Ireland: Connemara & Galway Bay

Air Package Itinerary

Western Ireland is a land of wild, mountainous beauty and must-see cliffsides that stretch along the Atlantic. Join us on a walking tour of Ireland to trek the dramatic paths along the famous Cliffs of Moher and to cross the less-traveled regions of Connemara and Galway Bay. Explore the country's only fjord, where you'll discover abandoned settlements that bear testament to a famine-stricken past. On the Burren Way, you'll hike a stark landscape of limestone, rare plants, and Turlough (disappearing lakes). The cultural heart of Ireland is Galway, where you can raise a pint in an authentic pub and maybe strike up a song with the friendly locals. During your Galway and Connemara walking tours you'll recharge at historic manors and stylish boutique hotels.



Highlights

Walk the low-lying causeway out to Omey Island, a path inaccessible at high tide, to feast your eyes upon spectacular vistas of grassy fields, ancient monasteries, and pink-granite outcroppings.
Gain a deeper appreciation for Irish music with your knowledgeable guides.
Step into Ireland's ancient history with visits to Celtic crosses, a seventh-century monastery, and prehistoric forts.



Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided - Full Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate, with an average of 4 to 6 miles per day and options on some days. There are rocky sections on walks as well as 4- to 5-foot-high stile crossings. The terrain is often uneven and can be slippery when wet. Walks are on paths along coastal cliffs (where vertigo could be an issue) and a fjord, rocky trails, and through peat lands, pastures, farmland, and bogs. The pace on this tour is leisurely to allow time to learn about the area's unique geology, plant life, and the ruins encountered on the trail. One day features a ferry ride and island exploration off the Atlantic Coast.

DAY 1

Fly from USA to Shannon, Ireland

Begin your adventure by departing from a convenient gateway city in the United States or Canada. Spend the first night aloft.

DAY 2

Arrive in Shannon, Ireland

Upon arrival at Shannon Airport, a representative holding a Country Walkers sign meets you as you exit the baggage-claim area. After an included transfer to your hotel, you're free to spend the rest of the day exploring at your leisure.

Upon arrival at Shannon Airport, a complimentary small-group transfer is provided to the Old Ground Hotel in Ennis, approximately 25 minutes away. Please note that there may be up to a 45-minute wait if there are other guests arriving within the same time frame. The remainder of the day is at your leisure (no meals included).

If you are going to be delayed meeting our transfer representative for more than 15 minutes due to delayed or lost luggage, please contact Allianz Global Assistance to advise of your delay and they will contact our transfer service on your behalf. Our drivers are generally able to wait for up to 45 minutes from the time your flight lands, after which you would be responsible for your own transfer.

Please note: If you arrive early, your hotel room may not be available until 2:00 p.m., in which case you may store your luggage with the reception desk.

Country Walkers provides you with City Information that includes recommendations on what to see and do in Ennis during your stay.

Accommodation: Old Ground Hotel, Ennis

DAY 3

Join your Ireland: Connemara & Galway Bay tour, Cliffs of Moher

1 mile walking, easy; 4 miles walking, easy to moderate

Awakening refreshed, you enjoy an included breakfast at your hotel before meeting your group at 9:30 a.m. in the lobby of the Old Ground Hotel. After a brief introduction to the group, your adventure begins.

Breakfast is included at your hotel. Your guide(s) will meet you at 9:30 a.m. in the lobby of the Old Ground Hotel. Your guide(s) will be wearing a Country Walkers shirt. Please be dressed for walking and ready for an immediate departure.

Shortly after meeting your guide(s), you transfer north of Ennis. You are immediately taken back in time as you stroll to Dysert O'Dea, an 11th-century Hiberno-Norman tower and an 8th-century early Christian monastery founded by St. Tóla, with time to peek at the tower's eclectic little museum.

