



CONNEMARA MUSIC TRAIL

Connemara's rich traditions of music, song, dance and story-telling are very unique and one of the greatest pleasures of the region.

Oscar Wilde described Connemara as a 'savage beauty' and its patchwork of brooding lakes, mountains and bogs certainly gives a sense of splendid isolation. This landscape along with the wild Atlantic coastline has inspired much of the music that can be heard to this day in Connemara. The sense of loss that was experienced through immigration which started during the famine often permeates the music and song of the area.



Musicians gather for informal 'sessions' in many pubs across Connemara and if you're lucky enough to join one, it's a great way to witness the wild heart of Connemara with lively music, song and dance going on late into the night. In Carna and An Casla in particular, you may also get the chance to hear the hauntingly beautiful tradition of Sean Nós singing or dance, a style native to this area.

Another good way to tune into local culture is to attend one of the many festivals where you'll find workshops and performances of drama, dance and music. Here are just some of the many festivals and music venues on offer:

Music Festivals

Clifden Arts Festival

Clifden Community Arts Week is Connemara's top arts festival and has been running for 34 years in a range of venues in Clifden. It is a great celebration of the arts and includes poetry readings, lectures, recitals, concerts, traditional music, and comedy, all taking place in one of the most beautiful places on the west coast of Ireland. For further information see: www.clifdenartsweek.ie

Clifden Traditional Music Festival

Held in April each year, this is a weekend of the very best of Irish music, song and dance with concerts, sessions, workshops and outdoor entertainment. For further info: www.clifdentradfest.com

Taréis na Féile Bríde

This weekend of traditional Irish music and dance takes place in the village of Letterfrack in February each year. It features concerts, music workshops, pub sessions and Sean Nós dance workshops. All musicians are welcome to join in. For further info see: www.ceecc.org

Roundstone Traditional Music Nights

This is a wonderful evening running during July and August where musicians, singers, Irish dancers and Sean Nós dancers demonstrate traditional Irish culture with a strong Connemara influence.

www.roundstone.ie/music.htm

Féile Chomórtha Joe Éinniú (The Joe Heaney Commemorative Festival of Traditional Singing)

Taking place in April/May each year, this is a festival of traditional Sean Nós singing, music and dance held in Carna in memory of singer Joe Heaney. A native of Carna, Heaney spent much of his life in England, Scotland and New York. From 1982-1984, Heaney was an artist-in-residence at the University of Washington in Seattle. The Joe Heaney Collection of the University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archives was established after his death in Seattle in 1984. Since then, the local people of Carna have celebrated his memory every year since his death. The programme of events includes Sean Nós singing sessions and dancing, traditional music sessions, workshops, lectures, children's singing competition, céilídh, concerts and recitals featuring the best of local talent and visiting artists. A visit to Joe Heaney's grave in Muighrois cemetery to mark his anniversary is always a special part of the festival.

Some events are free. Contact: 095 33599.

Féile Plearaca Chonamara

This is an arts festival which celebrates the language and traditional arts and culture of the Connemara Gaeltacht (Irish speaking) area. All activities are 'as Gaeilge', but anyone with an interest in the language or culture is welcome. Festival can take place in May and September in Ros Muc or Cill Ciaráin.

See web site for details:

www.plearaca@eircom.net



Dusty Banjo's Music Weekend

Taking place in June each year, this is a weekend of music sessions in the fishing village of Cleggan. For further information see: www.dustybanjos.com

Inishbofin Arts Festival

This annual festival takes place on Inishbofin island in May each year over a 3 day weekend. It includes traditional concerts, Sean Nós dancing, story-telling, activities for children and organised walks. There is also a visual art exhibition and a craft market.

For more details visit: www.inishbofin.com

For ferry access see: www.inishbofinislanddiscovery.com

Inishbofin Set Dancing and Trad Weekend

Held every year in September/October, this Festival takes place on the island of Inishbofin off the coast of Connemara. It is a three day event which includes set dancing workshops, pub sessions and a céilí. The events can be viewed live at www.livetrad.com

For more details, contact: bofindancing@gmail.com

For ferry access see: www.inishbofinislanddiscovery.com

Live Music Venues

Teach Ceoil Traditional Arts Centre, Tully

The Teach Ceoil (House of Music) operates as a centre for the traditional arts with classes in Irish music and dancing taking place during winter and spring. *Seisiún*, a programme of Irish traditional music, song and dance featuring artists from the Connemara area, takes place on Tuesday nights during July and August at 9 PM. The programme has been running for 30 years and has proved very popular. Pre-bookings are not taken, so if you would like to

experience a taste of the real Ireland in a country kitchen setting, you are advised to get there early as space is limited.

www.goconnemara.com or www.comhaltas.ie

Trad in the West, Clifden

The Station House Theatre in Clifden hosts a show called *Trad in the West* every Monday night during July and August. The show starts at 8 pm sharp and features all-Ireland champion musician Marie Walsh as well as some of Ireland's finest performers. This is an exciting and pulsating show of traditional Irish music, song and dance which is not to be missed. Tickets cost €15 and can be booked in advance with the theatre or you can just turn up on the night and pay at the door.

