

Ireland Travel Recommendations from Abbey of the Arts

This is not an exhaustive list but represents some of the places we have enjoyed traveling to in Ireland. Websites have not been included because links often change, but all can be found via a simple online search.

Our strongest recommendation is don't try to see everything! Ireland is a small country, with lots of narrow roads. Driving from one place to another often takes much longer than you anticipate (unless you happen to be traveling one of the few places that have a motorway, such as from Dublin to Galway). Every corner of Ireland has something of beauty to offer. Better to choose one or two areas and focus there. We have not spent any time yet in Northern Ireland which is also worth exploring. We tend to stay closer to Galway and our recommendations largely reflect this.

Hermitages

There are some wonderful places to go on retreat in Ireland.

Glendalough Hermitages – Glendalough is one of our favorite places for a retreat with loads of hiking trails and the beautiful ruins of the monastic city. The hermitages have two beds each with a bathroom, mini-kitchen, and a fireplace, run by the Sisters of Mercy. No wifi. There is a small convenience store and natural foods shop about a 5 minute walk away, as well as a lovely restaurant. They are about a 15 minute walk from the center of the national park where the ruins are. They can be reached on **public transit** by St. Kevin's Bus from Dublin City which runs twice daily. You can request to be dropped off at the hermitages. They book up quite early.

Holy Hill Hermitages in Sligo – These are also little independent cottages run by the Carmelites, recently built so quite spacious as they meet disability requirements here in Ireland. Single bed with bathroom (couples hermitage also available) and kitchenette, desk, window seat. No wifi. They have a vegetarian pantry and vegetable garden where you can get your food to prepare meals. You can reach them on **public transit** by taking a bus to Sligo town, and then a bus to Skreen where they will pick you up.

Glenstal Abbey Godpods in Limerick – We have not stayed at these hermitages, but the Abbey has beautiful grounds and the Benedictine monks are known for their music and liturgy. Not accessible by public transit, unless you can arrange with the monastery to pick you up in Murrough and bring you to the Abbey. They also have a retreat center with rooms available there.

Avila Carmelite Centre in Dublin – this is a retreat center located in Dublin with nice rooms. They also have really lovely little hermitage cottages in the back at the edge of their lawn. It is a nice respite but still accessible to the attractions of Dublin by public buses that come along the main road a 5-minute walk away.

Galway City

If you are staying in Galway City, we highly recommend the **Adare Guesthouse B&B** run by Grainne. We brought our pilgrims to stay here many times and they always loved her hospitality.

Other hotels we have stayed in and enjoyed include the House Hotel, Hardiman Hotel, Jury's Inn, and if you want a special splurge stay at the 5-star Glenlo Abbey Hotel (would require a car) with beautiful grounds by the lake. We also love the Twelve Hotel which is in nearby Barna village and has great food.

Galway City has so many wonderful restaurants, Dela, Kai, Ard Bia, Oscar's to name a few. We have two Michelin star restaurants – Aniar and Loam – which would require bookings and be on the high end of prices. In the summer it is a good idea to book a table most nights. For cafes there is Urban Grind and Tartare in the West End, Rouge and Le Petit Delice are both wonderful French bakeries.

There is live music most nights. Check Tigh Coili and Taaffes for early sessions. Monroes and the Crane Bar in the West End also have music most nights.

Aran Islands and Connemara Region

We highly recommend a visit to either **Inismor** or **Inisheer** (Aran Islands). You can take a bus from Galway City docks area to the ferry terminal in Rossaveal. Then the ferry out to the islands. You can do this in a day trip (visiting one or the other) or you could stay overnight. On Inismor our favorite place to stay is **Kilmurvey House**.

Inisbofin - One of our favorite islands is Inisbofin which you can reach by **public transit** from Galway City by taking the CityLink bus to Cleggan Village and then take the ferry over to Inisbofin. Runs 2-3 times a day depending on time of year. We love the **Galley Inn B&B** run by Caroline Coyne, but she is not open all year long. She does have a self-catering apartment. You can also stay at one of the hotels if the Galley isn't available – we have stayed at the Dolphin and Doonmore, also is Inisbofin House Hotel. Lots of great walking options on the island – the east end has a monastic ruin and beautiful quiet beach. The west end is a bit wilder in feel with bogs and cliffs.

