



St Colman's Cathedral above the harbour at Cobh, Co. Cork — photographed by Dave O'Riordan.

The Perfect 7 Days in Ireland

One honest week on the Atlantic coast — Kerry's lakes, the Dingle Peninsula, the Cliffs of Moher, Galway and Connemara — with real drive times, the stops that earn their place, and none of the rushing that ruins Ireland.

7 days

6 BASES, 1 NO-DRIVE DAY

≈ 690 km

OF DRIVING, HONESTLY PADDED

4 counties

KERRY · CLARE · GALWAY · MAYO

From Irish Escapes — the Ireland trip planner at irish-escapes.com.

Free with the Irish Escapes newsletter. Prices are honest ranges, checked October 2026 — always confirm before you book.

How this week works

The route runs one way up the west coast, so you never backtrack: land, drop south to Kerry, then work north — Dingle, Clare, Galway, Connemara, Westport — and fly home from Dublin or Shannon. Every day changes base except Galway, and the longest driving day is the first. After that, no day asks more than about two and a half hours of you.

DAY	ROUTE	REALISTIC DRIVE*	SLEEP
1	Arrive → Killarney & the lakes	Arrival day	Killarney
2	Killarney → Dingle Peninsula	≈ 1 hr 30	Dingle
3	Dingle → Shannon ferry → Ennis	≈ 3 hrs incl. ferry	Ennis
4	Ennis → the Burren → Cliffs of Moher → Galway	≈ 2 hrs 30	Galway
5	Galway city — a no-driving day	None	Galway
6	Galway → Kylemore → Clifden & the Sky Road	≈ 1 hr 45	Clifden
7	Clifden → Leenane → Westport & Clew Bay	≈ 1 hr 45	Westport

*Drive times are wheels-turning estimates padded by roughly a quarter over sat-nav figures — the Irish Escapes planner's realism correction — because rural roads, tractors, photo stops and one-lane bridges are real. Add your stops on top.

Getting in and out

Fly into **Shannon** if you can — Killarney is about 1 hr 45 away and Day 1 stays gentle. From **Dublin**, allow about 4 hours to Killarney with a break. Going home from Westport: about 3 hrs 15 to Dublin, or 2 hrs 45 to Shannon. Pick up the rental car at the airport and keep it the whole week.

When to go

May, June and September are the sweet spots: long light, open ferries, thinner crowds. July–August is glorious but books out — reserve Dingle, Galway and Clifden early. April and October work if you pack for weather and accept shorter days; winter is for pub fires, not this route.

What a week costs — honest ranges

Per person, sharing, mid-range, at October 2026 prices. These are planning ranges, not quotes.

ITEM	RANGE	NOTES
Rental car, 7 days	€250–€550	Booked early, small-to-mid car; summer sits at the top. Check the excess.
B&Bs & guesthouses	€90–€160 / night	Breakfast usually included — and it counts (see page 10).
Fuel	€90–€130	For ≈ 690 km plus detours.
Food & drink	€55–€90 / day	Big breakfast, café lunch, pub or restaurant dinner.
Sights & ferries	€80–€140	Cliffs visitor centre, castle/abbey entry, Shannon ferry ≈ €20–€25 per car.

Book stays here when you're ready: [STAYS LINK]. Book tours here: [TOURS LINK].

Killarney & the Lakes

Arrive → Killarney



Ross Castle on Lough Leane — photographed by Dave O'Riordan.

≈ 1 hr 45 from Shannon

ARRIVAL DRIVE (≈ 4 HRS FROM DUBLIN)

Gentle

PACE — SHAKE OFF THE FLIGHT

Killarney

SLEEP — NIGHT 1 OF 1

Don't start your week with a heroic drive. Get to Killarney, check in, and spend the afternoon inside Ireland's oldest national park, where the town simply dissolves into lakes and oak woods.

