

*** Early Fall Tour of Ireland / August 29 – September 9, 2024 ***
The Sights and Sounds of Western Ireland – Connemara, Galway and Mayo

*The Irish Cultural Center's John Tabb & Ellen Redman
host this musical trip. Please Join Us!*

Tour the wild and beautiful West Coast of Ireland! Embrace Ireland's distinctive culture, music and dance in County Mayo, the Connemara region and Galway, on a leisurely paced early fall tour through gorgeous countryside, charming towns, and bustling cities. Enjoy the summer weather without the usual crowds. Early September temperatures rival those of July and it's the driest month. Multiple night stays in Westport, Clifden and Galway allow you to immerse yourself in the beauty, hospitality, music and culture of Ireland's Historic West Coast Towns.

The ICC reserves the right to make changes to the itinerary as needed, due to weather or other circumstances.



Trip Details and Itinerary

- Day 1:
Thursday, Aug 29 Depart by coach from ICC in West Springfield at 1:30 pm to Boston's Logan Airport. Leave Logan at 7:05 pm aboard Aer Lingus Flight EI 134.
- Day 2:
Friday, Aug 30 Arrive at Shannon Airport at 6:20 am local Irish time. Board bus coach for land transportation. Stop at Treacy's West County Hotel in Ennis, Co. Kerry for tour-sponsored full Irish breakfast. While in Ennis we will conduct a short walking tour of the city, you can tour the Clare County Museum and visit the ATM to get your Euros. We will then leave for Clifden, stopping in An Spiddeal County Galway to stretch your legs. Then we are off to Kylemore Abbey. Kylemore Castle was built in the late 1800s by Mitchell Henry MP, a wealthy businessman, and liberal politician. Inspired by his love for his wife Margaret, and his hopes for his beloved Ireland, Henry created an estate boasting 'all the innovations of the modern age'. An enlightened landlord and vocal advocate of the Irish people, Henry poured his life's energy into creating an estate that would showcase what could be achieved in the remote wilds of Connemara. Today Kylemore Abbey is owned and run by the Benedictine community who have been in residence here since 1920. While there we will experience woodland and lakeshore walks, magnificent buildings, and Ireland's largest walled garden! Upon arrival at the Station House unpack and relax or freshen up before a welcome get-together drink in the Signal Bar along with traditional music at 6:00 pm followed by dinner at 7:00 pm in the Station House restaurant. Ellen, David and John may be participating in a traditional music session this evening if you (or they) have any energy left.
- Day 3:
Saturday, Aug 31 After breakfast this morning, the bus will depart at 9:30 am. We will stop to take a cruise on the Killary Fjord, the only fjord in Ireland. The cruise offers a great way to take in the dramatic sweep of the landscape, as you pass between the Twelve Bens and the Maamturk mountains to the South, in County Galway; and the Mweelrea mountains to the North in County Mayo, as well as the views out to the Atlantic at the mouth of the fjord. The fjord's sheltered waters are perfect for mussel farming, and you will see the ropes at several points on the fjord. You will also see some circular salmon farms, closer to the shore. Sheep dot the hills and

towards the mouth of the fjord is a small island, which has a Victorian range marker on it. This is the point at which dolphins typically emerge if they are in the vicinity and they like to swim alongside the ship. You can partake of a snack on the ride back at the wonderful onboard galley. Then we are off to Cong the village which was the sight for the movie *The Quiet Man*. We will stop for lunch on the way or perhaps in the village itself. The ride today will provide you with views of Connemara which is renowned for its picturesque setting and beautiful scenery. There are scenic mountains, expanses of bogs, heaths, grasslands and woodlands. Connemara has been chosen as the site for many famous movies as well as several Irish TV shows. We will return midafternoon so you can enjoy the picturesque town of Clifden. Enjoy dinner at the hotel tonight and some wonderful craic at one of the local pubs.

Day 4:
Sunday, Sept 1

After our Station House breakfast, we will begin our journey to the city of Galway. Our first stop will be the Patrick Pearse cabin and visitor center located in Ros Muc, in the heart of the Connemara Gaeltacht. It was here that Patrick Pearse, leader of the 1916 rebellion against British rule, built a summer cottage for himself.

In the state-of-the-art visitor centre you can explore the things that drew Pearse to Connemara – the area’s unique landscape and the ancient Gaelic culture and language which is still alive today. You will get a warm welcome from our local guides, who are steeped in the local culture and take great pride in it.

