



Country Walkers

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Ireland: Connemara & Galway Bay

Travel Style - Guided Walking Tour

This small-group Guided Walking Adventure offers an authentic travel experience, one that takes you away from the crowds and deep into the fabric of local life. On it, you'll enjoy 24/7 expert guides, premium accommodations, delicious meals, effortless transportation, and local wine or beer with dinner. Rest assured that every trip detail has been anticipated so you're free to enjoy an adventure that exceeds your expectations.



Join us for some *craic agus ceoil* (fun and music) while exploring the windswept bluffs, verdant farmland, and little-known islands of western Ireland. In the cultural heart of the Emerald Isle, you stroll the vibrant streets of Galway past busking musicians, historic buildings, and charming shops. You walk the dramatic coast along the Cliffs of Moher, where lush, green headlands meet the roaring ocean, and Killary Harbor, home to abandoned settlements that bear testament to Ireland's famine-stricken past. Inishbofin Island offers golden beaches, grassy paths, and a rich history haunted by artists, monks, and pirates. The bare karst landscape of the Burren is a geological wonder of limestone rocks and rare plants, home to an Iron Age fort and a Bronze Age burial ground. Sweeping views await you high in the Mamturk Mountains, the "fairy hills" of Sheeauns, and the lake-dappled peatlands of Connemara National Park. The island's crowning glory, however, is its Irish spirit: ebullient and witty, life-affirming and infectious

Tour Only Itinerary - 2019

Day 1

Join your Country Walkers *Ireland: Connemara & Galway Bay* tour

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

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



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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

Sheedy's Country House has been in the family since the early 1700's – a much-loved home that has been passed down the line of four generations, from great grandfather to son, John Sheedy, and his wife Martina. They immediately make you feel like family guests in their special home and are on hand at all times to make your stay the best it can be.

Day 2

The Burren

5 ½ miles walking, 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 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 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.

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Day 3

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

A meticulously renovated manor house built in the early 1800s, filled with antiques and boasting a superb dining room. Spacious guest rooms are individually decorated plush retreats.

Day 4

Killary Harbor

4½ miles walking, easy to moderate; optional, 2 miles walking 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 4½ 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



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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.

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Day 5

Inishbofin

4½ miles walking, 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

Built in 1820 as the harbormaster's house, this family-run inn is the town's oldest building, formerly also a Franciscan monastery and a convent before becoming a boutique guesthouse. Stylish rooms are individually decorated with period furniture and original artwork, while elegant living rooms with fireplaces are perfect to relax in after a day of walking. Breakfast is served in a light- and flower-filled conservatory.

Day 6

Roundstone Bog



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3½ miles walking, easy; optional 3½ 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 Omev 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.

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Day 7

Your Country Walkers 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.