



CONNEMARA FILM TRAIL

Since the early 20th century film makers from all over the globe have been attracted to the amazing variety and stunning aesthetics the West of Ireland has to offer. The entertainment industry publication, Variety, recently said that the film industry in Ireland '.... is now achieving critical mass of filmmaking talent to match the kind of influence, disproportionate to its small size, that it has always enjoyed in the fields of literature and theatre'.

Ireland has had a long and enduring love affair with the silver screen and Connemara, in particular, has provided both the subject matter and spectacular panoramas for some of the world's best loved cinema. Now you can learn about the directors and the stars who breathed life into these storylines and you can experience first-hand, as they did, the sheer beauty of the Atlantic coast. Follow in the footsteps of Hollywood icons including John Wayne, Fred Astaire, Meryl Streep, Maureen O'Hara and Richard Harris as you visit some of film locations on the Connemara Film Trail.

Man of Aran (1934)

For the last 200 years, the Aran Islands have held a powerful romantic fascination for the outside world which is unequalled anywhere else in Ireland. The three islands of Inis Mór, Inis Oírr (Inisheer) and Inis Meáin were believed to have contained the essence of the ancient Irish life represented by the struggle between man and his hostile, but spectacular, surroundings. The release of the documentary, Man of Aran, in 1934 held true to this myth. The film was made by renowned American director, Robert Flaherty, who was well known at the time for having virtually invented the documentary form.

The Man of Aran, known by the islanders as simply 'The Film', was simple in structure. Flaherty placed a family unit at the centre of the work portraying its attempts to survive in the barren landscape. Their routine work consisting of laying seaweed on bare rock to make earth for potatoes and fishing on the edge of a cliff are captured. There is also a prolonged and riveting shark fishing scene on stormy seas which was one of the most dangerous ever filmed at the time.

There was some criticism that the film did not as it claimed portray contemporary life on the islands, but rather a romanticised notion of what life was like in the 19th century, almost 100 years before. Nevertheless, the film won the *Grand Prix* at the Venice Film Festival in 1935 and is still screened regularly today.

Directions: Take the R336 coast road from Galway city to Inverin or Rossaveal where you can take the ferry (Rossaveal) or a short 7 minute flight (Inverin) to one of the islands.

The Quiet Man (1952)

On the border of Mayo and Galway, director John Ford made a departure from his usual genre to make his 'labour of love' film where Sean Thornton, played by John Wayne, returns from America to Ireland. One day he spots a red-headed woman (Maureen O'Hara) leading a flock through the fields and learns that her name is Mary Kate Danagher. He falls for Mary Kate immediately, but her fiery temper and his own dark past complicates their courtship and he also has to overcome local prejudices.

Many of The Quiet Man's outdoor scenes were filmed around the rolling hills and stone walls of Connemara. Ford brought a loving eye to the lush local scenery and the film won an Oscar for cinematography. The areas of Cong, Maam Cross and the nearby beaches were chosen for the idyllic rugged Irish landscape. West of Oughterard just off the N59, you can stop at The Quiet Man Bridge and see the bridge where Sean stood when he set eyes on his family's cottage for the first time.

The dramatic horse-race scene, which Thornton ultimately wins, was filmed on Lettergesh Beach on the Renvyle Peninsula. The white-sanded beach is a Blue Flag beach and is over a kilometre long. The area is now thriving due to its camping and water activity facilities, which include a PADI diving centre.

Most of the film is based in and around the fictional village of Inisfree. The village used for 'Inisfree' was actually Cong, located in south Co. Mayo on the Galway border. The filming of The Quiet Man had a huge impact on the small rural village at the time, with many inhabitants appearing as extras. That sense of pride for the film is still evident in the village. Cong has a Quiet Man Cottage Museum which is a recreation of Sean Thornton's thatched home. There is also a replica of Pat Cohen's Bar, which screens the movie on a daily basis.

The Mackintosh Man (1973)

The Mackintosh Man is a British Cold War spy thriller which was partly filmed in Connemara. It was directed by John Huston and stars Paul Newman and James Mason. The film is based on the novel, *The Freedom Trap*, by Desmond Bagley

which tells the story of the exposure and defection of George Blake, a Soviet agent in British intelligence. In the film Joseph Reardon (Paul Newman) is a British secret agent who impersonates a jewel thief. The police are deliberately tipped off about him and he is arrested and shipped to a high-security prison. There he meets a convicted Russian and the two of them escape with the help of a mysterious group called the Scarperers. Reardon then finds himself drugged and sent to Ireland. It turns out that the escape was organised by British intelligence boss, Mackintosh, in the hopes that Reardon could infiltrate the Scarperers and gather information on the group's leader, George Wheeler (Mason) and prove him to be a Russian spy.

