Welcome to Ireland’s West Coast

A beautiful part of a magical island

Come to Ireland’s North West, West, Shannon and South West regions and discover a special place, rich in history and wild in spirit.

This is the Ireland made famous in poetry, song and film. It’s the essence of Ireland and the part you can’t miss if you want to see the real country. The best of the past minglest effortlessly with a pulsating, contemporary present. The magic is all in the blend.

The warmth of the people draws every visitor in, the mesmerising music stays in their hearts forever. Charismatic towns and pretty villages vie with glorious landscapes and lofty mountain peaks for attention. A dramatic coastline running for Donegal to Cork contracts with golden sanded beaches and calm inlets.

Nature designed our region with an extravagant palate and we look forward to sharing it with you.
Clare, a county of extraordinary diversity, possesses an incredible variety of attractions for the visitor.

The ruggedly scenic Atlantic coastline with the Cliffs of Moher as the star attraction and contrasting safe golden beaches for bathers and water sports enthusiasts. The seaside resorts of Lahinch and Kilkee have attracted families for generations. Lahinch, beloved of surfers, is also home to Lahinch Seaworld, one of the largest aquariums in Ireland. Contrast that with the Burren, a national park featuring the world famous limestone karst landscape, which draws people to study botany, take photographs or simply wonder at the almost lunar formations. Beneath it are the Aillwee Caves, just inviting exploration and nearby the pretty town of Ballyvaughan. The River Shannon, forms Clare’s eastern boundary, widening into beautiful Lough Derg as it flows. A majestically arched bridge over the river joins the heritage twin towns of Killaloe in Clare and Ballina in Tipperary. Killaloe consists of a network of charming narrow streets, flanked by old shops and houses, that climb up the steep hillside and look down over the 13th century Cathedral. Ennis, the county town, is a bustling and active centre with a strong tradition of Irish music and dance. The county’s premier music festival is the week long Willie Clancy Festival which has been held in Miltown Malbay for over thirty five years.

Bunratty, so conveniently located near Shannon International Airport, is a window to the past, the 15th century Bunratty Castle and the 19th century Bunratty Folk Park, a vivid recreation of folk life at the time. The castle is the most complete and authentic medieval fortress in the country. It hosts the famous Bunratty Castle banquets with authentic food and of course superb entertainment.

Donegal

Wild and remote Malin Head on the Inishowen Peninsula in Donegal marks the most northerly point of the entire island of Ireland.

It sets the tone for the spirit of the county – independent, untamed and exciting, three quarters of its border formed by the Atlantic Ocean. Visitors can experience this for themselves walking the towering cliffs of Sli冰淇淋 League with the wonderfully named One Man’s Pass at the summit.

Spectacular Glenveagh National Park & Castle is a true national treasure. The extensive 14,000 hectare park consists of mountain, rare raised bogland lakes and woodland. It contains the largest herd of red deer in the country and the majestic golden eagle was reintroduced to Ireland in Glenveagh in 2000. Glenveagh Castle with its neo-gothic architecture complete with ramparts, turrets and a round tower is also open to the public.

Donegal Town itself is dominated by the 17th century Donegal Castle, once the seat of the O’Donnell chieftains and a fine surviving example of a Scots Planter fortified home. The largest town in the county is in fact Letterkenny in the north, and the county town is Lifford.

Handwoven Donegal Tweed is a unique cloth woven by hand on traditional wooden looms. In times past, many families lived by handspinning and handweaving cloth in their homes. Traditionally, the people would gather the colours locally – yellow gorse, orange lichen, red fuchsia, purple blackberries and these colours give Donegal Tweed its distinctive flecks, known all over the world. Today, Magee’s Handweaving in Donegal town is the largest stockist of Donegal Tweed in the world.

Donegal is a stronghold of the Irish language and has many Gaeltacht areas, mainly along the Western seaboard. Tradition and culture are still very strong here, and music or dance sessions are common in pubs all over the county.

Golden beaches adorn the coastline, from some high points six or seven beautiful strands can be seen stretching out along the shore. Near Gweedore the quartzite conical peak of Errigal, Donegal’s highest mountain, stands proudly, a challenge for the hill walker and, like much of this dramatic county, a tempting subject for the photographer.
Aasleagh Falls, Connemara, Co. Galway

Puffin on Skellig Michael
Galway county is full of action and activity for visitors at any time of year.

Medieval Galway City is a whirlwind of activity with pubs and restaurants, arts, crafts and culture, full to bursting with things to do and people to meet. Don’t miss the Galway Arts Festival – a strong, vibrant and incredible visual spectacle that is continually innovative year after year – and the 2009 Volvo Ocean Race Stopover which promises to be an amazing two week extravaganza!

Outside the city attractions include the Aran Islands with the wonderful Dún Aonghus fort and fabled stone wall network. Connemara is celebrated for its ethereal beauty and has plenty to entertain including the town of Clifden, its picturesque capital. At Dan O’Hara’s Homestead, the Connemara history and heritage centre provides an insight into this wild and lyrical land, while nearby Connemara National Park and the magnificent Kylemore Abbey are not to be missed.

Coole Park & Visitor Centre was the home of Lady Augusta Gregory, dramatist and co-founder of the Abbey Theatre and is now a nature reserve and a tribute to the many Irish writers who visited Lady Gregory at her home each summer. The famous ‘autograph’ tree features initials carved by many writers including Yeats, Synge, O’Casey and Shaw. Nearby Thoor Ballylee, a restored Norman tower house, was once owned by W.B. Yeats.

Brigit’s Garden near Oughterard is a journey into the heart of Celtic mythology, folklore and heritage. Set within 11 acres of native woodland & wildflower meadows the four beautiful gardens are themed on the Celtic seasonal festivals.

Galway East has a quiet, low lying landscape criss-crossed with stone walls, and a treasure trove of attractions such as Athenry Castle and Heritage Centre and indeed the medieval town itself. Hidden pearls like the pre-Christian Turoe Stone, Clonfert Cathedral, Dartfield Horse Museum and Portumna Forest Park dot the landscape.

While Galway International Oyster Festival and the Clarensbridge Oyster Festival compete as the social events of the season there’s so much more on offer for you to see and do – medieval banquets at Dunuaire Castle or a visit to the Ocean & Country Visitor Centre. A trip in a Galway hooker or a visit to Glengowla Mines or Ballinasloe Horse Fair in October, one of the most ancient gatherings in the region. That’s Galway – different, special and never, ever predictable.

Kerry

Kerry is often referred to as “The Kingdom”, and Kerry people modestly claim it’s the closest thing to heaven on earth. It’s no wonder tourists have been flocking there for hundreds of years.

The list of “must see” attractions is a lengthy one starting with the world famous Ring of Kerry, probably the best known scenic drive in the country. It begins and ends in Killarney, the lively county town so beloved of visitors, and weaves around lake and mountains, sandy coves and verdant woodland. Beside Killarney is Muckross House, set in the wonderful 25,000 acre Killarney National Park. Also in the Park are lovely Ross Castle and the Torc Waterfall, Ireland’s only remaining herd of native red deer and one of just three Yew forests in Europe.

Kerry has a flourishing Gaeltacht area where the Irish language and traditions are a vibrant part of everyday life.

The county is rich in archaeological treasures including the wonderful Skellig Islands, once home to hermit monks and now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Other gems are the Staigue Forts, Gallarus Oratory and beehive huts on the Dingle Peninsula and the fine round tower at Rattoo. History unfolds in a fascinating manner at Ardfert Cathedral, the Skellig Experience, Valentia Island, the Kerry County Museum and the Great Blasket Island Interpretative Centre.

Every member of the family will find an attraction perfectly suited to their age group. Families love Dingle Oceanworld, Tralee Aquadome and Molly Gallivan’s Traditional Farm which shows 5,000 years of history over just 500 metres. Glorious sandy beaches attract sports lovers and walkers. Garden lovers and botanists revel in Glanleam Gardens, Derryvane House & Gardens, Dereen Gardens and Muckross House & Gardens.

Golfers have a bewildering number of courses to choose from, but the outstanding stars in must be The Old Course at Ballybunion and Waterville Golf Links, both ranked among the top ten in the world.

There’s always something happening in Kerry, whatever time of year you choose to visit.
Leitrim

Leitrim county is a taste of the “real Ireland”, Ireland at its very best, a place of tranquillity and great natural beauty.

Lovely Leitrim is the hidden jewel in the North West. Ireland’s first eco tourism destination, The Greenbox, is centred in the county. Many tourist providers have received the prestigious EU Flower environmental award, and the National Organic Centre is located in Rossinver. Fishermen love Leitrim particularly because of the earliest salmon river of the season which is the Drowes in Tullaghan.

The Shannon Erne Waterway. Europe’s longest inland navigable waterway, forms part of Leitrim’s boundary and cruising holidays are very popular with visitors. The cruising is mainly centred around Carrick-on-Shannon the county town which is well supplied with marinas and harbours. Carrick, as it is usually known, is a delightful and picturesque town, packed with restaurants, bars, galleries, cafes, local crafts and shopping. It is also home to the Costello Memorial Chapel, the smallest in Ireland and reputedly second smallest in the world.

