



4 Day Self-Drive tour of Counties Mayo, Galway & Clare Sample Itinerary

*Journey through the rugged and untamed
counties of Mayo, Galway and Clare, with
delicious delicacies and natural beauty to guide
you.*

Day 1 - Westport to Clifden: 164km (101 miles)/3 hours 15 minutes at 50km/h Westport to Killary Harbour

It's not hard to see what makes Westport so charming: this pretty heritage town is cut through with an elegant tree-lined mall that runs alongside the Carrowbeg River. Here, and on the little streets that branch off it, you'll find a lively mixture of cosy cafés, bustling restaurants and some of the island's best traditional music pubs. Lovely shops, an uplifting atmosphere and beautiful Georgian architecture make it an ideal place to unwind. To get a taste of the town's history, make sure to visit Westport House & Country Park – home of Ireland's very own Pirate Queen, Grace O'Malley.

Leaving Westport, the splendour of Clew Bay dominates this stretch of coast, and a Clew Bay Cruise is a graceful way to explore its scattering of islands and curious seals. Keep your eye out for Dorinish, also known as "Beagle Island"; it was bought by John Lennon in 1967, and the story goes that he intended to retire there. Ask a local and they'll tell you there is an island here for every day of the year (in fact it's more like 117). Look upwards and you'll see Croagh Patrick's scree-covered slopes looming above – a detour in itself if you're up for the climb? Even if you don't make it to the slopes, beneath its shadow is the National Famine Monument. This moving sculpture of a "coffin ship" was commissioned to commemorate the anniversary of the Great Famine (1845-1852).

Head south and the road weaves through to the pretty town of Louisburgh. Plan your visit around the May Bank Holiday Weekend, and you'll arrive just as the Louisburgh Féile Chois Cuain rolls into town, with musicians from all over the world making music wherever they go. Following the

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signposts for the Wild Atlantic Way, and the village of Leenane and the fjord of Killary Harbour beckon.

Killary Harbour to Letterfrack

Pop into Gaynor's pub in Leenane and you might find that it looks a little familiar. That's because it had a starring role in the movie adaptation of John B Keane's *The Field*, as the haunt of one Bull McCabe. It wasn't just Keane who was mesmerised by this spot; director and screenwriter of *In Bruges*, Martin McDonagh's trilogy of plays – the most famous of which is *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* – was also inspired by this landscape. One of only three fjords in Ireland, Killary is nature's playground. Anyone looking to chill out, head for the Delphi Mountain Resort. For those who like an adrenaline rush, on the other hand, the Connemara Adventure Tours offer canoeing, gorge walking and archery. Boasting scenery and, indeed, geography not found anywhere in Ireland, you can always take a guided walk along the Famine Trail, which snakes along the banks of the fjord. Onwards now, and your next destination is Letterfrack.

Letterfrack to Clifden

Leave the imposing fjord in the rear-view mirror and travel onwards to Letterfrack through switchback roads and around a landscape peppered with lakes. It's worth bringing your camera with you just in case, for local legend and many crypto zoologists attest to the presence of monsters in these waters. The Each Uisce (water horse) is rumored to live in this most remote part of Ireland. Approaching Letterfrack, you will find the final resting place of pilot, surgeon, poet, politician, novelist and all-round wit, Oliver St John Gogarty (he of the renowned Dublin pub), in the graveyard at Ballinakill. Then at last it's on to Clifden where great food, great drink, plenty of places to stay and – even more importantly, perhaps – great music awaits. Now is a good time to fill up on fuel, as you won't find as many petrol stations moving forward into Connemara.

Clifden to Roundstone

Leaving Clifden for Roundstone, it's along this the stretch around Derrygimlagh bog that many transatlantic firsts were recorded. Guglielmo Marconi established the first-ever commercial transatlantic wireless station here, and pilots Alcock and Brown landed the first-ever transatlantic flight in 1919.

Day 2 – Roundstone to Galway city 185km (115 miles)/3 hours 42 minutes at 50k/m Roundstone to Spiddal

Leaving Roundstone, take to the Wild Atlantic Way road to Rossaveal (Ros an Mhíl) – you're in the Galway Gaeltacht here, so signposts will be in the Irish language. Just before you get there, you'll go through the townland of Ballynahown (Baile na hAbhann), which is where you'll find the headquarters of TG4, the Irish language national broadcaster. Rossaveal is your gateway to the Aran Islands, with daily sailings to all three islands of Inis Oírr (Inisheer), Inis Meáin (Inishmaan) and Inis Mór (Inishmore). The Aran Islands have inspired noted playwrights such as JM Synge and Martin McDonagh in their time, and will doubtless inspire you, too.

