

Go West Tour Itinerary

Monday: Arrival in Dublin, Ireland

Welcome to Ireland! You arrive in Dublin and check in to your hotel in the heart of the city center.

If you have time, check out some of the excellent tours of the city and sample Dublin's unique bars and restaurants. Then off to bed with you for a good night's sleep, for tomorrow begins what we hope will be one of your best experiences yielding a lifetime of happy memories!

Tuesday: Day 1 – Dublin to Inishmore (Aran Islands)

Highlights: Scenic Fly-Over the Aran Islands, Lovely Town of Cong, Sheep Dog Demonstration, Overnight Stay on the Aran Island of Inishmore

Meet your guide and your trip participants and begin your Irish adventure. First up you'll literally "go west" out of Dublin's fair city to County Galway and the beautiful village of Cong. Once the setting for the John Ford movie "The Quiet Man," this colorful town has abundant charms, including the ruins of an Augustinian Abbey and just a short walk beyond the town, you find wonderful views of the fairy-likesque Ashford Castle. Enjoy lunch and free time to explore this charming town.

After Cong, you'll travel through the gorgeous lakes and mountain valleys of Connemara. Along the way your journey takes you to a remote mountain farm where you'll meet a local farmer who'll delight in showing off his cherished sheep dogs. These spirited dogs will enchant you with their joy and skill at herding sheep, all the while faithfully obeying the farmer's directions via a series of calls and whistles.

Once the sheep are safely penned, you'll head to a small rural airstrip where you board your specially chartered plane for a short flight to the largest of the Aran Islands, Inishmore. With a bird's eye view, you'll be captivated by coastal cliffs and the vast maze of intricately laced stone walls.

Touching down, you have arrived for your overnight stay on Inishmore. A renowned refuge of old Irish culture, with resilient native Irish speakers, it's also heralded for its stunning natural beauty and rich archeological history. In the center of Kilronan village, your friendly local hostess will welcome you to relax in her island B&B. Here the night is yours to explore and check out the local pubs for music, food and fun!

Wednesday: Day 2 – Inishmore (Aran Islands) to Roundstone

Highlights: Inishmore Island Tour, Iron Age Fort of Dun Aengus, Aughnanure Castle, Roundstone Traditional Irish Dance and Music Show

After a quiet night's rest and a hearty Irish breakfast, a local guide will take you on an insider's tour of the island's best sights including a trip to the dramatic Iron Age fort, Dun Aengus. This ancient fort, one of the best of its kind in Europe, is precariously perched atop a huge sheer cliff commanding sweeping views of the island. Later you'll have free time for lunch, to explore more or seek out a famed Aran woolen sweater.

In the afternoon, your flight returns you to the mainland and then you travel across the peat-covered landscape to magnificent Aughnanure Castle. The strongest bastion of the O'Flaherty clan, it's one of the west's best-kept secrets. The boisterous and rebellious O'Flaherty's controlled most of the surrounding area from the six stories of this 15th Century Tower House Castle.

Afterwards you take a scenic route through Connemara's wild and beautiful mountain landscape by trout lakes and bogland to your overnight town of Roundstone. This small fishing town is a wonderful place to truly get in

touch with rural Ireland and sample great local seafood. The pretty setting of this unassuming community looks towards Connemara's grand peaks and hosts some of Ireland's most talented traditional dancers and musicians in its small community hall. You'll be lucky enough to experience one of these exceptional performances for a fantastic night you'll never forget!

Thursday: Day 3 – Roundstone to Westport

Highlights: Alcock & Brown Landing Site, Clifden, Wild Ponies, Connemara, Killary Harbor, Great Music in Westport Town

Leaving Roundstone, you set out to discover Connemara - an area of extraordinary natural beauty. Stopping frequently during the day, you'll get out and explore the many incredible sights and towns along the way. You begin by navigating the headland and visiting the landing site of the first transatlantic flight by Alcock & Brown in 1919. This area is also where Marconi sent wireless radio transmissions across the Atlantic!

Savor a tasty lunch in the colorful town of Clifden and then continue through the beautiful Connemara landscape flanked by the stark beauty of the Twelve Bens (mountain peaks). With luck, you'll see wild Connemara ponies, known for their hardiness and kind nature; they are Ireland's only native horse.

Your trip takes you on a wonderful loop through the Renvyle Peninsula and onto the majestic fjord of Killary Harbor. This 16 km sea-filled gorge has rich waters for salmon and mussels and the towering Mweerea, the highest mountain in the region, further enhances its incredible scenery. You'll pass into County Mayo and through the stunning area of Delphi and Doo Lough.

Further on you'll pass Croagh Patrick, Ireland's Holy Mountain, said to be where the bold Saint Patrick cast the snakes from Ireland's shores. Then finally to your last stop for the day and your home for the next two nights, Westport. This laid back town is a fantastic place to unwind and wander its many shops, bars, and restaurants. Traditional Irish music sessions (or as the locals say 'trad sessions') are plentiful. Stop by Matt Molloy's Bar – started by The Chieftain's flutist who has been known to stop by and join a session.

