

Ireland- Birds and Gaelic Heritage

May 31 – June 12, 2024

Itinerary in brief

You may wish to arrive in Dublin the day before in order to rest before the tour starts. Just let us know your flight plans and also whether you will need a hotel room.

Day 1 (Friday May 31st) Arrival in Dublin

After arriving in Dublin, we will head to our hotel, and meet early evening for dinner and trip briefing.

Night in Hotel near Dublin International Airport

Day 2 (Saturday June 1st) Full day in Dublin

We will set nature aside for our opening day in Ireland, with an exploration of much of the city including a visit to St Stephen's Green and Trinity College, Guinness Storehouse and Grafton Street. We aim to head to Sandycove Point and the James Joyce Tower and Museum for the end of the day. *Night in Dublin*

Day 3 (Sunday June 2nd) Transit to the west coast, Co Kerry

After breakfast we will bid a fond goodbye to Dublin and start on the 4.5 hour drive out west to County Kerry, and our base for the next few days, the town of Portmagee. We'll aim to stop in the midway town of Tipperary for lunch. Arrive Portmagee late afternoon and if time permits, we'll explore the nearby Valentia Island and Bray Head, with chances of Peregrine, Red-billed Chough, seals, and otters. *Night in Portmagee*

Day 4 (Monday June 3rd) Skellig Michael UNESCO World Heritage Site

Today we plan go out to one of the most enigmatic and remote sacred sites in all of Europe, the spectacular Skellig Michael UNESCO World Heritage Site (AKA Great Skellig Island), a pyramidal rock in the ocean situated some seven miles from the mainland. This beautifully rugged little island is home to one of the best preserved early medieval monasteries, with the hermitage perched on a narrow human-made terrace just below the island's summit. Due to its isolation it has been protected from alterations, with most of the structures within the monastery being almost fully intact. From a seabird's perspective, the island is located close to productive upwelling areas close to the continental shelf, so is an important site for breeding Manx Shearwaters, Atlantic Puffin, Black-legged Kittiwake, and Northern Gannet. With all those amazing backdrops, there's plenty of opportunity for stunning photography whilst on the island, with the birds going about their daily lives unhindered by our presence. Please note that the walk up to the monastery is up a fairly steep staircase (some 600 steps) and takes at least half an hour if not rushing, so a reasonable level of fitness is required for this journey. We will get 2.5 hours to explore the site. There's a 50 minute boat journey either side of the landing that is also an opportunity for seawatching and photography. However, this trip is weather dependent and could change at a moment's notice. We have allocated the next day in the trip itinerary to give us an additional chance to land if today looks bad. *Night in Portmagee*

Day 5 (Tuesday June 4th)**Skellig Day attempt x 2 (backup day)**

Please note: flexibility will be the key today, as we may have to use it if Monday's tour to Skellig Michael has been canceled due to the weather. In this case, we will head straight to Dingle after landing back in Portmagee late afternoon and will miss the following sites. However, we will have another chance to visit Inch Beach before we leave the Dingle peninsula.

Alternatively if everything goes to plan, we will leave Portmagee for the Dingle Peninsula after breakfast and explore Castlemaine Harbour and Inch Beach for shorebirds, terns, gulls and wildfowl along the way. There's also a chance here for Basking Sharks. The Dingle Peninsula is a rugged part of the country and is a must for any traveler to the region. Its beautiful beaches, pounding waves, salty winds, jagged cliffs and wide arching skies were made famous by legendary film director David Lean in the 1969 film *Ryan's Daughter*. Evening exploring the little town of Dingle, excellent friendly atmosphere and great pubs. *Night in Dingle*

Day 6 (Wednesday June 5th)**Great Blasket Island (Co Kerry)**

We aim to get going early after breakfast and head to the small port town of Ventry where we'll catch the ferry over to Great Blasket Island and its many historic sites. Largely unspoiled, this beautiful 1,100 acre island is only 4 miles long by half a mile wide, but is thriving with wildlife including a Gray Seal colony. The shore is a good area for Red-billed Chough, Peregrine, Black Guillemot and Common Murre, while the interior is filled with the song of Northern Wheatears, Skylarks and reeling Grasshopper Warblers in suitable habitat. We'll have approximately 3 hours exploring the island, and will be picked up by boat early in the afternoon to continue further around the islands to look for cetaceans. Harbor Porpoise, together with Short-beaked Common, bottlenose and Risso's Dolphin make up the bulk of sightings, however Minke, Humpback, Fin and Killer Whales are also seen regularly in the summer. The Dingle Peninsula is arguably the best whale watching area on the west coast, so our chances of encountering these fantastic animals are good. Seabirds including European Storm-petrel, Manx Shearwater, and Great Skua are also regularly seen on the trip. We'll return to Ventry about 1700 and head back to our base in Dingle for a well-deserved evening meal. *Night in Dingle*

