



5 Day Self-Drive Tour of Donegal Sample Itinerary

Weave your way around Donegal, taking in its most northerly points, maritime history and sublime golf challenges for the discerning golfer.

Day 1 - Muff to Buncrana: 157.5km (97 miles)/3 hours 8 minutes at 50km/h

Crossing the River Foyle with the city of Derry/Londonderry in your rear-view mirror, head northwest. You'll be driving through Muff and across the expanse of the Inishowen Peninsula, with beauty spots at almost every turn, and the massive Lough Swilly crossing your horizon.

Doagh Famine Village, Ballyliffin Golf Club and the opportunity to spot the Northern Lights/Aurora Borealis over Mamore Gap or Culdaff Beach are all highlights of the area. Stick around a while at Moville and meet Donegal Chef Brian McDermott (aka **The No Salt Chef**) at his cookery school. Swing south and you'll come to the beating heart of the Inishowen Peninsula in the town of Buncrana.

With a variety of places to stay, Buncrana makes for the perfect stop along the Wild Atlantic Way, and a base from which to explore. Rent a bike from **Cycle Inishowen**, or uncover your family history with **Clonmany Genealogy**. Maybe take a trip to Buncrana Castle, see the landscapes from the back of a horse or go hill walking? Or if you fancy taking it easy, book a session at the Seagrass Well Being Centre in the **Inishowen Gateway Hotel** and spoil yourself.

Suggested Visits :-

- ❖ Malin Head
- ❖ Inishowen Maritime Museum

Day 2 - Buncrana to Letterkenny: 45.5km (28 miles)/55 minutes at 50km/h

Heading south and west from Buncrana, the mighty Lough Swilly will make for a stunning backdrop. Before going too far off the peninsula, though, make time to visit the **Grianan of Aileach** (Fortress of the Sun). This circular stone ring fort occupies a sacred site and was referenced by Ptolemy in his 2nd-century map of the world. Further south, Inch Island soon looms on the horizon, and an opportunity for a round of golf presents itself at the **North West Golf Club**. Veering evermore west and towards the coast, and dipping slightly south again, you'll then come into the bustling commercial heart of Donegal: Letterkenny.

Mob: 00353 (0) 86 361 6935

E-mail: <mailto:info@bracktours.com>

Web: <http://www.bracktours.com>

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After all that time in the wildness of the coast, it may be time for some retail therapy in the **Letterkenny Shopping Centre**. Post shopping, unwind in the **Aura Leisure Complex**: take a dip in the pool or relax with a sauna or Jacuzzi. You could even sign up for Celtic stone carving classes at **Redmond Herrity's sculpture centre** or head for the **Colmcille Heritage Centre**, with its interpretive exhibition about Saint Colmcille, a patriarch of the Irish monastic movement.

Suggested Visits:-

- ❖ Bird Watching at Inch Island, Burt, Inishowen

Day 3 - Letterkenny to Bunbeg 171km (106 miles)/3 hours 25 minutes at 50km/h

Heading north again from Letterkenny, and onto the raw beauty of the **Fanad Head Peninsula**. With a life-saving lighthouse at its peak, the route along here is studded with incredible geological formations, including the Great Arch – an incredible viewpoint from every angle. On a less epic scale, Fanad is fringed by the “most beautiful beach in the world”, according to one British journalist...and it can be found near **Portsalon** at Ballymastrocker Bay.

It's southbound back along the coastline of Fanad, before looping up again towards Horn Head, which can be found via the village of **Dunfanaghy**. An opportunity to stretch the legs is combined with the chance to come face to face with this 200m-high rock ledge, scored with thousands of perches housing guillemots, gulls and puffins. Hugging the coastline, you may want to detour to **Glenveagh National Park** (Glen of the Birches). This breathtaking National Park covers over 16,000 acres of forests, lakes and castles, and is home to a magnificent herd of red deer.

Continuing west, you're touring the Gaeltacht part of Donegal now, so a lot of the signposts will be in Irish. The tiny fishing village of **Bunbeg** is next, and is sheltered by sea cliffs at the mouth of the Clady River. From picturesque Bunbeg Harbour, daily excursions are available to the nearby islands of Innishinny, **Tory** and Gola – all of which give you a great vantage point of your surroundings. If you fancy a round of golf, why not set up camp in **Teac Jack**, a buzzing hotel, restaurant and pub. The **Gweedore Golf Club** is a short drive from here, and afterwards you can catch a trad session back at Teac Jack. Bunbeg's charm, you see, may convince you to stick around for a while.