Back on the mainland, and Spiddal (An Spidéal) is the next village you will encounter on your journey. This village, on the shore of Galway Bay, is where the Irish language soap opera *Ros na Rún* is shot, so don't be surprised if you encounter a full TV crew when you arrive. If hunger strikes, there are a number of very good places to eat in the village. In particular, keep a look out for Boluisce Seafood Restaurant. Afterwards, pop into the parish church to look at some of artist Harry Clarke's outstanding stained glass windows.

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Spiddal to Galway city

Leaving Spiddal, Galway city is your next stop. Here, swap rural idylls for the buzz of this eclectic City of Tribes (so called after the 14 merchant families who used to dominate the local landscapes between the 13th and 17th centuries). When Irish people want to have a good time, they head for Galway. This pocket-sized medieval town is a microcosm for all that's best in Ireland. From lively pub sessions, to choice city shopping, you're going to want to get to know this bohemian spot. Our advice? Grab a delicious dinner at Ard Bia by the Spanish Arch and then stroll up to Monroe's to dance the night away at a trad session.

Day 3 - Galway city to Doolin 95km (59 miles)/1 hours 54 minutes at 50k/m Galway City to Doolin

Leaving Galway city centre via Salthill, stop to stretch your legs on the "Prom", Ireland's longest seaside promenade. Next, keeping the Atlantic to your right, head south for Ballyvaughan, with its picture-postcard thatched cottages (maybe pitstop at O'Loughlin's Pub where Stephen Spielberg and Vince Vaughan have visited on more than one occasion).

Botanists and naturists make this pretty village their base as they roam the Burren for the Arctic, Alpine and Mediterranean plants that blossom across this lunar-like landscape. The Burren takes its name from the Irish for "rocky place" – but despite this, its home to one of the most unique eco-systems in Europe.

For those keener on history than botany, the Neolithic Poul nabrone Dolmen, dating back to 4200BC, is a chunky slice of the past. After exploring, maybe make a little sensory history of your own, by creating your own scent at The Burren Perfumery. Satisfy your appetite with a trip to the excellent café and gardens before moving onwards to the fishing village of Doolin. Renowned for its incredible legacy of rousing traditional music sessions, make sure you leave enough time on your journey to stop for a tune or ten.

Day 4 - Doolin to Kilkee: 78km (48 miles)/1.5 hours at 50km/h Doolin to Kilkee

Heading south from Doolin, The Cliffs of Moher Hotel in Liscannor presents the perfect opportunity for a tasty bite to eat before experiencing the main event: the cliffs themselves. Plunging into the Atlantic, the gigantic Cliffs of Moher are the superstars of County Clare. The Cliffs of Moher Visitor Centre tells the story of the cliffs, as well as introducing you to the thriving wildlife that call them home. Be sure to have your camera at the ready; a photo with the cliffs is a must for your holiday scrapbook.

Continue south and before long you'll hit one of Ireland's surfing capitals: Lahinch. If riding Atlantic waves isn't your idea of fun, you're more than welcome to just watch those paddling into the surf offshore. Or you can take a swing at one of Lahinch's championship links golf courses. By night, enjoy the craic at a traditional Irish music session in town.

Heading south again takes you to a poignant spot in Ireland's maritime history: Spanish Point. It was here, just off the coast, that the Spanish Armada was wrecked in 1588. You're on the final leg of your route to County Clare's Kilkee now. A picture-perfect seaside town tucked into the coast of County Clare, Kilkee overlooks Horseshoe Bay, and retains its

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Victorian flare from a time when British royalty visited for a seaside holiday. Its immense draw was helped by the Duggerna Reef, stretching across the entire mouth of the bay.

Actor Richard Harris was a regular, and intrepid explorer Jacques Cousteau thought it the finest place to dive in all of Europe. In fact, he deemed it to be one of the top five dive sites in the world. Whether you're taking a stroll along the golden sands of Horseshoe Bay, diving with Kilkee Diving and Watersports Centre or dolphin watching, you'll find the Atlantic at your side at every turn.

Before continuing on your Wild Atlantic Way journey and around award-winning Loop Head, take a moment to satisfy your appetite with fresh, locally caught seafood in any of the seafront cafés or restaurants.



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