Parke’s Castle is a beautifully restored 17th century fortified manor house on the shores of Lough Gill. From there the Rose of Innisfree boat departs for scenic trips around the fabled Lake Isle of Innisfree. Manorhamilton, located in the North Leitrim Glens, is an area renowned for its hillwalking. The Enchanting Glencar Waterfall was immortalised in poetry by W.B. Yeats in ‘The Stolen Child’. The small village of Dromahair is a very pretty and historic settlement resting in wooded surroundings on the banks of the Bonet River.

Leitrim has the smallest population of any county in Ireland and also boasts the shortest coastline.

Limerick

Limerick – the Riverside city, considers itself the national capital of sport, with innumerable playing fields for rugby, football and hurling; golf courses, and horse and greyhound tracks.

With an 800 year old charter, older than that of London, Limerick City is a vibrant, cultural city, and a thriving university city with great restaurants, theatres and live music venues – a superb city mixing old and new. The River Shannon flows through the heart of the city, and visitors can enjoy a wide range of interesting attractions; King Johns Castle, The Hunt Museum, and St Marys Cathedral.

A particular feature of County Limerick is a range of attractive towns like Castleconnell by the River Shannon, the walled town of Killimlock with its rich history and Adare, perhaps one of Ireland’s prettiest villages with its thatched cottages and medieval churches.

The 5,000 year old Neolithic settlement at Lough Gur, near Bruff, is home to Ireland’s biggest stone circle, and is one of Ireland’s most important archaeological sites.

The Ballyhoura Mountain Bike Centre is a unique opportunity to enjoy the East Limerick’s outdoors by mountain bike. It is a trail system starting and finishing at a trail head near the village of Ard Patrick. A full range of visitor services are provided at the trail head.

Visitors enjoy a range of interesting attractions in County Limerick, some quite unique such as the Foynes Flying Boat Museum once the centre of the aviation world and the fulcrum point for air traffic. Foynes proudly claims to have invented Irish coffee and hosts an Irish Coffee Street Festival every year to commemorate the event.
Holycross Abbey, Co. Tipperary

Achill Island, Co. Mayo
Mayo

Jutting proudly into the Atlantic Ocean, Mayo boasts a stunningly beautiful unspoilt environment and a magical attraction for visitors.

Cosmopolitan towns positively burst with charm and personality, as welcoming as the Mayo people themselves. The standard and availability of accommodation is excellent and the range of visitor attractions and activities expands every year. Unique highlights include climbing Croagh Patrick, Ireland’s holy mountain with the starkly beautiful National Famine Memorial at its foot and spectacular views of Clew Bay and its many islands from the summit.

History comes alive at the world famous Céide Fields near Ballycastle in North Mayo where man’s imprint on the land dates back 5,000 years. Foxford Woollen Mills offers a glimpse of the county’s industrial past while the quirky Hemmigan’s Heritage Farm, a pre-famine homestead, shows how one family existed on a meagre holding and illustrates their daily lives. The National Museum of Ireland – Country Life just outside Castlebar, the county town, houses the national folk life collection depicting everyday life in Ireland from the 1850’s up to the 1950’s. The Museum is located on the grounds of historic Turlough Park House and set in award winning gardens.

North Tipperary

The lovely lake of Lough Derg forms the northern boundary of North Tipperary, its shoreline dotted with attractive award winning villages including Dromineer, Garrykennedy, Terryglass and Ballina.

With its 13,000 hectares of calm water stretching 40K in length – Lough Derg aptly named Ireland’s Pleasure lake offers wonderful facilities for all kinds of watersports. On it’s shores Ballina is a designated heritage town linked by a bridge to its twin town Killaloe, Co Clare.

Thurles is the home of the Gaelic Athletic Association founded in 1884. Attractions in Thurles include ‘Lár na Páirce’ (a centre which tells the story of the history of Gaelic Games) and the Famine and War Museum. Four miles south west is Holy Cross Abbey, a restored Cistercian Abbey. While in North Tipperary visit Farney Castle. Cabragh Wetlands are worth exploring.

The county’s capital, Nenagh, is one of three fine towns built by the great Butler family, together with Thurles and Roscrea. Nenagh has its own heritage centre. Roscrea town is one of the oldest in Ireland with Monastic and Norman buildings reflecting the history of the town. Roscrea Castle and Damer House are well worth a visit.

To the south of Nenagh is Silvermines, an historic mining area. Nearby is the Slieve Felim range of mountains including Keeper Hill is over 2,300 feet in height. The Slieve Felim Walking Way is a 36kms (23 mile) walking route with scenic views of 4 counties.
Roscommon

Roscommon is often described as ‘the heart of undiscovered Ireland’, a land of castles and ancient kings, of stately homes and wonderful landscapes, where shimmering rivers, lakes and forest parks abound.

In this inland county a restrained beauty reigns, bejewelled with sparkling lakes and dancing streams. The great River Shannon, over 200 miles in length, the longest in Ireland and the UK, marks the eastern county border as it meanders south down to Lough Ree and onward to the Atlantic Ocean. The pastoral landscape is peaceful and unspoilt, dotted with small interesting towns and villages, with cosy waterside pubs and excellent restaurants.

Roscommon offers an enchanting glimpse of hidden treasure to those who seek. Brimful of history and heritage, archaeological gems include Rathcroghan, ancient home of the High Kings with the award-winning Cruachan Ai Visitor Centre at Tulsk.

From more recent times, you will find quite a number of great houses and castles, such as the Georgian mansion King House in Boyle and Clonalis House in Castlerea. Strokestown Park House is another fully-furnished Georgian Mansion and has Ireland’s last remaining galleryed kitchen, fine restored gardens and the National Irish Famine Museum. Tucked away in the Arigna Mountains is another award winner – the Arigna Mining Experience Centre which traces the 400 year history of coal mining in the area.

The Yeats Trail is an intriguing journey that draws you into the world of Nobel poet WB Yeats and his artist brother Jack Yeats. Encompassing Dublin, Galway and his much loved Sligo, fondly referred to as ‘Land of Heart’s Desire’ by the poet, the Trail brings you on a unique experience through landscape, literature, history and culture. Consider this a “must do” on your visit!

Historically the county is quite significant, especially Carrowmore which is the largest megalithic cemetery in Ireland and one of the most important in Europe dating back to nearly 5,000 BC. Lissadell House, has a romantic history, associated with both Yeats and the republican Countess Markievicz. The house and estate are now in private ownership but are open to the public.

Another Roscommon gem is Eagles Flying, Ireland’s largest sanctuary for birds of prey and owls which also houses the National Raptor Centre and has regular bird shows for visitors. In Gurteen, south Sligo, the Coleman Music Centre welcomes visitors and regularly hosts events and music classes. The centre brings to life the traditional style of music played by Michael Coleman and other musicians of that time.

Sligo Folk Park in Riverstown promises a true experience of rural and Irish heritage and is based on a traditional cottage farm. A small replica cottage at the Folk Park called ‘Mrs Buckley’s Cottage’ has actually travelled all over the world for Irish celebrations.

Sligo

Sligo stands out from neighbouring counties with a greener and more luxuriant appearance punctuated with distinctive limestone mountains such as Benbulben.

W.B. Yeats and his brother the artist Jack B. Yeats are strongly associated with the county and much of their work is set there. W.B. Yeats grave at Drumcliffe is a popular attraction. The well known epitaph penned by the poet himself reads

Cast a cold eye
On life, on death.
Horsemanship, pass by!

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West Cork including Cork City

West Cork forms the south west corner of Ireland and it’s a very special spot indeed, seeming to draw together the best of everything, all concentrated in one place.

Cork City is the main access point with an international airport and sea port, and convenient transport links. This thriving metropolis was European City of Culture in 2005.

Picturesque Kinsale is the acknowledged gourmet capital of the country, presenting a superb selection of restaurants, cafes and food stores, all jumbled together in one small, delightful seaside town.

Every corner has plenty to offer families and kids with amenities including the Model Railway Village in Clonakilty, the thrilling Dursey Island Cable Car and the Mizen Head Visitor Centre. Beautiful sandy beaches abound, Barleycove and Inchydoney are firm favourites, offering pristine water and old fashioned seaside fun for everyone.

Outstanding visitor attractions include the famous Garinish Island, an island garden of rare beauty taking full advantage of the warming Gulf Stream, and nearby Bantry House with its own superb gardens. Gougane Barra is an acclaimed beauty spot and the charming villages of Baltimore, Schull and Glengarriff captivate every visitor instantly.

West Cork is also brimful of historical importance and the Michael Collins Centre in Clonakilty chronicles an important chapter.

Sports and outdoor fans find themselves in paradise, with cliff top walks and cycling, scuba diving and sailing as well as fishing (sea angling and game fishing especially) and way marked walking trails. Golfers are well catered for too; Lee Valley Golf & Country Club, Bantry and the dramatic cliff top links at the Old Head, Kinsale are amongst the most popular.

Festivals are par for the course in West Cork and hugely popular with both locals and visitors. The Kinsale Arts Festival draws huge crowds as does the West Cork Music Festival. The Taste of West Cork Food Festival in Skibbereen grows in size every year. Then of course there is the spectacular scenery for which West Cork is famous, towering mountains with picturesque high passes, tranquil lakes and delightful coastal scenery.
Family Fun

Family holidays are very special times, they create memories that last a lifetime. We’ve gathered a selection of activities and attractions which families tell us they love. They are suitable for children and adults alike.