Suggested Visits:-

- ❖ Fanad Head
- ❖ Tory Island

Day 4 - Bunbeg to Ardara 72km (44 miles)/1 hour 26 minutes at 50km/h

When you do depart **Bunbeg** southbound, and edging slightly east, there's ample opportunity to stop for a spot of fishing for brown trout, sea trout and salmon along Loughanure between May and September. Continue to head southwest along the coast and before long you'll reach **Dungloe**. **Dungloe** is another Gaelteacht town, meaning the primary language is Gaelige/Irish. But don't worry, everyone will speak English, too. Grab a bite to eat at Doherty's Restaurant. They serve delicious home-cooked foods and, of course, fresh local seafood from the boats. If you decide to linger here, you can enjoy a live traditional Irish music session in Beedy's Bar on the Main Street. With Dungloe as your base, you're free to explore nearby Mount Errigal, the unspoilt Cloughglass Beach at **Burtonport**, or take a trip out to Arranmore Island on the **Arranmore Ferry**. You can even charter your own vessel with **Inishfree Charters**, and see it all at your own pace. Arrive at the start of May, and join in the **Dungloe Walking Weekend**, with guided walks for all levels.

Dungloe to Ardara

As you leave Dungloe, keep the Atlantic on your right. We're told the beach inspector once tried to count the beaches of Donegal, but gave up after the first few hundred as so many tiny coves appear just off the main roads. Golfers also take note: the **Narin and Portnoo Golf Club** lies a short distance off the route and is well worth the detour. A landscape streaked with lakes glides by as you continue south. Our advice is to bring your fishing rod. Lakes Aderry, Namanlagh and the River Gweebarra are all fishing havens. The

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salmon and sea trout season runs from 1 April through to the end of September, and a day permit is required to fish in the River Gweebarra (available from the local shop in Doochary).

Heading south brings you into **Ardara**, a designated heritage town. Dubbed “the festival capital of Donegal”, you’ll be charmed by the warm welcome you receive in this close-knit community. Check out **The Donegal Tweed Centre** and discover all about the tradition of hand weaving tweed around the area. When night falls, there are also plenty of holiday cottages and hotel accommodation, so Ardara is the perfect place to spend the night.

Suggested Visits:-

- ❖ Town of Glenties
- ❖ Leo’s Tavern

Day 5 - Ardara to Donegal Town 111km (68 miles)/2 hours 13 minutes at 50km/h Ardara to Killybegs

Leaving **Ardara**, make sure to schedule time for a visit to **Killybegs**. This picture-perfect fishing town has a profound connection to the ocean and this story is explained beautifully in the **Maritime and Heritage Centre**. Just a 10-minute drive from here brings you to Fintra Beach. With views of the lighthouse at Saint John’s Point and even the mighty Ben Bulbin Mountain in neighbouring County Sligo, a stroll along these golden sands is a must.

Killybegs to Donegal Town

Heading east from **Killybegs**, and soon it feels like you’re driving along the very edge of the world. In this stretch of the northwest the **Slieve League Cliffs** are king. Clocking in at nearly twice the height of County Clare’s **Cliffs of Moher**, these are some of Europe’s highest accessible sea cliffs, so make sure to take the time to explore them. Keeping east, you’re nearing **Donegal Town**: a lovely spot situated at the mouth of Donegal Bay. Dun na nGall (Irish) translates to “Fort of the Foreigners”, referencing a time when Vikings made the town their stronghold.

From **Donegal Castle** to the Franciscan Friary ruins, historical significance is everywhere. The town itself is packed with contemporary and traditional craft shops selling local goods, and dining out brings its rewards with award-winning restaurants dishing out tasty seafood caught fresh from Donegal Bay. A great way to explore Donegal Bay is on a waterbus. The waterbus takes in gorgeous views of the Bluestack Mountains, Seal Island and Donegal Bay. Check **Donegal Bay Waterbus** for sailing times. This is the final stop for this section of your Wild Atlantic Way touring route, but the coastal odyssey doesn’t end here. Further south you’ll find **the Burren** and the mighty **Cliffs of Moher** and beyond that, the wonders of Kerry and Cork.

Suggested Visits:-

- ❖ Slieve League Cliffs
- ❖ Kitty Kelly’s Irish Coffee Demonstration



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