For further info: www.stationhousetheatre.com; Ph: 095 21699

An Island Story, Inis Mór

This show on Inis Mór, the largest of the Aran Islands, tells the story of island life through an enchanting performance of music, story, poetry, song and dance. It takes place in July and August each year in Áras Aonghusa, near the fort of Dun Aonghusa. There are daily performances Monday to Friday at 2:45 pm and 8:30 pm (no evening show on Fridays). The show is an hour long and costs €10. For further details and bookings contact: 087 6326081 or see: www.deirdrenichinneide.com

Other Musical Attractions



Roundstone Musical Instruments

On an old Franciscan monastery site in Roundstone, Malachy Kearns (better known as Malachy Bodhrán among folk musicians) works at his craft of making Ireland's oldest product, the Bodhrán (Bow-Rawn). It is an 18th century one-sided drum made from goatskin and treated by a traditional process. The Bodhrán stirs the spirit when played with the 'tipper' or beater hitting the skin in a racing style while a hand presses the back of the skin to vary the tone. It was at this workshop that Malachy made the stage drums for the world famous 'Riverdance' show. There are daily talks and demonstrations and, alongside the workshop, you can visit a small folk museum (entry is free). There is also a coffee shop and a shop where you can purchase customised bodhrán and other Irish musical instruments as well as Irish CDs and songbooks.

www.bodhran.com; Ph: 095 35808

Kylemore Abbey & Garden

Kylemore Abbey and Garden is one of Ireland's top visitor attractions. The castle and estate was owned by Mitchell Henry who built the castle in 1871. In more recent times it has been home to the Benedictine nuns and until 2010 was a boarding school for girls. In 1995 the nuns restored a beautiful gothic church on the estate. The church hosts lunchtime musical performances of traditional, classical and folk music every day during July and August. All visitors to the abbey are welcome to attend from 1-3 pm each day. In addition, you can see the nuns sing the Latin *Vespers* or *Evensong* from 3 pm on Sundays during July and August. For details see: www.kylemoreabbeytourism.ie

Cnoc Suain

Cnoc Suain is a cultural retreat set in 200 acres in the Connemara Gaeltacht near the village of Spiddal. It is aimed at groups on residential or day programmes who want to experience an authentic and memorable Irish cultural learning programme which can incorporate music, song, story-telling and history. It also offers half day experiences on Wed, Fri and Saturdays from 10-1pm at a cost of €30 per person including bus transport to and from Galway city. The half day includes a live performance of traditional Irish music, song and story, learning some Irish céilí dancing steps, Irish soda bread baking demonstration, and talks on natural history and the traditional customs and practices of Connemara.

For further information see: www.cnocsuain.com; Ph: 091 555703

Traditional Music Nights

- Lowry's Bar, Clifden: Every night from May – September except Sundays. Tuesday – Friday the rest of the year.
- Mannion's Bar, Clifden: Thursdays – Sundays from May to September. Weekends only for rest of the year.
- EJ King's, Clifden: Music 7 nights a week from May – September with Trad music from Saturday – Thursday each week.
- J Conneely's, Clifden: Trad music every evening at 6:30 pm during the summer.
- Newman's Bar, Cleggan: Saturday Nights
- Oliver's Bar, Cleggan: Wednesday nights in July and August
- An Tobar Bar, Spiddal: Traditional music sessions most nights in the summer months
- Tigh Chadháin, Cill Chiaráin (Kilkieran): Traditional music most weekends during the Summer
- Tigh Mheaic, Carna: Traditional music most weekends during the Summer
- Carna Bay Hotel: Live music and Sean nós dancing every Friday during the summer months
- Abbeyglenn Castle Hotel Irish Night: Tuesday night is Irish night at Abbeyglenn Castle Hotel in Clifden. A traditional Irish menu is provided (in Gaelic) which is followed by a wonderful evening of traditional Irish music and song. www.abbeyglenn.ie
- Johnny O'Loughlin's Pub in Zetland Country House Hotel in Cashel also has traditional music on many evenings during the Summer months.

For further details and dates of all music festivals see: www.discoverireland.ie/connemara