After lunch at a pub in the market town of Kilfenora, your afternoon walk takes place at one of Ireland's most dramatic natural phenomena, the Cliffs of Moher. Stretched over almost 5 miles, these cliffs rise precipitously from the Atlantic Ocean to a vertiginous 700 feet and, on a clear day, you can enjoy views of the Aran Islands in Galway Bay, as well as the verdant hills and valleys of Connemara. The cliffs are not only home to an estimated 30,000 birds of 29 different species—Atlantic puffins, hawks, gulls, guillemots, shags, ravens, and choughs—but also contain evidence of river channels cutting through the shale and sandstone beds dating back 300 million years. A spectacular start to the week, you walk along the top of the Cliffs of Moher, at a safe distance from the actual precipice. On your right is lush farmland, while the Atlantic shimmers to your left with the Aran Islands below. Seabirds swoop overhead, with ground orchids growing along the side of the path.

An approximate 20-minute drive brings you to your home away from home for the next two nights, Sheedys Hotel and Restaurant. After meeting the owners, there is time to relax before indulging in the first night's feast.

Accommodation: Sheedys Hotel and Restaurant, Lisdoonvarna

DAY 4

The Burren

5.5 miles, easy to moderate; optional 3 miles, easy

Today you venture into the heart of the Burren. Here, the shapes and textures of the bare limestone that give this site its Gaelic name (meaning “a rocky place”) make for fascinating walking. The thin soil hosts unusual and diverse flora, in which plants from the high Arctic and Alpine regions of Europe bloom alongside those from the Mediterranean region. Your guides engage the group with their knowledge of history, geology, and plant life—as the Burren is rich in all these subjects.

You travel along the Burren Way on foot, following a trail from near Ballynahown, up over the plateau, then down into the Caher River valley where you rejoin our coach. Lovely views of the sea appear along this ancient path that was once a cattle-driving trail. A short transfer takes you to Ballyvaughan, where you enjoy lunch.

This afternoons walk is in the fertile Burren lowlands, through hazel woods, rich fields and along ancient roadways. You will also skirt a Turlough or disappearing lake, a unique feature of limestone regions such as The Burren. Once again you retire to Sheedys Hotel and reunite for a sumptuous dinner created with organic ingredients produced and harvested locally.

Accommodation: Sheedys Hotel and Restaurant, Lisdoonvarna

DAY 5

Colman Kilmacduagh

2 miles walking, easy to moderate

Today’s walk through the verdant Irish countryside takes you to the relatively unknown ruins of Kilmacduagh, an early Christian monastery established by Saint Colman in the 7th century. You take time to explore this mystical setting and stroll around the monastery, including its holy well, which is still honored today.

Lunch is in Galway, the third-largest city in the Republic of Ireland and nicknamed “Ireland’s cultural heart” for its full calendar of festivals and events and numerous dance and musical organizations, theater companies, visual arts, writers, and film groups, as well as over 50 event venues. In recent years, Galway was named the second-best destination in Ireland and was ranked ahead of most European capitals. Following this city break, you board the coach and transfer to a more rural setting in the westernmost part

of the Connemara region.

Your hotel for the next two nights is a first-class 19th-century country house in Letterfrack, set amidst 30 acres of peaceful private woodland on the shores of the natural Ballinakill Harbor. Dinner this evening is in the hotel's beautiful dining room, perhaps with the sound of a crackling open wood fire in the background.

Accommodation: Rosleague Manor Hotel, Letterfrack

DAY 6

Killary Harbor

4.5 miles, easy to moderate; optional 2 miles, easy to moderate

Following a hearty breakfast and energized by a freshly brewed cup of coffee or tea, you set out for another day admiring the contrasting sceneries of the emerald green hills and deep blue waters. Today's walk explores the country's only fjord: Killary Harbor, which lies on the border between County Galway and County Mayo. The 10-mile-long fjord reaches a 150-foot depth at its center. You walk 4 ½ miles along a harborside trackway, passing the deserted village of Foher and its evocative famine graveyard. The deep bay affords views of inland mountains and magical islands. Lunch is at a pub in Letterfrack, founded by the Quakers in the mid-19th century. Later you can browse among the town's displays of handwoven arts and crafts. This afternoon, you may choose to enjoy the grounds at your manor hotel or an optional walk departs from the Connemara National Park Visitor Center, gently rising to Diamond Hill, where spectacular views unfold.