On any dry day, in any season, a beach excursion gets rid of the cobwebs and excess energy. We’ve more than 60 EU Blue Flag beaches so there’s sure to be one near you. Some gorgeous examples are Kilkee, Fanore, and the horseshoe bay of Lahinch in Clare while Inch beach and Barleycove in West Cork have drawn visitors for generations. Kerry has beautiful beaches too including Banna, Ballyheigue and Inch strands. In Sligo, Mullaghmore is always popular, and both Dunmoran and Streedagh received the prestigious Green Coast Award. Donegal’s coast is festooned with sandy beaches; Rosnowlagh, Portsalon and Stroove are three lovely examples. Galway has a string of beaches stretching from Salthill near the city, right out to Carraroe. On the Aran Islands Kilronan attracts families like a magnet as does Keen Bay on Achill Island and the beach on Clare Island. Mayo’s Old Head Beach is yet another gem.

Water-based fun doesn’t have to depend on the weather, kids of all ages love Waterworld in Bundoran. Waterpoint in Enniscrone, Lahinch Seaworld & Leisure Centre, Kilkee Waterworld and The Aquadome in Tralee with plenty of splashes, slides, twists and flumes. Check out the water without getting your feet wet at Galway Atlantiqua, the national aquarium or Oceanworld Aquarium in Dingle which have both fresh and saltwater fish and animals to entertain and enthral.

Ever been cruising? How about taking a cruising holiday on the River Shannon, an experience which could prove addictive. Start in Leitrim and work your way all the way down through the lakes to Lough Derg. A shorter cruise brings you down Killary Fjord on the Connemara Lady keeping an eye out for dolphins. Clew Bay has dolphins too, and a seal colony just a short boat trip from Westport Quay. Off the Clare and West Cork coast are other great place to see dolphins on a special cruise while Dingle (Kerry) has Fungi, Ireland’s best known dolphin. If you’ve an eye for something larger, try whale and dolphin watching in Donegal or Baltimore.

Push the boat out completely and take everyone on an island holiday. Let the pace and movement of another world absorb everyone in the family. Inishbofin in Galway is well set up for families with children of almost any age. It couldn’t be easier to get to Valentia Island in Kerry and Achill Island in Mayo – both have bridges to the mainland.

Beauty spots like Knockarea with panoramic views of Sligo from the top and Ballycroy National Park in Mayo are great places for walks, picnics and exploration. A day trip to Lissadell House (Sligo) or Lough Key Forest & Activity Park (Roscommon) with Ireland’s only treetop walk is an exhilarating experience. In Killarney, visiting Muckross House, Gardens & Traditional Farm is another popular family day out as is a visit to Blackrock Observatory in Cork City.

Learning can be fun too. The National Museum of Country Life near Castlebar has a year round programme of free events for children and adults. Birr Castle is a wonderful family attraction with a Historic Science Centre featuring the magnificent telescope which was the world’s largest for the best part of a century. In Foyne, the amazing Flying Boat Museum displays the world’s only full scale replica of the Boeing 314, “Yankee Clipper”. Brigit’s Garden in Connemara is another option, with a nature trail and educational programme for adults and children.

A day of outdoor activity challenges and involves everyone and the west coast has numerous purpose built outdoor and activity centres to choose from no matter what county you are holidaying in. Everyone loves miniature railways, and the at West Cork Model Railway Village in Clonakilty the 1940s West Cork Railway is recreated in all its glory. Take a real train ride too, on the new road train. Or try out the traditional steam train, part of the old Tralee & Dingle Light Railway running from Tralee to Blennerville Windmill. The train ride at Conmacnoise & West Offaly Railway, Shannonbridge, Co. Offaly runs through native bogland and both it and West Clare Railway, Kilrush, Co. Clare are entertaining and educational, teaching everyone about wildlife and conservation.

Gaelic games are a great spectacle and bringing the family along is part of our tradition so keep an eye out for a match during your visit. There’s always something close to you either at local level or perhaps even a county final.

Are your children animal lovers? Take them to Eagles Flying in Sligo or Birds of Prey, Allwee Cave in Clare and let them marvel at the flying displays. Open Farms are always a big hit and Swan Island Open Farm in Leitrim is a great example as are Kennedy’s Pet Farm in Killarney and Stonehall Visitor Farm, Kilcornan in Limerick. Folk parks are great too, Sligo Folk Park combines a trip down memory lane with a petting farm. Bumratty Castle and Folk Park in Clare brings the medieval world to life as does Athenry Castle in Galway.

Don’t forget ‘the underworld’ everyone in the family enjoys visiting caves such as Allwee Cave, Ballyvaughan and Doolin Cave in the Shannon region or The Arigna Mining Experience in Roscommon.
Ireland’s West coast is simply steeped in heritage and culture. Uniquely, the past lives on in everyday life, in the landscape, the places and of course the people. Quite literally, it’s part of what we are.

Knock Shrine (Mayo), site of a Marian apparition, attracts almost a million pilgrims annually.

Culture in the west is a lively, attractive combination of contemporary and traditional – indeed Cork City was European Capital of Culture in 2005. Small theatres and art centres are vibrant hearts of many towns including the University Concert Hall (Limerick), An Grianan (Donegal), The Hawk’s Well (Sligo), The Dock (Leitrim), The Black Box Theatre (Galway) and The Royal Theatre (Mayo). Music too is a living part of everyday life, from impromptu traditional sessions in cosy local pubs, to busking and concerts. Some pubs have strong links with specific performers such as Leo’s Tavern in Donegal, home of Clannad and Matt Molloy’s in Mayo. In Tubbercurry (south Sligo) you will always find a session and it also hosts a variety of trad music festivals such as annual South Sligo Summer School. The Porterhouse Pub in Westport was the worthy winner of the Best Music Bar Award 2008.

Writers and artists have been inspired by this region for many years and are strongly connected with certain areas. The poet William Butler Yeats is synonymous with Co. Sligo and is buried in Drumcliffe. Artist Paul Henry’s most famous works depict Achill Island in Mayo where German writer Heinrich Böll also spent many years, and where his cottage is now a retreat for artists and writers. John B. Keane and Bryan McMahon will always be remembered in their native Listowel (Kerry). The Searchaí, Literary and Cultural Centre illustrates the rich literary legacy of north Kerry. Siamsa Tire in Tralee is the National Folk Theatre with a full to bursting summer programme of music, dance and folklore.

Museums offer time for reflection on bygone times and the standard in the west is very high. The National Museum of Country Life in Mayo is the only branch of the National Museum outside Dublin and illustrates life in rural Ireland from 1850 to 1950. Galway City Museum and Sligo County Museum are folk museums with a strong local focus. The Hunt Museum, Limerick exhibits one of Ireland’s greatest private collections of art and antiques, dating from Neolithic times through to the 20th Century. The National Famine Museum in Strokestown Park House (Roscommon) both document this tragic chapter in Irish history. The famous historical figure Michael Collins is commemorated at the Michael Collins Museum in Clonakilty, near the scene of both his birth and untimely death.

Impressive stately homes dot the region, each with its own family history and story to tell. Lissadell House & Gardens in Sligo is the ancestral home of the Gore-Booth family. Romantic Kylemore Abbey in Connemara has a chequered history, changing from private house to convent and school. Both also have exquisite gardens open to the public.

Some Western areas are still Irish-speaking, and here traditional ways are very deeply rooted in everyday life. These are known as Gaeltacht areas and here the Irish or Gaelic language is in daily use, in both domestic and business contexts.

The landscape is peppered with castles, monuments and picturesque ruined cottages. Even the fields themselves are shaped by the hand of man, stretching back 5,000 years to the dawn of time as the Céide Fields in Mayo so engagingly demonstrates. So much of this is open to the visitor including the attractions of Dysert O’Dea (Clare), King John’s (Limerick), Parke’s (Leitrim), Ross (Kerry), Roscommon, Blarney (Cork) and Donegal castles. At night the feasts at Bunratty (Clare), Knappogue (Clare) and Dunguaire (Galway) Castles provide a medieval banquet experience to cherish forever and kissing the Blarney Stone remains a ‘must do’ for the brave!

Some ancient remains are a testament to the craftsmen who built them so many years ago. The Gallarus Oratory near Dingle is an amazing example of dry stone building, it’s still weatherproof after 1,500 years! The magnificently located fort of Dun Aonghus on the Aran Islands, towering over the mighty waves below, stirs emotion in all who visit. The remarkable cluster of megalithic tombs at Carrowmore in Sligo provokes so many questions about their origins, much lost in the mists of time, and yet enough remaining to make us wonder. Another historical structure well worth a visit is Poulnabrone Dolmen in The Burren, Clare. Interpretative centres at the Craggaunowen (Clare) and Lough Gur (Limerick) are enjoyable ways to explore and understand a fascinating aspect of history. The Blasket Centre in Kerry honours the unique community who once lived on the Blasket Islands.