Friday: Day 4 – Free Day in Westport

Your free day! Sleep in or take a trip to hike Croagh Patrick and avail of some of the most incredible views in the world. Explore by bike or foot along the "Great Western Greenway," a beautiful trail starting in Westport through bucolic Irish countryside. Shopping, fine restaurants and pubs, golfing, fishing, and even a cruise of Clew Bay are all available. Enjoy another night in this vibrant town!

Saturday: Day 5 – Westport to Belmullet

Highlights: Tour an Irish Manor House, Achill Island's Rugged Beauty, Co. Mayo's Vast Peat Landscape, Friendly Belmullet Town and Your Boutique Hotel

Begin your day in grand splendor in one of Ireland's great period homes, Westport House. Built upon the castle ruins that once housed the infamous pirate queen, Grace O'Malley, this 18th Century manor home or "Big House" is still owned by her direct descendants. Learn about the home's fascinating history on a special private tour before the house officially opens for the day.

With tales of the high seas, you'll head further west to explore rugged Achill Island, Ireland's largest island and a culturally rich Gaelic speaking region. The splendor of Achill's scenic Atlantic Drive spans towering sea cliffs to beautiful and remote sandy beaches. Fragments of Ireland's rich history can be found all over the island from pirate queen castles to deserted famine villages. After lunch on Achill, your trip moves to northwest County

Mayo, one of Ireland's least visited areas. Here you'll pass through one of Europe's largest peatland habitats. Home to whooper swans, peregrine falcons and corncrakes, it's an important sanctuary for migratory birds.

After a spectacular day of scenery, you arrive into the rural town of Belmullet and your boutique hotel. Have a delicious meal in the hotel's bar, explore the town, or pop in to McDonnell's pub where Padraig the owner likes to personally greet each newcomer to his pub. You're sure to have a fun night chatting with locals and maybe sip a free pint from Padraig to keep you in the "Pot" (the pub is humorously likened to a lobster trap or "Pot" by locals who love the lively atmosphere).

Sunday: Day 6 – Belmullet to Enniscrone

Highlights: Ancient Céide Fields, Medieval Round Tower, Franciscan Friary, Oceanside Town of Enniscrone

Leaving the comfort of your plush hotel, you'll travel along Mayo's north coast, flanked by huge, sheer cliffs that rival the Cliffs of Moher in the south. Here, your path takes to the oldest and most extensive Stone Age field systems in the world, the Céide Fields. Spread over several kilometers, the walls of these ancient fields lay hidden beneath Mayo's deep blanket bog for over 5,500 years until their discovery in the 1930s!

You'll then continue your journey to an old Irish Round Tower. Rapunzel-esque towers like this are one of Ireland's most iconic structures and have stood tall in the changing landscape for over a thousand years.

After ducking down narrow country lanes, discover the ruins of one of Ireland's finest Franciscan Friaries. Have fun wandering freely, exploring its cloisters, fascinating carvings and glorious Irish-Gothic arches.

Your final stop for the night is the beautiful town of Enniscrone. Set beside a long and beautiful Atlantic beach, the town is a favorite among the Irish themselves. For over a hundred years, people have relaxed at the local seaweed and steam baths or viewed some of the best sunsets in Ireland, right in front of your cozy guesthouse!

Monday: Day 7 – Enniscrone to Dublin

Highlights: Ox Mountain Drive, Megalithic Passage Tombs, Carrick-on-Shannon, The River Shannon, Dublin

Saying farewell to Enniscrone, you'll trace a narrow path through the ancient Ox Mountains and a glacial drumlin belt formed during the last Ice Age. Then, hiking an old farm trail, you'll discover one of Ireland's hidden gems, a forgotten cluster of megalithic, passage tombs! As some of the oldest man-made structures on earth, they pre-date the Egyptian pyramids and even Stonehenge in England. Away from all signs of the modern world, you'll enter the tombs and connect with Ireland's mysterious Neolithic people. Ponder the unsolved clues and consider why these ancient architects incorporated enigmatic, solar alignments into the tomb's structure.

Continue onto the town of Carrick-on-Shannon nestled on Ireland's longest and mightiest waterway, the River Shannon. Take a peek at one of Ireland's smallest churches or stroll the banks of the Shannon alongside house-barges and riverboats. Have fun meandering by the local shops and cafes to find a delicious lunch.

Finally it's back to lively Dublin and your last night in the Emerald Isle. Enjoy a meal in one of the many fine restaurants, savor the final hours of your Go West Tour, and cherish a lifetime of amazing memories!

Slán Beo! Irish for "Goodbye, live life!"

While it is our intention to adhere to the route described above, there is a certain amount of flexibility built into the itinerary and on occasion, it may be necessary, or desirable, to make alterations. The information in the itinerary has been compiled with care and is provided in good faith. However, it is subject to change, and does not form part of the contract between the client and Inroads Ireland.

© 2016 Inroads Ireland, LLC