There is time before dinner to relax in the hotel's Victorian conservatory with a cup of tea or to take a stroll on the hotel's private estate. You gather with your traveling companions in the hotel's dining room for another sumptuous dinner of local specialties such as Connemara lamb or wild Renvyle salmon.

Accommodation: Rosleague Manor Hotel, Letterfrack

DAY 7

Inishbofin

4.5 miles, easy to moderate

Following a satisfying (and award-winning) breakfast in the hotel's conservatory, you depart for a 20-minute drive to the picturesque little fishing town of Cleggan, with its pier and colorful fishing boats. You then catch the ferry, weather permitting, to Inishbofin—"the island of the white cow," according to its Irish name—a serene place with a breathtaking coastline which lies 7 miles off Galway's coast. Occupied since the Bronze Age, the island is one of a handful of shipping ports on the West Coast of Ireland which thrived in the 17th century. It is also the location chosen by Ireland's legendary pirate queen, Grace O'Malley, to build her fort. Inishbofin has since become a popular destination for local writers and artists. You explore the island's golden beaches and grassy paths before resting on the boat ride back to the mainland after enjoying a late lunch.

This evening you retire to your family-owned hotel, and Clifden's oldest building, dating from approximately 1820. Overlooking the harbor, you are only a few minutes' walk to the town center, where dining options abound.

Accommodation: The Quay House, Clifden

DAY 8

Roundstone Bog

3.5 miles, easy; optional 3.5 miles, easy

As your Irish adventure draws to a close, you depart for one last inspiring day on the trail. Today's walk is only a short distance from your hotel and introduces you to a fascinating ecosystem. Roundstone Bog is one of the largest examples of a western blanket bog in the world. Starting out following a little-used road, the route takes you on a wild trail and sheep paths, until you reach the bog proper, if the weather has been dry for the previous few days. Here your guides point out the flora specially adapted to living in wet acid soils: heather-clad outcroppings of rock, insectivorous plants, and sedges. In summer, the eerie cries of breeding golden plover and merlin drift overhead.

This afternoon, tide permitting, an island visit is on the agenda. You reach Omey Island on foot along a causeway cut off by high tide. This low-lying island of pink granite is covered by sand dunes. Recent excavations have provided anthropologists with a wealth of new information on the customs of early Christian monasteries in Ireland.

You return to your hotel in the quaint town of Clifden, referred to as “the capital of Connemara” because of its size. Tonight’s farewell dinner is at a favorite local restaurant owned by your hosts’ extended family. Now a connoisseur of the local delicacies, you may choose your favorite from the creative offerings listed on the menu while toasting the week’s accomplishments and discoveries.

Accommodation: The Quay House, Clifden

DAY 9

Your *Ireland: Connemara & Galway Bay* tour concludes

After enjoying breakfast in Clifden and traveling with your group to Ennis, a private coach brings you to the Old Ground Hotel for your post-tour night. (Lunch and dinner are on your own.)

Accommodation: Old Ground Hotel, Ennis

DAY 10

Departure

This morning a complimentary small-group transfer is provided to Shannon Airport based on your departure time.

What's Included	Air Package	Tour Only
Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓	✓
All on-tour meals except 2 lunches	✓	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓	✓
Emergency travel assistance hotline available 24/7	✓	✓
Roundtrip airfare	✓	
Airport car service for arrival & departure	✓	
Pre- and post-tour breakfasts	✓	
Business-class upgrades available	✓	