Several scenes in the film were shot in the village of Roundstone on Roundstone Pier and many of the town's residents featured as extras in the film.

Directions: N59 from Galway. Take a left onto the R341 after Sráth Salaich (Recess) and follow the road to Roundstone.

The Purple Taxi / Le Taxi Mauve (1977)

Filmed in various locations across Connemara but particularly around the Renvyle peninsula, The Purple Taxi was Fred Astaire's final feature film. It was directed by Yves Boisset and also starred Charlotte Rampling and Peter Ustinov. It made its debut at the Cannes Film Festival in 1977.

The plot revolves around three expatriates, an Irish-American, a Frenchman and a Russian who are all trying to either deceive each other or expose the others' swindling ways. Astaire plays the local Irish doctor and owner of a purple automobile. He sports the same stage-Irish accent that served him so well in Finian's Rainbow, and fits in well with the comedic tone of the film. The score includes performances by the renowned Irish traditional group, The Chieftains.

Directions: From Galway take the N59. Just after An Sráith Salach (Recess), take a right onto the R334. On reaching a T-junction where you meet the N59 again, take a left towards Letterfrack Village. At the crossroads in the village, turn right for the Renvyle Peninsula.

Poitín (1978)

Bob Quinn's pivotal film was the first feature film to be made in the Irish language. It is set in the village of An Ceathrú Rua (Carraroe), in the centre of Connemara's Gaeltacht region. Featuring breath taking scenery, meandering rivers and miles of unspoilt white sand beaches, it is the story of an Irish moonshine (Poitín) maker who lives in an isolated cottage with his daughter. In an attempt to get their hands on his drink two locals terrorise the man and threaten to kill him. Eventually the man outwits

the two would-be thieves, luring them to their deaths. The darkness is lightened with a highly comedic tone that runs throughout the narrative.

Directions: Take the R336 coast road from Galway passing through the town of An Spidéal (Spiddal). At Casla take a left on the R372 towards An Ceathrú Rua.

The Field (1990)

Adapted from the hit John B. Keane play, *The Field* is directed by Jim Sheridan. Richard Harris plays a farmer, Bull McCabe, a man who has toiled for years over a field rented to him by 'the widow' Maggie Butler. When she puts the land up for auction, Bull tries to intimidate any potential competitors in purchasing the land, including a wealthy American.

With the American, Peter, primed to buy the land, Bull and his son, Tadgh, arrange to meet him at a remote location. But it's a trap and Bull and Tadgh attack him in a dramatic and frightening scene.

In keeping with the setting of the original play, the film adaptation was shot on location in Connemara and Co. Mayo. Its rugged landscape provided a perfect setting for the harshness of Keane's story. The ambush scene was filmed at Aasleagh Falls just north of Leenane village. The Falls are actually in Mayo, and are part of the estuary of the River Erriff, which flows past Leenane and into Killary Harbour, home of Ireland's only Fjord, where much of the film was made.

Directions: Take the N59 from Galway. At Maam Cross turn right towards Maam on the R336. At Maam village, follow the R336 to the left until you reach Leenane.

Into the West (1996)

The popular fishing village of Roundstone provided the beautiful backdrop for *Into the West*. This popular and picturesque village is located less than 50 km from Galway city along one of the most beautiful drives in Western Europe. The story starts in Dublin with two young brothers, Tayto and Ossie. They are members of Ireland's traveller community who have been 'settled' or housed in grim high rise apartments, putting an end to their itinerant lifestyle. The boys are given a horse by their grandfather who they name 'Tír na nÓg', meaning "Land of Eternal Youth", inspired by an Irish legend. They try to keep the horse near the high rise apartments, but when a crafty horse dealer takes the horse, they steal him back and ride together to the West coast.

Directions: On the N59 from Galway take a left onto the R341 after Sráth Salaich (Recess) and follow the road to Roundstone.

The Matchmaker (1997)

The Matchmaker tells the story of Marcy Tizard, assistant to US Senator John McGlory, who is sent to Ireland to trace his roots in the hope that this will result in more Irish-American votes for his re-election campaign.

When Marcy arrives in the fictional village of 'Ballinagra,' preparations for its annual match-making festival are underway. Since she is a well-dressed, single young lady, she becomes the centre of attention for two professional matchmakers, Dermot and Millie, and the locals place bets that she'll be 'fixed up' in no time. Romance is the last thing on Marcy's mind, until she meets Sean, a charming local bartender....

Filmed almost entirely in the village of Roundstone, the film stars Janeane Garofalo and Milo O'Shea. O'Dowd's Bar and Restaurant, renowned its seafood chowder, was turned into a funeral parlour during the making of the movie and many local people appeared as extras.

