

Ireland: Connemara & Galway Bay

Tour-Only Itinerary

Accompanied by resident pooch Tyson, you step onto the flowery grounds of your manor house inn to watch evening light play on Ballinakill Bay. Next door is Connemara National Park, where this afternoon you climbed Diamond Hill for sweeping views of western Ireland's bogs, heaths, islands, and inlets. The landscapes, music and sights you've experienced here are unforgettable. But it's the warmth of the Irish people—in family-run inns, in a cheery Galway pub, in your tour guides' generous sharing of cultural knowledge—that has made you feel at home on this Connemara walking tour. Speaking of home, Tyson looks up at you, wags his tail, and says "Let's go!"



Highlights

Walk a low-lying causeway to Omey Island, a path inaccessible at high tide, to admire vistas of grassy fields, ancient ruins, and stunning pink-granite outcrops.

Gain a deeper appreciation for the sounds of Ireland from your knowledgeable guides as they teach you about music in true Irish style.

Discover enduring relics of Ireland's ancient history as you visit a historic monastery, tour prehistoric forts, and glimpse iconic Celtic crosses dotting the hillsides.

On all Guided Adventures you can count on ...



Expert local guides to introduce you to the best of your destination.



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



Off-the-beaten-path places you'd never find on your own.



Experts to handle all the details.



A maximum of 18 fun-loving fellow travelers to share the journey.



Flight + Tour Combos include plane tickets, airport car service, and pre- and post-tour accommodations.



Delicious, authentic multi-course meals—virtually all are included.

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

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

1 mile, easy. 4 miles, easy to moderate

Your guide(s) will meet you at the Old Ground Hotel at 9:30 a.m. in the lobby. Your guide(s) will be wearing a Country Walkers shirt. Please be dressed for walking and ready for an immediate departure. After a brief introduction to the group, your adventure begins.

Shortly after meeting your guides, 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 five miles, these cliffs rise precipitously from the Atlantic Ocean to a soaring 700 feet. 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, Sheedy's Country House Hotel. Once you meet the owners, there is time to relax before indulging in the first night's feast.

Accommodation: Sheedy's Country House Hotel, Lisdoonvarna

Included Meals: Lunch, Dinner

DAY 2

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—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 your 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 afternoon’s 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 distinctive feature of limestone regions such as the Burren. Once again you retire to Sheedy’s Country House Hotel and reunite for a sumptuous dinner made with organic ingredients produced and harvested locally.

Accommodation: Sheedy’s Country House Hotel, Lisdoonvarna

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 3

Colman Kilmacduagh

2 miles, 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. Numerous dance and musical organizations, theater companies, visual arts, writers, and film groups, as well as over 50 event venues, call Galway home. In

recent years, Galway has received numerous accolades, including being named the second-best destination in Ireland. 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 manor 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

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 4

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 amid 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 4.5 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, which 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 take a stroll in 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

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5

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 fishing town of Cleggan, with its pier surrounded by colorful fishing boats. You then catch the ferry, weather permitting, to Inishbofin "the island of the white cow," according to its Irish name. This serene island seven miles off Galway's coast boasts a breathtaking coastline. Occupied since the Bronze Age, the island is one of a handful of shipping ports on the west coast of Ireland that thrived during the 17th century. It is also the location where Ireland's legendary pirate queen, Grace O'Malley, chose 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 and then enjoy a late lunch before resting on the boat ride back to the mainland.

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

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6

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 most extensive 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, which is specially adapted to living in wet acid soils: heather clinging to 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, which is cut off by the high tide. Sand dunes cover this low-lying island of pink granite. 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

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7

***Your Ireland: Connemara & Galway Bay* tour concludes**

After a hearty Irish breakfast, you transfer to Ennis, bidding farewell and continuing your onward or homeward travels. Expect to arrive at Old Ground Hotel, Ennis, between 12:00 p.m. and 1:00 p.m.

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included

Tour Only

Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓
All on-tour meals except 2 lunches and 3 dinners	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓
Travel assistance available 24/7 provided by Allianz	✓