Bus companies out of Galway City offer tours of Connemara which include **Kylemore Abbey** (Benedictine Abbey). You can also take the CityLink bus from Galway to Clifden or Letterfrack (Connemara National Park and starting point for Diamond Hill hike). In Clifden we have stayed at the Station House Hotel and Buttermilk Lodge.

For a treat in Connemara consider staying at **Ballynahinch Castle** or the **Renvyle House Hotel**, both lovely but not accessible by public transit. Just across from Killary Fjord on the Mayo side is the **Delphi Resort**, another lovely place to stay

with walking trails and adventure activities. I also love going into **Leenane and having a seaweed bath**, open from Easter to October (this year they had shifted to Clifden so double-check location online).

Other hiking trails in Connemara include **Maumeen Pass** (a trail up a mountain to a beautiful St. Patrick site), the **trail along Killary Fjord**, and **Derrigimlagh Bog**. In Clonbur and Cong you can access a beautiful woodland trail that connects the two villages. In Cong is another beautiful old monastic ruin. None of these can be reached by public transit. To climb any of the mountains in the region (other than Maumeen Pass or Diamond Hill), you really need to hire a guide to accompany you.

Beyond Dublin, Galway, and Connemara

If you have a car, a visit to **Clonmacnoise** (about an hour east of Galway) is worthwhile. It is a well preserved monastic complex founded by St. Ciaran.

In County Clare and the Burren, **Doolin** is a lovely little village to visit with great music and proximity to the Cliffs of Moher. You can access the village on Bus Eireann from Galway. We have stayed at the Doolin Hotel. You can also get a bus tour to the **Cliffs of Moher** from Galway City as a day trip. If you have more time, there are some great hikes along the cliffs that extend past where the tourist center is located.

Killarney National Park is beautiful, you definitely need a car to explore. We have stayed at the **Muckross Park Hotel** which is right near **Muckross Abbey**, an old Franciscan ruin with a yew tree growing in the middle of the cloister.

If you are in the area around County Cork, in the village of **Ballvourney** is a site dedicated to **St. Gobnait** (one of Christine's favorite saints) who is patron saint of bees. You need a car to reach it.

If you have a car and more time, the **Dingle** and **Beara Peninsulas** are both beautiful.

Many folks want to drive the **Ring of Kerry**, but keep in mind that there are loads of tourist coaches traveling the ring as well any time of year. It is a beautiful drive, but not (in our opinion) any more beautiful than say driving around Connemara or Dingle. If you want to visit **Skellig Michael**, the island monastic site off the coast of Kerry, you will have to drive to Portmagee or Valentia Island and take a boat from there. Keep in mind that many of these boat trips which land on the island are booked ahead for months, especially now with the popularity of Star Wars which set recent films there. Sometimes you have better luck when you book a B&B and ask them for help in finding an opening.

Recommended Guides

These are the guides we use in Connemara and the Burren on our pilgrimages and some would be available for individual hire.

Dara Molloy – daramolly.com (Inismor)

Deirdre Ni Chinneide – deirdrenichinneide.com – she runs a small retreat center on Inismor, you can check her events page to see what she is hosting.

Tony Kirby – heartofburrenwalks.com (Burren)

Pius Murray – walkwithpius.com (Burren and Aran Islands)

Michael Gibbons – walkingireland.com (Connemara)

Jenny Beale at Brigid's Garden – brigitsgarden.ie

Sheena Dignam at Galway Food Tours – galwayfoodtours.com

Patrick Luskin – Lough Corrib Boat Tours from Ashford Castle (you can visit Inchgoaill island, a beautiful uninhabited island with ruins connected to St. Patrick).

Corrib Princess runs boat tours of the Corrib River and Lake, starting at the Woodquay Docks and there are different Galway Bay boat tours, including traditional Galway Hooker fishing boats, that leave from either the main docks at the harbor or the Claddagh Basin.