The must-sees

Ross Castle. A 15th-century tower house on the shore of Lough Leane, reached by an easy walk or cycle from the town centre through the park. Legend — tradition, in other words — says O'Donoghue still rises from the lake every seven years; the castle itself is solid fact and the right first photograph of the trip.

Muckross House & Gardens. A 19th-century mansion on Muckross Lake with furnished rooms, gardens and traditional farms nearby. Entry to the national park is free; the house and castle tours are ticketed and fill up in summer, so book ahead.

Photo: Ross Castle's shoreline in the early morning often gives calm water and reflections toward the MacGillycuddy's Reeks — worth setting one alarm this week.

Eat: a pub dinner in town — look for somewhere doing a proper Irish stew and brown soda bread, then an early night. **Sleep in Killarney** because tomorrow's peninsula starts from here, and because the town's B&B breakfasts set you up for it.

If you have an extra hour: take a jaunting car from the town centre through the park — agree the route and the price before you set off — or drive five minutes to the Aghadoe viewpoint for the whole lake spread out below you.

The Dingle Peninsula

Killarney → Conor Pass → Dingle



Kerry mountain country near Carrauntoohil — photographed by Dave O'Riordan.

≈ 1 hr 30

DRIVE — 67 KM, MOUNTAIN ROAD

Full

PACE — THE SLEA HEAD LOOP

Dingle

SLEEP — NIGHT 1 OF 1

The road west narrows, the signs turn bilingual, and by the time you crest the Conor Pass — Ireland's highest mountain pass — you're in the Gaeltacht, where Irish is the everyday language and the Atlantic does the decorating.

The must-sees

Slea Head Drive. The loop west of Dingle past beehive huts and the Gallarus Oratory, with the Blasket Islands offshore. Drive it clockwise, the direction the tour buses take, so you meet large vehicles on your side of the narrow road — and stop often; the lay-bys are the point.

Dingle Harbour & town. A working fishing harbour wrapped in painted shopfronts on Green Street and Main Street, with boat trips around the bay and out to the Blaskets in season (weather-dependent — check on the day and book ahead in summer).

Photo: the harbourfront early in the morning, soft light on the fishing boats — or climb to Eask Tower across the harbour on a clear afternoon for the whole town and bay in one frame.

Eat: seafood straight off the boats — a chowder at lunch, fish and chips or a harbour restaurant at night, then find the pub where the music starts of its own accord. **Sleep in Dingle town** for exactly that: the sessions are the evening's entertainment, and you can walk home.

If you have an extra hour: hold a falcon, browse the distillery, or simply order a second coffee on the quay and watch the harbour work. Slow is not wasted here.

North to Clare — by Ferry

Dingle → Tralee → Tarbert 🚢 Killimer → Ennis



Tonight's assignment: a Clare pub, a stew, and a session. (Irish stew, from the Irish Escapes food guide.)

≈ 3 hrs incl. ferry

DRIVE — THE SHORTCUT ACROSS
THE SHANNON

Easy

PACE — A TRAVELLING DAY,
DONE RIGHT

Ennis

SLEEP — NIGHT 1 OF 1

Today is the hinge of the week. Instead of the long road around Limerick, cross the Shannon where the river meets the sea: the Killimer–Tarbert car ferry cuts the corner off Ireland and puts you in Clare by lunchtime. Crossings are frequent in season — check the day's sailing times before you leave Dingle.

The must-sees

The ferry itself. Twenty minutes on the water with the Shannon estuary opening around you. Dolphins are sometimes seen from the deck — a genuine possibility, never a promise.

Ennis Friary. The ruins of a Franciscan friary founded in the 13th century under the O'Brien kings of Thomond, known for its carved windows and medieval sculpture. Photograph it in the afternoon, when light enters the ruins and picks out the east window.

Ennis old town. Narrow streets around Abbey Street, the O'Connell monument in the central square — Daniel O'Connell's historic Clare election is why it's there — and the Clare Museum for the county's story from Stone Age gold to All-Ireland fiddles.