Christian Heritage permeates the region with architecturally striking church buildings, some now attractive ruins, and others still in use. Ballintubber Abbey in Mayo has been a place of worship for 600 years, longer than any other church in the country. Sligo Abbey, Boyle Abbey (Roscommon), Holy Cross Abbey (Tipperary), Ardfort Cathedral (Kerry) and Clonmacnoise (Offaly) are other fine examples of amazing craftsmanship as is Cork City’s Shandon Church where you can also see the famous Shandon Bells. Round towers are curious and fascinating landmarks around Ireland and the west has several excellent examples including Rattoo Round Tower in Kerry. The towering peak of Croagh Patrick in Mayo has been a site of pilgrimage since pre-Christian times and even now up to 25,000 pilgrims climb on a single day every July. Lough Derg in Donegal is another destination for pilgrims also associated with St. Patrick. The traditional three-day pilgrimage includes fasting and completing a ritual of contemplative stations though there is also a one-day pilgrimage available.
Nature designed our links courses, we merely lent a helping hand. Lahinch, one of the grand old Irish courses, is known world wide, as are Connemara, Rosapenna and Rosses Point. Ballybunion is a household name around the globe. The delights of Carne are just beginning to find fame outside Mayo and the challenge of Doonbeg, Ballyliffin and Murvagh attract many a visitor. One thing is for sure – the magnificent Atlantic scenery will take your breath away no matter where you choose to play.

Contrast that with some of the most attractive and satisfying parkland courses in the country. Westport’s Championship course is a firm favourite and the lush mature settings of Adare Manor Hotel & Golf Resort and Dromoland Castle belie the feisty challenge around every corner. Worth noting is Lough Rynn Golf Course (Leitrim) which has been designed by Nick Faldo and will open in mid – late 2009.

Scattered all around the region are other less known courses, each with its own idiosyncrasies and varying degrees of difficulty. In total over 75 courses compete for attention.

Adare Manor Hotel & Golf Resort, Co. Limerick (parkland). Set on 840 acres, Robert Trent Jones Snr. created this Irish masterpiece. Some consider the 18th hole the best par 5 in the world.

Ballybunion Golf Club, Co. Kerry (links). Two courses, Old and Cashen forming one of the finest stretches of dune and links land to be found anywhere in the world...

Ballyliffin Golf Club, Inishowen, Co. Donegal (links). Two stunningly located courses, the Old Links recently refined by Faldo design, and the new Glashedy Links, notorious for its peat riveted bunkers.

Carne Golf Links, Belmullet, Co. Mayo (links). Exceptional links course designed by Eddie Hackett and believed by many to be his best. A genuine ‘find’ for golfers.

Castle Dargan Hotel, Golf & Spa Resort, Sligo, Co. Sligo (parkland). Majestically set on 200 acres of rolling hills with old stone walls and castle ruins.

Connemara Golf Club, Ballyconneely, Co. Galway (links). Adventurous 27 hole traditional links course situated between the Twelve Bens Mountains and the Atlantic Ocean.

County Sligo Golf Club, Rosses Point, Co. Sligo (links). Scenic and challenging 18 hole links courses bordering the Atlantic Ocean with Benbulben and Knocknarea as a back drop.

Dingle Golf Links, Dingle, Co.Kerry (links). According to Christy O’Connor, Dingle Golf Links has “everything St. Andrews has and more”. One of Eddie Hackett’s most bewitching creations.

Donegal Golf Club, Murvagh, Co. Donegal (links) One of the longest courses in Europe, designed by the legendary Eddie Hackett and enhanced by Pat Ruddy.

Doonbeg Golf Club, Co. Clare (links). Designed by two-time British Open Champion Greg Norman, with a full mile and a half of ocean frontage and daunting soft sand dunes.

Dromoland Castle Golf Club, Co. Clare (parkland) Spectacular course in the famous Dromoland Castle Estate, it is one of Europe’s finest golf venues.

Killarney Golf and Fishing Club, Co. Kerry (parkland). Three beautiful three lakeside championship golf courses. Located adjacent to Lough Lein with the McGillycuddy Reeks as an imposing background.

Lahinch Golf Club, Co. Clare (links). Two superb courses, the exceptional Old Course, or St. Andrews of Ireland, and the newer Castle Course.

Limerick County Golf & Country Club, Ballyneety, Co. Limerick (parkland). The thoughtful positioning of bunkers, lakes and trees provides a layout equalling the best parkland courses in the country.

Old Head of Kinsale, Co. Cork (links). Stunning course built on a 220 acre diamond of land jutting out over two miles into the Atlantic Ocean. Designed as a walking course played with a caddy.


Rosapenna Hotel & Golf Resort, Downings, Co. Donegal (links). A top links destination with the Old Tom Morris Course famous for over a century and now the magnificent Sandy Hills Links.

Roscommon Golf Club, Mote Park, Co. Roscommon (parkland). An outstanding Eddie Connaughton designed course set out on attractive old estate grounds. Exciting and demanding feature holes.


Golf Academies

- Dromoland Castle Golf & Country Club
- Limerick County Golf & Country Club
- Unigolf Club & Teaching Academy, Limerick
- Castle Dargan Hotel Golf & Spa Resort
- Rosapenna Hotel & Golf Resort Golf Clinic

Angling, Co Cork

Fishing on the Great Western Lakes
Walkers revel in mountain hikes, way marked trails, the newly developed looped walks or strolls along the beach. All of the National Parks in Ireland are in our region – Connemara, Glenveagh, Ballycroy, Killarney and The Burren. Each welcomes visitors, offering a wealth of walking options, and other amenities. Carruntoohill Ireland’s highest mountain is located in County Kerry and other mountains such as Errigal, Croagh Patrick, Benbulben, Ballyhoura, Slieve Bloom, the Twelve Bens and the Maamturks will challenge hikers of all standards. Just be sure you have suitable equipment and of course, only use public routes. If in doubt, book one of the many experienced walking guides.

Nearly 20 way-marked trails criss cross the region so anyone wanting a walking challenge will find it. Most enjoy truly dramatic views and provide long distance walking for a weekend, a week or more. Some of these trails intersect which gives the more experienced walker the opportunity to plan a longer tailor-made route. Even if you’re not on a dedicated walking holiday, the series of well marked looped walks around the region are a practical option for a one to four hour walk. Within the region there are dozens of looped walks, offering an opportunity to see some of the lovely countryside and hidden secrets in the west. There’s plenty for the casual walker too, many towns and villages have signposted short walks in their local areas, often flat and suitable for both young and old.

Feel the wild Atlantic wind in your face at the spectacular sea cliffs of Slieve League and Achill Island, some of the highest in Europe, or at the world famous Cliffs of Moher, immortalised in song and film. Just about every offshore island has lovely walking tracks and paths; and of course very little road traffic! Most of the region’s beaches are perfect for walking, no matter what the weather brings. For those of you interested in a quick stroll or a relaxed ramble attractions such as Lough Key Forest & Activity Park with its treetop walk and elegant Coole Park are woodland delights and beautiful at any time of year.

Cycling is always popular, offering a chance to see so much more than when travelling by car or bus. New linear and looped routes are signposted around the region, and more routes are planned for the near future. The linear routes often follow scenic coastal roads. Cycling hubs are being developed in Ballyshannon (Donegal), Westport and Achill (Mayo), and Skibbereen (Cork). Part of the cross-border Kingfisher Cycling Trail runs through the north of the region and links with the North West Cycle Trail which runs through Donegal, Sligo & Leitrim and also across the border into Northern Ireland. Mountain bikers will love the 90km Ballyhoura Mountain Biking Trail (on the Limerick – Cork border) with plenty of off road tracks. Shorter but no less scenic are the 14km Derroura Mountain Bike Trail and the 10km Bonaveen Trail in Portumna Forest Park, both in Galway.

The Connemara pony is native to this area so it’s no surprise that horse riders are well catered for. Try beach riding, trail riding, trekking or a lesson at centres scattered all over the region.

Fishermen have come here for centuries to enjoy the world class salmon fishing on the Moy (Mayo), the Fergus (Clare), the Eskey (Sligo) and Lough Eske (Donegal) or further south in Lough Currane (Kerry). Salmon and trout are both prized catches on the River Laune (Kerry), River Lee (Cork) and Caragh Lake (Kerry). Every year in early summer, anglers hold their breath waiting for the Mayfly to hatch on the Great Western Lakes (Mayo & Galway). Deep sea anglers find paradise off the entire length of the coastline, rich in variety of species from West Cork right up to Donegal. Most seaside towns have small quays and trips can be booked locally either for full or half days, or just for a couple of hours in the evening. Coarse angling is excellent on the inland lakes throughout the region and available all year around.

Not everything is so energetic, seaweed baths are almost unique to this region and the experience is true luxury. River cruising is a lazy way to let time slide by. The rivers Shannon and Erne, the main river systems in Ireland, are linked by the recently restored Shannon/Erne Waterway which boasts 750kms of cruising waterway. Carrick-On-Shannon (Leitrim) is the cruising capital of the Shannon. Take time out and hire a cruiser for a weekend or even a week; see the world at a different pace.