Day 7 (Thursday June 6th)**Historic Sites - Dingle Peninsula Day**

After breakfast, we'll take our time to explore the rest of the Dingle Peninsula by mini-bus and by foot, and focus primarily on some of the cultural heritage of the region. Taking in the Parish of Dun Chaoin (Dunquin) we'll visit some of the famous filming locations of the film *Ryan's Daughter* first thing, including Clogher Head where the bus stop scenes were filmed, and also a short visit to Charles Shaughnessy's (Robert Mitchum) old school house which was purpose built for the film and now lies derelict. We'll also wind our way onto the bay at Ard na Caithe for a visit to the 7th century christian chapel at Gallarus Oratory. The building is the best preserved church in the whole of Ireland and a beautiful example of early stonework. A visit to the West Kerry Museum (Museum Chorca Dhuibhne) for a look at the geological and archaeological exhibits and lunch will conclude the morning's activities. After lunch we'll take the Maimin Way archaeological walk which is about 5 miles starting and finishing at the museum. Evening dinner will be at the South Pole Inn in Annascaul, the pub that connects Kerry with Antarctica. This famous pub/working museum serves great local food and was established by explorer Tom Crean in 1927 after returning from Antarctica with both Scott and Shackleton. If the characters from the heroic age of Antarctic exploration is your thing then this is the pub for you! *Night in Dingle*

Day 8 (Friday June 7th)**Burren Botanizing**

We say goodbye to the Dingle area after breakfast and drive north along the coast to the Cliffs of Moher and over to the Burren National Park. The Burren is an interesting limestone pavement which is the stronghold to a wonderful variety of orchids, some 27 of the 31 species found in the country, and includes Early Purple, Fly, Autumn Lady's Tresses and O'Kelly's Spotted Orchid to name only a few. We will head to Slieve Carren on the loop trail for the best part of the afternoon, which is about 2 km on mostly flat ground and has a magical array of wildflowers and butterflies, including the beautiful Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Brown Hairstreak. We aim to arrive at our accommodation in Galway late afternoon for an evening in the city. *Night in Galway*

Day 9 (Saturday June 8th)**Day in Galway**

The medieval harbor city of Galway is without doubt one of the most fun places in all of Ireland and is the reason for the full day in the itinerary. With its laid-back, happy-go-lucky vibes you're almost guaranteed an unforgettable day. There will be many options available including a walk out along the Salthill Promenade, plus numerous cafes, pubs, boutiques, art galleries and museums to explore; there is literally something for everyone. However, in my humble opinion, it's the folk music that really must be experienced and we have many options available on our two evenings in the city. *Night in Galway*

Days 10 and 11 (Sunday June 9th, Monday June 10th) Inishbofin Island

After the hustle and bustle of Galway we plan to spend the last few days of the trip soaking up quiet island life on Inishbofin (island of the white cow). This small inhabited island of about 160 lies 9 miles off the coast of Connemara and is a real haven from the modern world. Famous for its archaeology, Corn Crake and Basking Sharks, the island is a gem and a great place to end the tour. The island has no trees and is a patchwork of green hills and gray rock, ripe with wildflowers. An idyllic sandy white beach cove marks its eastern end, and a windy wilderness of bog and cliff defines the west. A nature lover's paradise, we will explore the island fully over the two days on the island and, weather permitting, will also take a look at the neighboring uninhabited island of Inishark. Here we will look for nesting Ringed Plover, Red-billed Chough and migrant Whimbrel. As both islands are situated off the west coast they frequently turn up rare migrants from Continental Europe such as Rose-coloured Starling and Golden Oriole, so there's always the chance of something unexpected to see. *Night on Inishbofin*

Day 12 (Tuesday June 11th)**Transit to Dublin airport**

Early morning ferry back to Claggan and the mainland and drive back to Dublin International Airport.
Night near Dublin Airport

Day 13 (Wednesday June 12th)**Leave for home**