A short stroll across the bog will take you to the cottage itself. You will find it just as it was when Pearse left for the last time in 1915.

Then we are off for the Connemara Experience at Cnoc Suian. Our destination will be a beautifully restored hill village that sits on layers of Irish history; Cnoc Suain offers a thorough immersion into local culture. The group will split into two, each experiencing an intimate setting where we will learn about the vibrant living culture; customs & practices, the Irish Gaelic language, uses of wild herbs and seaweeds and a demonstration of brown soda bread baking on a fire and insights into the wild Connemara landscape, explaining the roles of peat/turf in the culture, and end in strange tales of bog bodies and bog pools! The groups will then combine and enjoy music, dance and fun in the Meeting House. Live traditional music & song with guests taking to the floor for an Irish Céili (folk) group dance. Then we are off to the Hardiman Hotel where we will check in and have dinner this evening. Ellen and John will be playing in one of the many music pubs in this vibrant city.

Day 5:
Monday Sept 2

After breakfast at the Hardiman, your hosts will take you on a walking tour of Galway from the hotel to the Wolfe Tone Bridge. When you complete your tour step outside to view the Spanish Arch built in 1584, take a walk across the Wolfe Tone Bridge to see the mouth of the Corrib and climb the Fisheries Watchtower for an even better view. Return to the hotel on your own via the pedestrian walkways of High, Market and Shop streets or enjoy lunch downtown in the vicinity of the Spanish Arch. (The walk to the hotel is ½ mile.) The bus will depart the hotel at 2:00 pm and travel to Woodquay in the heart of Galway City for 90-minute guided cruise along the majestic River Corrib and on to Lough Corrib, Ireland’s second largest lake, providing unsurpassed views that make this the most spectacular waterway in Ireland. Our journey will take us past castles and various sites of historical and cultural interest. There will be an Irish Dance demonstration as well as a discussion of Irish Whiskey and demonstration of the perfect Irish Coffee, samples included. The Corrib River cruise is sure to delight! Return to the hotel this evening and again enjoy dinner. Tonight, join Ellen and John at the famous Crane Pub for some tunes.

Day 6:
Tuesday, Sept 3
FREE DAY!

After the hotel breakfast the rest of the day is available for you to enjoy. Enjoy a free day in Galway City to shop and independently explore the “City of the Tribes.” Galway is a delightful city with narrow streets, old stone and wooden shop fronts, bustling restaurants and busy pubs. You may also choose to take a tour to the nearby Aran Islands or perhaps take a train to the town of Athlone to visit Ireland’s Oldest Pub. Dinner is on your own tonight. We will make recommendations for you to enjoy the amazing restaurants this city has to offer. John and Ellen will be playing tunes at one of the local pubs this evening.

Day 7:
Wednesday, Sept 4

After breakfast at the hotel, we depart at 9:00 and travel south through County Clare to visit the Burren region - we are off to the famous Cliffs of Moher. These spectacular cliffs will take your breath away. See where the Puffins nest, O’Brien’s tower at the highest point, and the famous sea stack that featured in the Harry Potter movie *the Half-Blood Prince*. When complete we will head for the quaint village of Doolin where you can do a bit of shopping, and enjoy lunch at one of the many pubs. We then continue along the coast of Clare and stop at St. Bridget’s Well – said to have miraculous healing powers before returning to Galway for the evening. Tonight, dinner is at the hotel and John and Ellen will let you know where to find the craic if you are at a loose end.

Day 8:
Thursday, Sept 5

After breakfast, we will depart the hotel bound for Westport and County Mayo. Our first stop on the way will be the famous Knock Shrine which is a pilgrimage site in the village of Knock, County Mayo. It is stated that as many as 25 observers saw an apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, Saint John the

Evangelist several angels and a lamb meant to signify Jesus in the year 1879. The site holds the original church, the new and majestic Basilica, and a museum depicting life in the year of the apparition. You can have a snack during our stop. Next on our agenda is the Country Life Museum, the only National Museum outside of Dublin. The award-winning Museum is all about discovering the story of Irish country life between 1850 and 1950; find out about the lives of our very recent ancestors through agriculture, fishing and hunting, clothing and textiles, furniture and fittings, trades and crafts, transport, calendar customs, leisure, and religion. Also on the grounds are the historic Turlough House and its historic gardens. Then we are off to the Castle Court Hotel in Westport where we will enjoy a traditional music concert by two world renowned Irish harpists. Dinner this evening at the hotel and be sure and visit Matt Molloy's, one of the amazing members of The Chieftains and the Bothy Band, who owns a world-famous music pub in town. Be sure to check it out.