The magnificent ‘lunar’ environment of The Burren is a world class heritage site which simply has to be seen to be appreciated. The scenic karst landscape is rich in archaeological and historical treasures. Lough Hyne (Cork) is the only inland salt water lake in Europe. Enjoy a walk through lush woodland to see the lake itself, take part in a midnight kayak trip on the lake or find out more about this rarity at the Lough Hyne Interpretative Centre.

Did you know our region includes Ireland’s most northerly point - Malin Head in Donegal, and the most southerly point - Mizen Head in Cork. That makes foro quite a coastline. Every single county has local beauty spots to demand your attention: the towering Cliffs of Moher (Clare), Glencar Waterfall (Leitrim), Connemara (Galway), the Lakes of Killarney (Kerry), Gougane Barra and Bantry Bay (Cork) and Achill (Mayo), all beloved of writers and painters. Sandy beaches are an outstanding feature of Ireland’s West Coast with silver sands and golden sands, all lapped by the Atlantic Ocean.
Horse riding, Co Donegal

Having fun on the beach at Kilkee, Co. Clare
Adventure sports are enjoying a real surge of popularity and there's plenty on offer all over the west. Watersports are an obvious choice given the long Atlantic coastline with all the beaches, waves and island dotted bays anyone could want.

West of Ireland waves are recognised by surfers worldwide for their quality and consistency and surfing is excellent in every coastal county. Some signature big waves are gathering support all around the globe especially Aileens near the Cliffs of Moher in Clare, Bundoran in Donegal, Easkey and Strandhill in Sligo, Achill Island in Mayo, the West Cork coastline and both Lahinch and Kilkee in Clare all compete for attention from the experts. For less ambitious surfers, there is a huge choice of beaches some with equipment hire or surf schools.

Challenge yourself with kitesurfing, a growing sport combining speed, agility and skill. Rosses Point and Emmiscone in Sligo are popular venues as is Rosnowlagh in Donegal. Windsurfers find suitable waves all down the coast and many of the adventure centres offer lessons and equipment rental. Check locally to find providers. Sea kayaking is also widely available through the centres. For thrills with no spills, RIB tours in the Shannon Estuary or on Clew Bay are fast, furious and fun, and whale or dolphin watching is entertainment for all the family. Even seasoned sailors can't help gasping in awe when a dolphin leaps clear out of the water nearby. Nature is truly wonderful. Get a close up look at the ocean during day or night trips with Atlantic Sea Kayaking in Skibbereen. The action continues underwater with excellent snorkelling and scuba diving, especially around the offshore islands.

The waters of the west coast are famed as top class and very beautiful sailing waters with hidden bays, inlets and picturesque quays on both mainland and the islands. Fully serviced marinas are on the increase and secure visitor moorings are available all down the coastline and on the islands. West Cork Sailing & Powerboating Centre in Bantry Bay offers powerboating, sailing, kayak rental and cruising with the tantalising possibility of dolphins leaping alongside. Sailing is also on offer at Rosses Point and Mullaghmore in Sligo and at Glenans Irish Sailing Centre near Westport in Mayo.

The exciting Volvo Ocean Race makes its first ever Irish stopover in Galway in from 23rd May to 6th June 2009. The docks area will be transformed into a sea of razzamatazz, music, markets and of course sailing. This two week extravaganza is for everyone, not just sailors. A gentler type of watersport takes place on the Shannon River where cruising is popular with locals and visitors alike. The huge river widens into large and very scenic lakes along the way with an extensive choice of villages and marinas. Lough Ree, Lough Allen and Lough Dergh are the main ones, each with its own distinctive character. Cruisers come in all sizes from cosy four berthers right up to floating palaces, and are available for hire at several main centres including Carrick-on-Shannon and Portumna.

Top quality adventure centres will supply all the equipment needed for an hour, a day or a week of challenging fun for individuals, families or groups. Many now offer team building courses specifically tailored to suit each business. In addition to climbing walls, watersports and team challenges, Delphi Adventure Centre in Galway has a death defying high ropes course while nearby Killary Adventure Company’s scenic bungee draws fearless jumpers from far and wide. Lough Key Forest & Activity Park has an unusual treetop walk in the lovely forest park, a safe way for everyone in the family to get a true bird’s eye view.

In the north west there are a number of activity centres to choose from – Lough Allen Adventure Centre (Leitrim), Donegal Adventure Centre and Gartan Outdoor Education Centre (Donegal). The University of Limerick Activity Centre has something for everyone, on or off the water while Nigel Callender Rock Climbing Adventures provide an exhilarating way to explore the Burren in Co. Clare. In Killybegs, the Nathan Kingerlee Outdoor Training Centre specialises in hiking, rock climbing, mountaineering, kayaking, canoeing and corporate team building. Just down the road, Cappanlea Adventure Centre introduces exciting wilderness experiences as well. Star Sailing & Adventure Centre in Kenmare offers sailing, kayaking, canoeing, archery and more.

Real adrenalin junkies can test themselves sky diving at SkyDive Ireland near Nenagh or taking part in the growing sport of Adventure Racing. Every August the Beast of Ballyhoura takes place on the Limerick – Cork border while further north and later in the month, Gaelforce West takes place in Westport. Both events have shorter introductory races and a serious long course challenge including running, cycling, abseiling, canoeing and orienteering. Part of Gaelforce West takes in a climb up Croagh Patrick, but the popular mountain climb is not just limited to racers. The view at the top is well worth the effort. Croagh Patrick is locally known as ‘The Reek’ and on the last Sunday of July attracts up to 25,000 pilgrims making the climb to the top. Many even ascend barefoot as tradition dictates.

Ireland has often been called the land of the horse, so it’s no surprise that every county has excellent horse riding facilities. Trail riding is a great choice to get a really local experience. It’s available throughout the region with half and full day treks which are a good option and beach riding, where available, is really popular. Usually stables offer a combination of activities, Killarney Riding Stables has short treks into the glorious national park or trail rides of up to 5 days through the park and onto the Ring of Kerry while riding holidays on the The Connemara Trail brings the rider through the heart of Connemara the Atlantic coast.
Fuschia grows wild in hedgerows all along the West Coast.
The mild temperate climate and warming influence of the Gulf Stream combine to create ideal conditions for a very wide variety of plants and garden types. In recent years many gardens have opened their doors to visitors, some are restored gardens and some newly created masterpieces.

The Donegal Garden Trail provides the garden enthusiast with a range of twenty-six gardens in the northwest of Ireland representing both traditional and innovative approaches. Go to www.donegaldontrail.com for more information.

Further south the Limerick Garden Trail is an outstanding feature offering the opportunity to visit seven of the best gardens in Limerick and includes gardens of all sizes, from half an acre up to 500 acres, many of which are award winning.

Here is a selection of some more garden treasures in the west:

Achill Secret Garden, Co. Mayo. The three acre landscaped garden began in 1975 with Monterey Cypresses and Cordyline trees. The three feature flower borders are colour coded in yellow, red and blue tones. Superb treeferns are a hidden secret.

Bantry House & Gardens, Co. Cork. Wonderful restored gardens with the house as an integral part of the design, sitting on the three of terraces. A parterre facing south, surrounds a wisteria circle in turn surrounding a fountain. From there rise the Hundred Steps leading to a breathtaking view over Bantry Bay.

Brigit’s Garden, Co. Galway. Four beautiful gardens themed on the Celtic seasonal festivals and set in 11 acres of native woodland and wildflower meadows. They feature a nature trail, ogham trees, children’s discovery trail, a ring fort and a spectacular calendar sundial. Family friendly and wheelchair accessible.

Lough Rynn, Co. Leitrim. A luxury lakeside castle hotel surrounded by 400 acres of woodland and pasture. The large Victorian Gardens are designed in three layers and display a rich variety of trees, shrubs, flowers and fruits.

Muckross House & Gardens, Co. Cork. Set in the impressive scenery of Killarney National Park, many tender and exotic trees and shrubs flourish in the mild climate of Muckross. Attractive features include a sunken garden, rock garden on a natural rocky outcrop and stream garden.

Organic Centre, Co. Leitrim. Gardens with a difference, these are organic gardens used for demonstration and teaching purposes at the National Organic Centre, Rossinver. They include a heritage garden, children’s garden, sunflower maze, herb garden and willow sculpture area.

Vandeleur Walled Gardens, Co. Clare. Set among 420 acres of native woodland, the gardens were redesigned around the old path system with a horizontal maze and unusual water-feature. A Victorian-style glasshouse, displays unusual and tender plants. Includes old farm machinery display, gift and coffee shop.
Dramatic forces of nature have forged a complex and breathtakingly scenic western seaboard. Out of this cauldron a series of islands were formed, sturdily defying all the might of the Atlantic Ocean.

Ireland’s islands are as diverse as they are abundant, their craggy shores, dramatic beaches and ancient history protecting some of Ireland’s strongest cultural traditions. Although each individual island has its very own characteristics, they all share a proud and defiant history as small fiefdoms standing apart from the mainland.

Mystical, rugged, remote and enchanting, Ireland’s islands captivate everyone who visits. But despite being wild and windswept, these islands are surprisingly easy to get to from plenty of access points up and down the mainland.