Eat: a traditional pub with a kitchen that takes stew seriously. **Sleep in Ennis** because it's Clare's music town: for a traditional session, arrive early to get a seat near the musicians, and remember the pubs fill as the evening goes on.

If you have an extra hour: walk the River Fergus bridges at evening light, with the cathedral behind you — the town's best free view.

The Burren & the Cliffs

Ennis → the Burren → Cliffs of Moher → Galway



The Clare coast — limestone under your feet, the Atlantic ahead.

≈ 2 hrs 30

DRIVE — IN TWO EASY HOPS

Full

PACE — THE WEEK'S BIGGEST
SIGHTS

Galway

SLEEP — NIGHT 1 OF 2

Drive out of Ennis into a grey stone sea: the Burren, a limestone pavement where Arctic and Mediterranean flowers somehow share the same cracks. Then the land simply stops — and 214-metre cliffs take over.

The must-sees

The Burren. Don't just drive through it. Stop at a portal tomb or a ringfort, get out, and stand on the cracked pavement. In May and June the orchids and bloody cranesbill do something botanists cross oceans to see.

Cliffs of Moher. Ireland's most famous view earns it — on a clear day the Aran Islands sit offshore and the cliffs run for kilometres in both directions. Go **late in the day**: the light leans golden on the cliff face and the day-trip crowds have thinned. Book the visitor centre ahead in summer; the cliff path south toward Hag's Head is quieter than the centre terraces.

Photo: from the southern path, shoot back along the cliff line in the last hour before sunset. Wind is the default condition — bring the layer, hold the hat.

Eat: lunch in a Burren village café (smoked salmon country — the Burren's smokehouses are the real deal), dinner in Galway. **Sleep in Galway:** two nights, because tomorrow nobody drives anywhere.

If you have an extra hour: detour through Kinvara for the harbour and Dunguaire Castle on the way into Galway — a postcard that costs you twenty minutes.

Galway City — Slowly

On foot — the car stays parked



Galway — buskers, bookshops and the bay.

None

DRIVING — A DELIBERATE REST
DAY

Slow

PACE — MARKETS AND MUSIC

Galway

SLEEP — NIGHT 2 OF 2

Every great road trip needs a day with no road. Galway is built for it: a medieval street plan, a river in a hurry, and a population that treats busking as a public service.

The must-sees

Shop Street & the Latin Quarter. Lynch's Castle — a fortified merchant's house now working as a bank — anchors a street of bookshops, jewellers making Claddagh rings, and buskers of genuinely professional standard. Go early for quiet streets, or in the evening for the lit shopfronts and music.

Spanish Arch & Galway City Museum. The surviving arch of the old city defences beside the Corrib, with the free City Museum next door covering Galway's history and the Claddagh fishing village that stood across the river.

The Long Walk & Salthill. Photograph the row of colourful houses from the Claddagh side in the morning; late in the day, stroll the promenade at Salthill (about half an hour each way) for sunset over Galway Bay toward the Clare hills.

Eat: graze the market by St Nicholas's Church if it's a Saturday, oysters if you're brave, and a proper restaurant dinner tonight — you've earned a table, not a tray. **Sleep in Galway** a second night: the whole point of a base is one unpacked suitcase.

If you have an extra hour: Galway Cathedral, completed in 1965 on the old gaol site — dome, mosaics and stained glass, and the quietest hour of the day.

Connemara

Galway → Kylemore Abbey → Clifden → the Sky Road



West of Galway the land empties into bog, lake and mountain.

≈ 1 hr 45

DRIVE — PLUS THE SKY ROAD
LOOP

Full

PACE — BIG-SKY COUNTRY

Clifden

SLEEP — NIGHT 1 OF 1

Connemara is the Ireland of the imagination with the volume turned down: bog roads, still loughs, the Twelve Bens standing over all of it. Oscar Wilde called it a savage beauty; two centuries of visitors have failed to improve on that.

The must-sees

Kylemore Abbey. A lakeside castle built as a love letter — a 19th-century estate on Pollacappul Lough, now home to Benedictine nuns, with a walled Victorian garden that would justify the drive alone. Arrive before the mid-day coaches if you can.