Day 9:
Friday, Sept 6

After our breakfast at Hotel Westport, we are off to Achill Island. First inhabited 5,000 years ago, Achill Island is the largest of all islands off the coast of Ireland and is accessible by bridge. With majestic mountains, breath-taking landscapes and miles of unspoiled Blue Flag beaches, Achill Island is a paradise for lovers of outdoor pursuits, and history lovers will find the imprint of past generations in everything on Achill Island, from megalithic tombs to ancient forts, and historic churches to villages, including the famous site of the Deserted Village. These crumbling stones are all that remains of more than 80 houses that were abandoned in 1845 due to the famine. Visitors can explore the homes, as they are open to the public. You can have lunch while we are on the island at one of the beachside pubs. We will return to Westport in the mid afternoon and dinner will be at the Hotel this evening.

Day 10:
Saturday, Sept 7
FREE DAY!

After the hotel breakfast the rest of the day is available for you to enjoy. Perhaps you may travel to Crough Patrick. Have you climbed it yet? No trip to Westport is complete without climbing The Reek. Even thou locals say it only counts if you do it in your bare feet!!! Perhaps you might want to escape the hustle and bustle of urban life on the Great Western Greenway, the longest off-road cycling and walking trail in Ireland. Stretching 42 km from Westport to Achill. Maybe Burrishoole Abbey and Rockfleet Castle will draw your attention both are steeped in history and have strong family ties to Grainuaile (Grace O'Malley), they are still standing and look over the Clew Bay in a majestic manor. Or perhaps you will want to take a ferry to Clare Island, the largest of Clew Bay's Islands, Clare Island, has been inhabited for 5,000 years. It boasts dramatic coastal cliffs and spectacular views of the surrounding bay. Ferry services from Roonagh Pier take 15 minutes. A notable site on the island is Granuaile's Castle, it is said that the Pirate Queen's head is buried near this castle. Maybe you will visit Westport House here you will step back into the 18th century with a visit to the home of Grace O'Malley. The house was designed by the famous architects Richard Cassels and James Wyatt in the 18th Century and enjoys a superb parkland setting with lake, terraces, wonderful grounds, and magnificent views overlooking Clew Bay, the Atlantic Ocean, Achill, Clare Island and Ireland's holy mountain, Croagh Patrick. There are opportunities to enjoy art, activity, history, and culture in this beautiful historic house showcasing with over 30 rooms open to the public with original antiques, architecture and artwork. Dinner is on your own this evening, and Ellen and John will be playing nearby later.

Day 11:
Sunday, Sept 8

After our hotel breakfast we are off to County Sligo. The ride will take us along some of the most beautiful scenery available on the Wild Atlantic Way. We will stop in the City of Sligo, (in Gaelic meaning "abundance of shells) which has been an important site since the earliest times of man. The city was the port which provided escape to many of those suffering from the famine. It is also the home of many literary greats, including Yeats. After some free time in the city for shopping and lunch, we will embark on the Yeats Experience. The president of the William Butler Yeats Society will board the bus and guide us through the surrounding countryside which provided the backdrop for so many of the poems and fairy stories penned by Yeats. We will learn about the man, the country and the poetry that influenced him and why poetry is such an important part of the Irish culture. After our stay in Sligo, we head back for dinner at the Westport Hotel. Enjoy some tunes at one of the local pubs with Ellen and John.

Day 12:
Sunday, Sept 9

After breakfast, we depart at 8:30 am for Shannon Airport. Enjoy last minute shopping at Shannon's Duty-Free Shop. Our Aer Lingus Flight EI 135 departs at 14:45, arriving in Boston's Logan Airport at 4:25 pm local time. We will arrive by coach back at the ICC in West Springfield in the early evening.

Price per person: \$3,900 (double) or \$4,675 (single) includes airfare, 10 nights lodging, 8 dinners, 11 breakfasts, and all trips, admissions, transfers and gratuities.

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