Some, such as Achill (Mayo) and Valentia (Kerry), are attached to mainland by a bridge; others can be accessed by small boat, ferry or even by air. And you don’t have to complete your island adventure in a single day trip – staying a few nights or longer on one of the many inhabited islands is very worthwhile or even try island hopping around the West Coast Islands to get a flavour of more than one magical off shore island.

Many ferry ports are serviced by coaches and buses, so you need only check the timetable for the date you want to travel on websites such as www.irishrail.ie, www.buseireann.ie or www.aerarann.com.

**INTERESTING ISLANDS**

**Aran Islands – Inishmore, Inishmaan & Inisheer Co. Galway.** Inishmore (Inis Mór) the largest and most developed of the three Aran islands is a Gaeltacht (Irish speaking) island and combines a vibrant history with excellent facilities and lively nightlife. Patchwork fields with characteristic stone walled boundaries cover the island. The second of the islands, Inishmaan (Inis Meáin) is the most traditional and a true escape from the modern world. Features include the superb fort of Dun Chonchuir and magnificent stained-glass windows by Harry Clarke. The smallest and most easterly island, Inisheer (Inis Oírr) is small enough to see entirely on foot. Highlights include historical remains, golden sandy beaches and an arts and cultural centre with a full programme to introduce local culture and traditions.

**Arranmore, Co. Donegal.** Another Gaeltacht island, Arranmore (Árainn Mhóir) is a wild and rugged place with fantastic cliff scenery, sea caves and sandy beaches. The island, the largest in Donegal, is a peaceful place with a scenic way-marked trail. Inhabited since prehistoric times, a feature is the promontory fort at Uilinn dating from 800BC and still standing on its cliff-top perch.

**Blasket Islands, Co. Kerry.** This group of nine islands lies off the tip of the Dingle Peninsula. The main island An Blascaod Mór was depopulated in the 1950s but is open to visitors as is the Blasket Island Centre at Dún Chaoin on the mainland. Much celebrated in poetry and prose, the Blaskets are famed for both their traditional heritage and wildlife, especially birds. No other island community of this size has yielded such a literary wealth, producing world renowned writers who documented island life in their beloved Irish language.

**Cape Clear, Co. Cork.** Cape Clear dominates the entrance to the wonderfully named Roaringwater Bay. Ireland’s most southerly inhabited island, it is a Gaeltacht stronghold. The island is steeped in cultural heritage and rich In wildlife; rare migratory birds, whale, leather-back turtles, sun fish and shark are spotted every year. It hosts the annual Cape Clear International Story Telling Festival.

**Clare Island, Co. Mayo.** Traditional home of pirate queen Granuaile, this is the largest of Clew Bay’s many islands. Granuaile’s castle guards the harbour and she is reputed to be buried at the 13th century Cistercian Abbey which also features the finest medieval wall paintings in Ireland. Walkers enjoy panoramic views from Achill Island to Croagh Patrick and south to Inishbofin. Offshore, the clear waters are known for their exceptional dive sites.

**Coney Island, Co. Sligo.** Accessible by land at low tide, it is believed locally that its more famous namesake in New York was named after the Irish island by a Sligo sea captain. The mud flats provide water feeding grounds for the Brent goose, as well as wild duck and waders.
Dramatic forces of nature have forged a complex and breathtakingly scenic western seaboard. Out of this cauldron a series of islands were formed, sturdily defying all the might of the Atlantic Ocean.

Garinish Island, Co. Cork. Only 15 hectares in size, Garinish is well known to horticulturists worldwide for its wonderful sub-tropical gardens of Ilnacullin. Taking full advantage of the balmy Gulf Stream, the gardens are a celebration of design and plant care.

Gola Island, Co. Donegal. Just 2km off the Donegal coast, Gola (Gabhla) is a Gaeltacht island with a small seasonal population. Original examples of the Gabhla longhouses, the island’s vernacular cottage architecture, can still be seen. Gola is well known for walking, bird watching, photography and art. Rock climbers enjoy a fine challenge in the towering cliffs.

Holy Island, Co. Clare. Holy Island in Lough Derg in the Lower Shannon is one of the most famous monastic sites in Ireland with a well preserved round tower, the ruins of six churches, a holy well and a bargaining stone where marriage vows are still renewed.

Inishmurray, Co. Sligo. A small uninhabited island, Inishmurray is a nationally important bird sanctuary for both breeding and wintering birds. Significant populations of Arctic Tern and Common Tern, Shag, Herring Gull, Great Blackbacked Gull and Eider duck make the island their home as do numerous pairs of Black Guillemot, Barnacle Geese, Storm Petrels, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Fulmar. The well preserved remains of monastic buildings and the island’s village can be seen, including mysterious cursing stones, altars and beehive cells.

Inisbofin, Co. Galway. An attractive, well developed and very popular holiday island off the Galway coast, Inisbofin offers good walking, excellent sandy beaches and panoramic views as well as lively summer festivals, an island market, a children’s club and a choice of hotels and restaurants. Legend has it the island was named after a white cow. Long favoured by fishermen, farmers, exiled monks and fugitive pirates, it has been inhabited for over 6,000 years.

Inishtrahull, Co. Mayo. Rising boldly from the wild Atlantic, will wall-like cliffs Inishtrahull ‘the island of the wild boar’ lies between Inishbofin and Clare Island. It is popular for swimming, diving, walking and archaeological sites. The community centre is a focal point for traditional music and dance and it has several beautiful beaches with crystal waters.

Scattery Island, Co. Clare. Lying at the mouth of the River Shannon, Scattery has a rich and unusual history including attacks by Vikings and other raiders. It has been an ecclesiastical centre since early times and has a round tower, cathedral and oratory as well as a ruined Elizabethan tower house. The island has been uninhabited since 1978 but it does have a visitor centre and island tours are available free of charge.

Skelligs, UNESCO World Heritage Site, Co. Kerry. Three stunningly beautiful rocky islets off the south Kerry coast form the Skelligs. The largest, Sceilg Mhichíl, one of Ireland’s two UNESCO World Heritage Sites, 500 steps up a 1,000 year old stone stairway lead to one of the most magnificent monastic sites in Europe, including the characteristic beehive huts. The Skelligs host huge colonies of sea birds, both native and migratory. The smallest island is a seabird sanctuary and one of the world’s greatest ganneteries, being home to more than 30,000 pairs of gannets.

Tory Island, Co. Donegal. 12km off the Donegal coast, Tory (Toraigh) is the most remote of Ireland’s inhabited islands; a fact which has preserved so many of its Gaeltacht traditions. These include the appointment of the island king or Rí Thoraí. Tory is famous for its island painters, a round tower and intriguing Tau Cross. It also has a way marked walking trail. So isolated is this lovely island that people living on Tory still speak of ‘travelling to Ireland’.

Valentia Island, Co. Kerry. One of the largest islands off Kerry, Valentia is joined to the mainland at Portmagee by a bridge. 350 million year old tetra pod (dinosaur) footprints were discovered here. It is home to Glenleam Gardens, Valentia Heritage Centre and The Skellig Experience Visitor Centre. Valentia’s main village, Knightstown, is reminiscent of an Anglo-Irish village with its many stately buildings and refined ambience. The famous Valentia slate is still quarried here and has been used on many prominent buildings including the British House of Commons.

For further information visit – www.irelandsislands.com
Terryglass Arts Festival, Co. Tipperary

Earagail Arts Festival in Co. Donegal
Entertainment

If there’s one thing we’re good at in Ireland it’s enjoying ourselves and enticing all our visitors to join in the fun. Festivals take place all year round and crowd the calendar during the summer months. Check out what’s on before you book your next holiday!

Traditional music is literally in the air no matter where you travel so it’s no wonder so many festivals have built up around it. The Willy Clancy Week in Clare is the largest traditional music summer school with 1,500 attending from all over the world. Nearby Ennis is home to the Glór Irish Music Centre with music, dance and song all year round while the Ennis Trad Festival attracts a huge crowd over a long weekend each November.

The Corn Barn in Bumratty Folk Park, Clare, is the perfect setting for Traditional Irish Nights, a celebration of all the best traditions of Ireland today. Music is also central to Tábhairne Leo (Leo’s Tavern), the family home of “Clannad” and “Enya” in Donegal. Inisheer in the Aran Islands hosts the annual Bodhrán Summer School. A different type of music is celebrated at the Sligo International Choral Festival and in Leitrim the Carrick Water Music Festival covers everything from jazz and classical to swing and traditional. The West Cork Chamber Music Festival is a 9 day feast of classical music every July, featuring musicians from all over the world and the Guinness Cork Jazz Festival is rated among the top three jazz festivals in the world!

The variety of music gigs and shows is increasing all the time. Try Trad on the Prom in Galway for a contemporary Irish show featuring an electrifying mix of music song and dance or keep an eye on the ever changing programme at the Royal Theatre in Mayo and the INEC in Kerry. Cork City’s Opera House Theatre offers not just opera but also concerts, comedy, drama, musicals, dance and family shows and Sligo Live offers lovers of Irish and rock music an experience to remember in select venues. The theatres and arts centres throughout the region offer a wide variety of entertainment all year round so be sure to check out the local event listings when you visit.