Directions: N59 from Galway. Take a left onto the R341 after Sráth Salaich (Recess) and follow the road to Roundstone.

Tristan & Isolde (2006)

Tristan and Isolde is romantic drama based on the medieval romantic legend of Tristan and Isolde. It was produced by Ridley Scott and Tony Scott and starred James Franco.

The film is set in Great Britain and Ireland during the Dark Ages after the fall of the Roman Empire. Britain has been divided into several clans while the powerful Ireland, untouched by the Romans, dominates and ravages British tribes. Tristan, a fierce courageous warrior is rescued from a washed up ship on the west coast of Ireland by Isolde. Isolde, along with her maid-servant, Bradnae, finds the boat with Tristan in it, and hides him in a hut, where she nurses him back to health. In the process, they fall in love, but Isolde conceals her identity from Tristan given that he is second in line to Britain's throne and she herself is an Irish princess.

When Tristan is about to be discovered by Irish guards, he escapes by boat back to Britain. Isolde's father, King Donnchadh, together with the British traitor Wictred, declares a fight as part of a plan to divide the British and make Wictred king, by promising the hand of Isolde to the winner. However, Tristan wins the tournament. Without knowing that Isolde is his love, Tristan offers her to Marke, in order to make Marke king and thus unify the British clans. When Tristan sees who Isolde is, he must decide between his loyalty to Marke and his love for Isolde.

Many of the scenic shots were filmed on the Renvyle Peninsula and around Killary Harbour. Most notable were the fort scenes and the scenes on the beaches of Glassilaun and Lettergesh.

Directions: Take the N59 from Galway. Just after An Sráith Salach (Recess), take a right onto the R334. On reaching a T-junction where you meet the N59 again, take a left towards Letterfrack Village. At the crossroads in the village, turn right for the Renvyle Peninsula.

Marley and Me (2008)

Newlyweds John and Jenny Grogan (Owen Wilson and Jennifer Aniston) travel to Ireland's west coast on honeymoon. On their return they decide to leave behind the harsh winters of Michigan and head south to begin a new life in West Palm Beach, Florida. They find jobs as journalists with competing local newspapers, buy their first home, and begin to make their way through the challenges of a new marriage, new careers and, possibly, the life-changing decision to start a family.

Unsure of his readiness for raising children, John suggests a puppy to Jenny instead. The Grogans adopt a cute golden Labrador and name him Marley. In no time at all, Marley grows into a 100-pound high-energy dog that turns their home into a disaster area. He is thrown out of obedience school, takes bites out of the sofa, steals a Thanksgiving turkey, consumes pillows and flowers, and drinks toilet water.

But amid the mayhem he generates through the years, Marley sees the Grogans through the ups and downs of family life and, as John and Jenny come to realize, Marley—"the world's worst dog" - somehow brings out the best in them.

Marley and Me was released in the US in December 2006 and set a record for the largest Christmas Day box office ever with almost \$15 million in ticket sales. The scenes in Ireland were filmed in the Inagh Valley, Lough Na Foey and at the Glebe Stone Circle and Ballymagibbon Cairn near Cong. At the stunning Lough (lake) Na Foey, sheep belonging to local farmer, Joe Joyce, blocked the road for the couple. Today, you can visit Joe's house and see him training his sheepdogs on the shores of Lough Na Foey (www.joycecountrysheepdogs.ie)

Directions: Take the N59 from Galway. At Maam Cross turn right towards Maam on the R336. At Maam village, follow the R336 to the left. After about 7 km you will see a signpost to the right for Lough Na Foey. Follow this winding road until you reach the lake.

The Guard (2011)

The Guard is a black comedy written and directed by John Michael McDonagh and starring Brendan Gleeson and Don Cheadle.

It is the story of an unorthodox Garda (Irish policeman) named Gerry Boyle who joins forces with a straight-laced FBI agent, Wendell Everett, to take on a drug smuggling gang in the Connemara Gaeltacht. A murder which appears to be the work of a serial killer is the first incident and a series of incidents involving blackmail and murder ensues. Boyle and Everett form an unlikely alliance and the film ends in a bloody climax.

The Guard is to date the most successful independent Irish film ever made in terms of box office receipts. It was filmed in the Connemara Gaeltacht on Galway's south coast in and around An Spidéal, Bearna, Leitir Móir and Leitir Mealláin.

Directions: Take the R336 coast road from Galway city passing through Bearna and An Spidéal. At Casla, continue on to the R374 to arrive at a collection of small islands reached by bridges to include Leitir Móir and Leitir Mealláin. This area is known as Ceantair na nOileáin.