The Sky Road, Clifden. A short loop west of town with elevated views over Clifden Bay and the offshore islands. Drive it slowly, stop only at the marked viewpoints, and time the upper viewpoint for late afternoon or sunset, when the light pours over the bay.

Derrigimlagh Bog. Just south of Clifden: the bog where Alcock and Brown landed in 1919 after the first non-stop transatlantic flight, beside the remains of Marconi's first commercial transatlantic wireless station. A signed loop walk joins the two stories.

Eat: Clifden does seafood and lamb well; book dinner ahead in summer — the town's restaurants fill fast. **Sleep in Clifden,** Connemara's small capital, because the Sky Road at sunset is ten minutes from your door, not an hour.

If you have an extra hour: Omey Island, at low tide — walk across the sand to a tidal island with a hidden church. Check the tide times first, and leave well before the sea comes back for its property.

Clew Bay & Westport

Clifden → Leenane → Killary Harbour → Westport



Clew Bay country, Co. Mayo — Croagh Patrick country.

≈ 1 hr 45

DRIVE — THROUGH IRELAND'S
ONLY FJORD COUNTRY

Full

PACE — A FAREWELL SUMMIT
(OPTIONAL)

Westport

SLEEP — NIGHT 1 OF 1

The road north runs along Killary Harbour — Ireland's only true fjord — past Leenane and into Mayo, where Clew Bay opens out in a scatter of drumlin islands and one unmistakable cone of a mountain stands guard over all of it.

The must-sees

Westport town. A planned Georgian town that shows what care looks like: the Octagon, the clock tower, and the tree-lined Mall along the Carrowbeg River. Morning light suits it — and so does doing very little in it.

Croagh Patrick. Ireland's holy mountain, climbed by pilgrims for centuries. The path from Campbell's pub at Murrisk is a serious half-day: allow several hours, wear real boots, and only attempt it in settled weather. Not climbing is also a complete sentence — the view of it from Westport Quay at sunset is the town's classic picture.

The Great Western Greenway. If the legs allow, hire bikes for a section of the traffic-free Greenway toward Achill — book hire ahead in summer and arrange the shuttle back.

Eat: a last-night dinner at Westport Quay, with the bay outside the window. **Sleep in Westport:** it is the friendliest possible full stop, and the drive home tomorrow breaks up kindly from here.

If you have an extra hour: Westport House and its gardens on the Carrowbeg — photograph it across the lake in calm early light tomorrow, before you leave.

Day 8 — going home: Westport → Dublin ≈ 3 hrs 15 (M4/N5 all the way) or Westport → Shannon ≈ 2 hrs 45. Return the car, and start the argument about which week to do next: the Southwest in 5, or the full island in 14 — both live on the site.

Packing for Irish weather — by season

Irish weather is not extreme — it is frequent. Temperatures rarely go far below freezing or above the low twenties, but rain, wind and sunshine can all visit in a single afternoon. The whole art of dressing for Ireland is layers plus a waterproof shell, whatever the month.



Non-negotiable equipment: a full Irish breakfast before a driving day. You will not need lunch.

SEASON	TYPICAL FEEL	PACK
Spring (Mar–May)	Highs 9–15°C, lengthening light	Waterproof jacket, warm mid-layer, waterproof walking shoes, hat for the passes.
Summer (Jun–Aug)	Highs 15–20°C, daylight past 10 pm	Layers you can peel, a real rain shell (not a fashion one), comfortable broken-in walkers, a light scarf for cliff wind.
Autumn (Sep–Nov)	Highs 10–17°C, golden, stormier late	As summer, plus a warmer fleece and waterproof trousers if you plan hills.
Winter (Dec–Feb)	Highs 5–9°C, ~8 hrs of light	Full winter kit: warm waterproof coat, hat, gloves, waterproof boots. Cosy pubs are the itinerary.