The atmosphere and energy of our arts festivals make them events not to be missed. Local arts festivals jostle for attention including Boyle Arts Festival based in King House, Roscommon, the historic 18th century mansion and Clifden Arts Week, a celebration of music, art and poetry in the capital of Connemara. Kinsale Arts Festival is a week long programme of theatre, literature, music and children’s events and the Cork Midsummer Festival offers a combination of cutting edge, exciting performances and events throughout Cork City. Donegal hosts the International Earagail Arts Festival including a wide range of events and activities reflecting its Gaelic location. One of Ireland’s longest running festivals, Bivv Vintage Week and Arts Festival, is full to bursting with events for all the family including parades, competitions and an antique and fine arts fair. EV+A in Limerick is Ireland’s pre-eminent annual exhibition of contemporary art. Nearby, the four day Tergylass Arts Festival is picturesquely located on the shores of Lough Dergh in Tipperary. The truly incomparable Galway Arts Festival lights up July with its trademark parades and events. Ballina in Mayo hosts an unusually themed Salmon Festival, a combination of arts and community celebrations while the Westport Music Festival attracts all ages and is a hive of activity.

The Yeats International Summer School in Sligo celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2009 and features literature, music and drama. One of the leading literary festivals is the well established Listowel Writers Week where spotting famous writers is part of the fun.

Most arts festivals include children’s programmes while Roola Boola in Castlebar, Babaró and Earwig in Galway are specifically for children.

Killarney Summerfest is a full month of concerts, art, children’s activities and just about anything else you can think of. There’s something happening every day during the summer. Another special Kerry event is the world-famous Rose of Tralee Festival, also celebrating its 50th anniversary in August 2009.

Visitors enjoy local sporting events and many say there’s nothing better than going to the dogs! A night at the Galway Greyhound Stadium or Cork Greyhound Stadium is always entertaining and very memorable. Limerick’s famous and newly refurbished Thomond Park is the spiritual home of Munster Rugby, and is known for its unique history and atmosphere. One of the busiest weeks of the year in Galway is Race Week in the middle of the summer when fashion and a passion for horses meet in harmony. Additional racecourses in Ballimrobe, Limerick, Roscommon, Listowel, Tralee, Killarney and Sligo ensure that a day at the races can be enjoyed almost all year round.

Our traditional Gaelic Games of hurling and football are fast paced and exciting – be sure and catch a game while you’re here! You’ll be amazed at the enthusiasm and fervour for local and county teams. Even faster and definitely louder are the rallies held annually in both Donegal and Galway with the Donegal International Rally firmly at the forefront of Irish motorsport for over 36 years. The Northwest of the region hosted an impressive staging of the World Rally Championship in 2007 and it returns to the northwest again in January 2009.

Also in 2009 the Volvo Ocean Race, the world’s premier yacht race for professional racing crews will stopover in Galway, the only port in Ireland or the United Kingdom to host one. This ocean marathon, which spans some 39,000 nautical miles takes nine months to complete. The Galway stopover promises to be a once in a lifetime spectacle and is not to be missed by sailors or landlubbers!
Explore our Lifestyle

Visitors enthuse about our quality of life and we’re proud to share it. Our natural advantages of stunningly beautiful surroundings, pristine waters and a strong tradition of excellent food combine with a quirky approach to life which engages everyone.

Building on the spectacular natural scenery, spas and wellness centres have evolved. Some base therapies on the ocean itself, others dedicate themselves to pampering guests and easing away the stresses and strains of a busy life.

The destination spa, Coolbawn Quay has a magical location on the shores of Lough Derg in Tipperary and exquisite body and beauty treatments to match. Most hotels around the region now have their own integrated spas so guests can easily incorporate relaxing or rejuvenating treatments into their stay. After all, you are on holiday...

Many of Ireland’s natural seaweed baths are in our region and this, the original beauty treatment, still has a strong claim to be the best. Let your cares melt away in the sheer luxury of essential oils released in the hot sea water at Voya Seaweed Baths in Strandhill (Sligo), Bundoran Seaweed Baths in Donegal and Ballybunion Seaweed Baths (Kerry). Kilkee Thalassotherapy in Clare also offers seaweed baths and wraps along with other treatments. Another seaweed specialist is Corall Feamainne in Kinvara (Galway); the name translates as ‘seaweed treatment centre’.

Inchydoney Island Lodge and Spa in West Cork is a tranquil retreat combining a stunning location overlooking two beaches with luxury accommodation and unique seawater therapies.

Dedicated health centres like Cloona in Westport (Mayo) and Ard Nahoo in Dromahair (Leitrim) focus on both mind and body taking a truly holistic approach. For those who would like to take a spiritual journey the time honoured three day pilgrimage in Lough Derg (Donegal) is a very special and moving experience. In Mayo another traditional pilgrimage is the Tóchar Phadraig, culminating in the ascent of Croagh Patrick Ireland’s holy mountain. Climb barefoot if you dare!

Leitrim is the centre of green and ecotourism in Ireland. The entire county is part of The Greenbox, Ireland’s first ecotourism destination, which also includes part of counties Sligo and Donegal. Unwind or indulge, focus or drift away, secure in the knowledge that mother nature isn’t picking up the tab. The National Organic Centre in Rossinver focuses on organic growing and sustainable living. It’s a great place to visit, sells organic produce and also runs regular courses and open days on related topics. Leitrim also hosts the annual Harvest Feast food festival, in Drumshanbo.

The freshness and availability of quality ingredients makes the recent focus on food a natural development. There’s a surge of interest in buying directly from producers as the throng of shoppers at the network of Farmers’ Markets and Country Markets proves. Galway’s famous bustling market on Saturdays and Sundays, has been trading near St. Nicholas’ Church in the centre of the city for centuries. The historic Milk Market in Limerick is a thriving Saturday country market selling vegetables, homemade butter, cheese, bread and flowers. In Sligo the Saturday Farmers’ Market is a hive of colour and activity with producers offering organic meat, fruit and vegetables together with home baking, cheese and fresh fish. Westport’s Country Market (Mayo) has been a Thursday morning institution for over 20 years and the town’s Saturday Farmer’s Market in a welcome recent addition.

West Cork has blazed a trail for artisan foods and local produce for many years and this is reflected in the proliferation of food shops and local markets around the area. When in Cork Clonakilty Black Pudding is an Irish delicacy worth trying and a visit to Kinsale, Gourmet Capital of Ireland, is well worthwhile.

The tradition of farmouse cheese making has been completely rejuvenated in recent years. Keep an eye out for specialist cheese makers at markets and in local shops all over the region. Green fields and lush pastures ensure a fresh and wonderful range of dairy produce. The west coast also boasts a number of award winning butchers such as McGeough’s in Oughterard (Galway) and Dominic Kelly’s in Newport (Mayo) – try their produce when you’re here!

Given our long coastline and clean ocean it’s no surprise that seafood is of the highest quality. If you’re fortunate, you can sometimes buy direct from small trawlers as they land at picturesque piers. Otherwise you’ll find seafood in specialist shops and on menus all over our region.

Our lifestyle is very special to us, and we look forward to sharing it with you.
Some Highlights

GREAT VISITOR ATTRACTIONS
- Allihies Cave, Ballyvaghan, Co Clare
- Bantry House & Garden, Bantry, Co Cork
- Birr Castle Demesne, Co Offaly
- Blackrock Observatory, Cork City
- Blarney Castle & Blarney Stone, Co Cork
- Bunratty Castle & Folk Park, Bunratty, Co Clare
- Céide Fields, Ballycastle, Co Mayo
- Charles Fort, Kinsale, Co Cork
- Cliffs of Moher, Liscannor, Co Clare
- Cork City Gaol, Cork City
- Donegal Castle, Donegal Town, Co Donegal
- Galway City Museum, Galway City, Co Galway
- Glenveagh National Park & Castle, Letterkenny, Co Donegal
- King Johns Castle, Limerick City, Co Limerick
- Kylemore Abbey & Gardens, Kylemore, Co Galway
- Lissadell House, Lissadell, Co Sligo
- Lough Key Forest Park Visitor Centre, Boyle, Co Roscommon
- Muckross House, Gardens & Traditional Farm, Killarney National Park, Co Kerry
- National Museum of Ireland – Country Life, Turlough, Co Mayo
- Parkes Castle & Rose of Inismore Tour Boat, Dromahair, Co Leitrim
- Ross Castle, Killarney, Co Kerry
- The Skellig Experience, Valentia Island, Co Kerry
- Shandon Bells, Cork City
- Yeats Grave & Drumcliffe Visitor Centre, Drumcliffe, Co Sligo

GREAT SCENIC ATTRACTIONS
- Atlantic Coastline
- Ballyhoura Mountains, Co Limerick
- Bantry Bay, Co Cork
- Benbulben, Co Sligo
- Blasket Islands, Co Kerry
- Cliffs of Moher, Co Clare
- Coole Park, Co Galway
- Connemara National Park, Co Galway
- Croagh Patrick, Co Mayo
- Donegal Gaeltacht, Co Donegal
- Dún Aonghus, An Sligeann, An Sligean, Co Galway
- Glencar Waterfall, Co Leitrim
- Knocknarea, Co Sligo
- Lakes of Killarney, Co Kerry
- Lough Derg, Counties Clare/Tipperary/Offaly
- Lough Key Forest Park & Activity Park, Co Roscommon
- Mizen Head, Co Cork
- Shannon/Erne Waterway
- Skellig Rocks, Co Kerry
- Slieve Bloom Mountains, Co Offaly
- Slieve League, Co Donegal
- The Burren, Co Clare

