



A local representative
available 24/7.



Gracious accommodations
that are a clean, comfortable
home away from home.



Detailed maps & route notes
featuring turn-by-turn
directions and places of
interest.



Experts to handle all the
details, including moving
your luggage between hotels
while you're out exploring.



Scheduled taxi transfers to
bring you to and from each
day's walks.



Access to a Self-Guided
Flight Concierge—ask our
knowledgeable team to find
flights that sync with your
planned trip.



Delicious meals—many
are included.

Activity Level

This tour is one of our Self-Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate, with an average of 4–8 miles per day, with options on some days. The terrain includes daily elevation gains and losses. The terrain is often uneven and can be slippery and muddy when wet. Walks are on well-maintained dirt trails, either packed or with loose rocks and roots, as well as grassy paths, sandy beaches, and minor roads. Day 2 along the Cliffs of Moher Coastal Walk features narrow, exposed cliff paths which can be challenging in heavy wind or rain, while Day 3 features a 20-minute return ferry ride and island exploration

off the Atlantic Coast. Remember: preparation is the key to ensuring your tour readiness; the more you walk or participate in aerobic exercise prior to your trip, the more you will enjoy your experience!

DAY 1

Your Ireland: Cliffs of Moher, the Burren & Aran Islands tour begins. Optional visit to Doolin Cave & Visitor Center

Arrive in Shannon and make your way to Doolin—once a bustling fishing village and now a center of Ireland's famed trad (or traditional) music scene—with an included taxi.

After an orientation meeting, you might warm up with a walk 45 minutes along a paved country road, or take a four-minute taxi ride to the renowned Doolin Cave (at your own expense). Locally known as Pol an Ionain, roughly translated as "Ivy Cliff Cave," this limestone cave at the western edge of The Burren is home to the longest free-hanging stalactite in Europe—known as "The Great Stalactite." For its responsible management, the cave has been awarded with eco-tourism accolades and serves as a compelling introduction to the spectacular limestone wonders of County Clare. Take your time exploring here, then return to town to get your healthy dose of craic—a good Irish sense of fun! During your three-night stay here, be sure to take in the raucous strains of fiddle and accordion at a local establishment. A trio of pubs will place you right at the center of Irish culture: McDermott's, McGann's, or Gus O'Connor's.

This evening, we've arranged an included dinner at a favorite restaurant among the locals. Savor your first dinner in Ireland, creative fare tailored to whatever is fresh at the markets and the latest harvest from area gardens.

Included Meals: Dinner

DAY 2

Cliffs of Moher Coastal Walk. Hag's Head to Doolin via Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience or Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience to Doolin

8.2 miles, moderate, 1,150-ft. elevation gain and 1,300-ft. elevation loss or 4.7 miles; moderate, 400-ft. elevation gain and 850-ft. elevation loss

After a full Irish breakfast curated from your hotel's gardens and neighboring farms, your hosts arrange a taxi to the Cliffs of Moher trailhead, about 20 minutes away at the southern end of the cliffs. Walking along this scenic icon of Ireland along the Wild Atlantic Way is sure to be a highlight of your trip. This famed wall of sandstone and shale soars up to 700 feet above the Atlantic surf for some five miles and hosts a profusion of seabirds. Your choice of walks today let you experience this magnificent wonder at a pace that suits you.

If you'd like a longer route, our local driver delivers you to Hag's Head, a rocky promontory said to resemble a woman looking out to sea. From here, enjoy dramatic views of the cliffs to the north. But don't lose notice of the massive sea arch at the tip of the headland, and another as you look a bit farther north. Pause during your exploration to admire the Moher Tower, the remains of a fort that—along with many others along the Atlantic—helped to protect the coast from attack by Napoleon. Today, the tower is occupied by the native chough and other birds.

After returning to the main trail from the head, continue north, taking in sweeping views as the lashing Atlantic surf provides a soundtrack to your hike. Look out for migrating minke and humpback whales in the autumn. Avid birders will want to have binoculars at the ready for up-close views of the more than 30 species of birds: guillemots, kittiwakes, peregrine falcons, fulmars, and shags among them. Puffins are part-time residents on Goat Island just offshore, appearing between late March and mid-July. More than 30,000 breeding pairs from 20 bird species pass through here annually.

In about three miles, arrive at the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience, nestled into a hillside. We have included your entrance fee to this fascinating exhibition that chronicles the natural and human history of this captivating and breathtaking region. You'll want to spend some time here immersing yourself in a full sensory experience. Be sure to visit the Cliffs Exhibition, housed in a huge domed cave at the center of the building, and check out the video and virtual reality features.

If you prefer a shorter walk today, your driver will instead bring you to the Visitor Experience this morning. No matter your choice, you walk from here about 4.7 miles back to Doolin, passing the stone O'Brien's Tower, built in 1835. This historic folly enjoys an ideal perch at the highest point of the Cliffs of Moher and offers views of the Aran Islands on a clear day. Once you arrive at the Doolin Trail, follow it into the village.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3

Inisheer (Inis Oírr). National Loop Walks: Lub Ceathru an Locha or Lub Ceathru an Phoillin

3.8 miles, easy, 250-ft. elevation gain and loss or 7.3 miles, easy to moderate, 350-ft. elevation gain and loss

After a leisurely breakfast, hop the 10:00 a.m. ferry (included in the tour cost) for a 20-minute sail to the smallest and most easterly of the Aran Islands, Inis Oírr (Inisheer/East Island). Modern conveniences came late to this enchanting little enclave. It wasn't until 1997 that electricity was fully connected. It has long subsisted on a farm culture, despite that much of the island has only six inches of topsoil. Today, day trippers come to this classic fishing village for its footpaths and phenomenal views of flower-filled fields and the Cliffs of Moher back on the mainland. Known to many as the last outpost of Irish culture, it is one of Ireland's last remaining Gaeltacht areas, the name given to places where Irish is still the first language.