Always in the car

- **The shell:** a waterproof jacket you actually like wearing — it will be in half your photos.
- **Footwear:** waterproof, broken-in, with grip. Burren limestone and cliff paths are slick when wet.
- **A day bag** for layers, water and the inevitable bookshop purchase.
- **Adapters:** Ireland uses the three-pin Type G plug (same as the UK); the currency is the euro.
- **Offline maps:** download the west before you go — signal drops in the valleys, exactly where the views are.

The site's full What to Wear guide, month by month with temperatures and daylight hours, lives at irish-escapes.com — Resources → What to Wear.

Money, driving & good manners

Money essentials

- **Cards** are accepted nearly everywhere; keep €30–€50 in cash for ferries, parking meters, honesty boxes at sites, and musicians' hats.
- **Tipping:** 10–12% in restaurants when service isn't included; round up in pubs only for table service; a euro or two for guides you enjoyed.
- **Tax-free shopping:** visitors from outside the EU can reclaim VAT on goods taken home — ask for the paperwork at the till, not at the airport.
- **Prices here are ranges.** Fuel, ferries and entry fees move; the figures in this guide were checked in October 2026.

Driving essentials

- Ireland drives on the **left**; distances are in kilometres in the Republic.
- Rural speed limits are a legal maximum, not a target. On one-lane roads, the passing places are for passing — and a wave of thanks is compulsory culture.
- Never park blocking a gate or a lane: farm machinery is wider than your optimism.

Manners that matter

- **The round system.** In a pub group, people buy in rounds — one person gets a drink for everyone, then the next. It is a social rhythm, not a debt ledger, but slipping away just before your round is noticed. Leaving early? Get yours in first.
- **The trad session.** Musicians gathered in a corner are not a concert: conversation continues, but quietens when a singer starts. Never join in with an instrument unless invited — and buying the musicians a drink if you've loved it is the done thing.
- **Tea.** It is offered at every arrival, crisis and celebration. Refusing once is polite; refusing twice starts negotiations.
- **Land & ruins.** Many ringforts and tombs stand on farmland. Ask at the farmhouse, close every gate, and take nothing but photographs.

Eat like the week depends on it

Order the **Irish stew** where it comes with brown soda bread for the last of the broth; take the **seafood chowder** on the coasts, where it is made from the day's catch; save the **full Irish** for big driving days; and if you see **boxty** or **colcannon** on a menu in the northwest, that's the kitchen showing its roots — order both. The full food guide, dish by dish, is on the site.

Make this week yours

This PDF is the fixed route. The site is the living version — where you can bend it around your own dates, your own town, your own family's story.

Plan it properly

Plan Your Journey — the free planner at irish-escapes.com: start from this itinerary, swap bases, add the places your people came from, and it rebuilds the days with the same honestly padded drive times used in this guide.

Go deeper on every stop

All six bases in this guide have full town pages on the site — best sites, photo spots with the best hour to stand in them, history and hard-won practical tips — alongside 65 town guides and all 32 county pages.

Coming home to your own story

If your family name came from these counties, the site's Resources section is where that work lives — the Coming Home heritage guides today, with the Irish surnames map and the 1926 Census guide in build for the trip this week often turns into.

Stay in the loop

You're on the list now — the Irish Escapes letter brings a new corner of Ireland, a practical guide, or a route worth stealing, and never spam. Welcome aboard.

The whole week, one line

Killarney → Dingle → Ennis → Galway → Clifden → Westport. Book the stays early, drive it slowly, and let the west work on you.

Photo credits: Cover (Cobh), Ross Castle and Kerry mountains © Dave O'Riordan; remaining photography from the Irish Escapes image library (see irish-escapes.com for the full credit list). **Honesty note:** drive times are padded estimates, prices are ranges checked October 2026, and ferry sailings, opening hours and Croagh Patrick conditions must always be checked on the day. Traditions are labelled as traditions; everything else is verifiable — that's the deal with everything Irish Escapes publishes.

irish-escapes.com