Disembarking, you are greeted by a pristine, white-sand beach lapped by crystalline waters. Colorful currachs, or fishing boats, bob in the current, fresh from their morning at sea. You can get right down to walking, choosing from the two "National Loop Walks" that depart from the pier. Each trace neat limestone walled boreens, or little roads, scenic coastal trails and various cracked limestone landscapes that evoke the spirit of the Burren, which you visit tomorrow. As you stroll, you just might come across the clip-clop of a pony and trap, a popular way to get around the island.

Choose your trail based on your desired pace: You'll want to be back at the pier to catch the 4:45 p.m. ferry back to Doolin.

Lub Ceathru an Phoillin (7.3 miles). Follow beautiful limestone boreens past age-old stone walls, a sandy pathway, and flora-lined road. Rounding the eastern side of the island, you pass some of the island's most historical buildings; the Plassy shipwreck, thrown onto the island by a 1960 storm; Loch Mór, the only freshwater lake on the island; lush meadows of wild grasses, clovers, and vivid flowers; and the village of An Formna, which offers splendid views of An Loch Mór. Reaching the western shores of the island, detour to St. Enda's holy well of Tobar Éinne and be on the lookout for the growing colony of grey seals on your way back to the pier. As you explore, have your binoculars ready so you can catch glimpses of birds

and other creatures, from the gannet with its black-tipped wings to cattle and horses.

Lub Ceathru an Locha (3.8 miles). Choose this path if you want to soak in the island's beauty at a more relaxed pace—with ample time to literally stop and smell the roses, or in this case the milkwort, royal-blue gentians, buttercups, orchids, and more of the 400+ flower species. You enjoy much of the same beauty and splendor as on Lub Ceathru an Phoillin, but spend more time on the eastern half of the island, perhaps lingering in the village of An Formna or at the 14th-century O'Brien's Castle at the island's highest point.

If you have time after your walk, take some time to explore the tiny shops and pubs of the main village, adjacent to the pier and below the old lighthouse and O'Brien's fort. Back in Doolin, enjoy another included dinner of traditional pub fare, the perfect opportunity to drink in the local culture of trad music, and to sample a hearty dish and a local ale.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 4

The Burren Way. Ballinalacken to Fanore Beach

6.9 miles, easy to moderate, 500-ft. elevation gain and 800-ft. elevation loss

After breakfast, taxi about 10 minutes to the privately owned 15th-century Ballinalacken Castle, towering above the countryside of County Clare. From here, you walk into the Burren, a massive pasture of limestone karst whose name comes from the Irish word for “stony place.” This is the only place in Europe where alpine and Mediterranean flora grow alongside each other. Its remarkable landscape of steel-gray rock exposed by the last ice age provides a fascinating environment for walking. You set out to follow an especially scenic segment of the Burren Way, a 28-mile footpath that traverses this otherworldly setting of quiet country lanes and creviced limestone floor through which grow colorful splashes of fragile wildflowers.

From Ballinalacken Castle, you climb northward along a quiet rural road lined with stone walls. Take your time to admire the charming houses, farms, and open fields grazed by cattle. You pass the peak of Slieve Elva—the highest point in this area at 1,128 feet—enjoying westward views that stretch out across the Atlantic Ocean to the Aran Islands and eastward vistas across scarred limestone hills. By walk's end, you descend onto Fanore Beach on the northwest coast of the Burren, where the ocean washes over a karst

beach head. This is also where the Burren's only river—the Caher—empties into the Atlantic. Here, you can rest and relax or perhaps explore the sand dune complex and the oldest archaeological remains in the region. You might even spot some crinoid, brachiopod, and coral fossils in the bedrock! Later, your driver picks you up for a 25-minute drive to your hotel.

This evening, savor a special final dinner at your hotel, a gracious 18th-century manor house on the outskirts of the charming fishing village of Ballyvaughan. The award-winning restaurant offers a three-course seasonal menu prepared with local ingredients, perhaps Barbecue Irish Beef or Wild Irish Halibut.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 5

Your Ireland: Cliffs of Moher, the Burren & Aran Islands tour concludes

After a generous breakfast featuring eggs, meats, and pancakes from local sources, taxi to Shannon (about 1 hour, 10 minutes) to make your flight, train, or bus connections. Alternatively, you may spend an extra day in Ballyvaughan to relax and join a guided walk through this magical region with a local Burren expert.

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included

Tour Only

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| Boutique accommodations | ✓ |
| 7 meals: 4 breakfasts and 3 dinners | ✓ |
| Detailed water- and tear-resistant Route Notes and maps | ✓ |
| Orientation meeting with a Country Walkers representative | ✓ |
| Local representative available 24/7 | ✓ |
| Scheduled taxi and luggage transportation (Please note: If unable to walk, it is possible to travel with your luggage from one accommodation to the next at no additional charge.) | ✓ |
| Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary: Entrance to the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience and round-trip ferry tickets from Doolin to Inis Oírr (Inisheer/East Island). | ✓ |
| Travel assistance available 24/7 provided by Allianz Global Assistance | ✓ |
| Access to Self-Guided Flight Concierge—Ask our knowledgeable team to find flights that sync perfectly with your planned trip. | ✓ |