GREAT BEACHES
- Ballyheighue Beach, Co Kerry
- Banna Beach, Ardfern, Co Kerry
- Barleycove Beach, Co Cork
- Inch Beach, Co Kerry
- Inchydoney Beach, Clonakilty, Co Cork
- Keem Bay, Achill Island, Co Mayo
- Kilkee, Co Clare
- Kilrush, Co Clare
- Lahinch, Co Clare
- Mullaghmore, Co Sligo
- Oatquarter, An Sligeann, An Sligean, Co Galway
- Old Head Beach, Louisburgh, Co Mayo
- Rosses Point, Co Sligo
- Rossnowlagh, Co Donegal
- Stroove Beach, Inishowen, Co Donegal
- Salthill Beach, Galway City, Co Galway
- Spanish Point, Milltown Malbay, Co Clare

GREAT RIVERS & LAKES
- Ballisodare River, Co Sligo
- East Clare Lakelands, Co Clare
- Gougane Barra, Co Cork
- Lakes of Killarney, Co Kerry
- Lough Arrow, Co Sligo
- Lough Corrib, Co Galway
- Lough Conn, Co Mayo
- Lough Curran, Co Kerry
- Lough Derg, Co Donegal
- Lough Hyne, Skibbereen, Co Cork
- Lough Mask, Co Mayo
- Lough Melvin & The Drowes, Co Leitrim
- Nenagh River, Co Tipperary
- Owenna River, Co Donegal
- River Fergus & Tributaries, Ennis, Co Clare
- River Laune, Co Kerry
- River Moy, Co Mayo
- Shannon River
- Upper Shannon Catchment Shannon Erne Waterway & their associated satellite fisheries

GREAT GOLF COURSES
- Adare, Co Limerick
- Ballina Golf Club, Co Mayo
- Ballimane, Co Mayo
- Ballybunion, Co Kerry
- Ballyliffin, Co Donegal
- Carne, Belmullet, Co Mayo
- Castle Dargan, Co Sligo
- Connemara, Co Galway
- County Sligo Golf Course, Rosses Point
- Dingle Golf Links, Dingle, Co Kerry
- Doonbeg, Co Clare
- Dromoland, Co Clare
- Killarney Golf & Fishing Club, Co Kerry
- Lahinch, Co Clare
- Lee Valley Golf & Country Club, Bantry, Co Cork
- Limerick County Golf & Country Club, Ballyneety, Co Limerick
- Murvagh, Co Donegal
- Old Head of Kinsale Golf Links, Co Kerry
- Ring of Kerry Golf & Country Club, Killarney, Co Kerry
- Rosapenna, Co Donegal
- Roscommon, Co Roscommon
- Westport, Co Mayo

GREAT HISTORICAL SITES
- Ardfern Cathedral, Co Kerry
- Athenry Castle, Athenry, Co Galway
- Ballintubber Abbey, Ballintubber, Co Mayo
- Bells of Shandon, Cork City
- Boyle Abbey, Boyle, Co Roscommon
- Carrowmore Megalithic Tombs, Carrowmore, Co Sligo
- Céide Fields, Ballycastle, Co Mayo
- Craggaunowen, Quin, Co Clare
- Donegal Castle, Donegal Town, Co Donegal
- Dun Aonghus, An Sligeann, An Sligean, Co Galway
- Desert O’Dea, Corofin, Co Clare
- Gallarus Oratory, Dingle Peninsula, Co Kerry
- Lough Gur, Bruff, Co Limerick
- Malin Head, Co Donegal
- Micheal Collins Centre, Clonlaitly, Co Cork
- Parkes Castle, Dromahair, Co Leitrim

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Some Highlights

GREAT ISLANDS
- Arranmore Island, Co Donegal
- Blasket Islands, Co Kerry
- Clare Island, Co Mayo
- Coney Island, Co Sligo
- Garnish Island, Co Cork
- Gola Island, Co Donegal
- Holy Island, Lough Derg, Co Clare
- Inishbofin, Co Galway
- Inishhturk, Co Mayo
- Inis Mór, Co Galway
- Inishmurray, Co Sligo
- The Skelligs, Co Kerry
- Scattery Island, Co Clare
- Tory Island, Co Donegal
- Valentia, Co Kerry
- West Cork Islands – Cape Clear, Sherkin

GREAT GARDENS
- Achill Secret Garden, Co Mayo
- Bantry House & Gardens, Co Cork
- Birr Castle Gardens, Co Offaly
- Brít’s Garden, Rosc ã l, Co Galway
- Caher Bridge Gardens, Co Clare
- Emmiscove House, Ballina, Co Mayo
- Gardens of Europe, Lishtowel, Co Kerry
- Glenveagh Castle, Co Donegal
- Islamorade ã ud & Gardens, Co Limerick
- Kylemore Abbey & Gardens, Connemara, Co Galway
- Limerick Garden Trail, Co Limerick
- Lissadell House, Co Sligo
- Lissolan Gardens, Clonakilty, Co Cork
- Lough Rynn Castle, Co Leitrim
- Muckross House & Gardens, Killarney
- Organic Centre, Rossinver
- Strokestown Park House & Gardens, Co Roscommon
- Vandeule Walled Gardens, Co Clare

GREAT WALKS
- Ballyhoura Way, Co Limerick
- Burren Way, Co Clare
- Dingle Way, Co Kerry
- Foxford Way, Co Mayo
- Glencolmcille Loop Walk, Co Donegal
- Inishowen Coastal Walk, Co Donegal
- Kerry Way, Co Kerry
- Leitrim Way Historical Trail, Co Leitrim
- Lough Derg Way, Counties Limerick/Clare/Tipperary
- Miners Way Historical Trail, Counties Leitrim & Roscommon
- North Kerry Way, Co Kerry
- Sheep’s Head Way, Co Cork
- Slieve Bloom Way, Co Offaly
- Slieve Felim Way, Co Tipperary
- Sligo Way, Co Sligo
- St Patrick’s Way, Co Mayo
- Suck Valley Way, Co Roscommon
- The Beara Way, Co Cork
- The Bluestack Way, Co Donegal
- Walking in the Maamturk Mountains, Co Galway

GREAT ANGLING
- Caragh Lake, Co Kerry
- Deep Sea Angling off Co Donegal
- Deep Sea Angling off Mullaghmore, Co Sligo
- Easkey River, Co Sligo
- Fishing for wild brown trout on the Great Western Lakes
- Little Brosna & Camcor Rivers, Birr, Co Offaly & Roscrea Co Tipperary
- Lough Allen, Co Leitrim
- Lough Currane, Co Kerry
- Lough Eske, Co Donegal
- Mulcair River, Annacotty, Co Limerick
- River Fergus System, Ennis, Co Clare
- River Laune, Co Kerry
- River Lee, Co Cork
- River Shannon & Lough Derg, Counties Clare, Tipperary & Offaly

FOR FAMILIES
- Birr Castle Demesne & Historic Science Centre, Co Offaly
- Bunratty Castle & Folk Park, Co Clare
- Clonmacnoise & West Offaly Railway, Co Offaly
- Cruise on Killary Fjord, Co Galway
- Cruising on the River Shannon
- Dolphin Watching, Co Clare
- Eagles Flying, Ballymote, Co Sligo
- Foynes Flying Boat Museum, Co Limerick
- Galway Atlantiquaria, Galway City
- Island holiday on Clare Island, Co Mayo
- Island holiday on Inishbofin, Co Galway
- Kennedy’s Pet Farm & Playgrounds, Killarney, Co Kerry
- Lissadell House, Co Sligo
- Muckross House, Gardens & Traditional Farms, Killarney National Park, Co Kerry
- Oceanworld Aquarium, Dingle, Co Kerry
- Sligo Folk Park, Riverstown, Co Sligo
- Swan Island Open Farm, Ballinamore, Co Leitrim
- The Lough Key Experience, Co Roscommon
- Waterpoint, Enniscreine, Co Sligo
- Waterproof Tralee, Co Kerry
- Waterworld, Bundoran, Co Donegal
- West Cork Model Railway Village, Clonakilty, Co Cork

- Roscrea Castle & Damer House, Roscrea, Co Tipperary
- Skibbereen Heritage Centre, Co Cork
- Sligo Abbey, Sligo Town, Co Sligo
- The Great Blasket Centre, Dingle, Co Kerry
- The Burren, Co Clare

GREAT “HIDDEN GEMS”
- Arigna Mining Experience, Arigna, Co Roscommon
- Ballycroy National Park, North Mayo, Co Mayo
- Bird Watching, Inch Levels, Co Donegal
- Blasket Islands, Co Kerry
- Brít’s Garden, Oughterard, Co Galway
- Clew Bay Seal Colony, Co Mayo
- Clonmacnoise & West Offaly Railway, Shannonbridge, Co Offaly
- Crargaunowen, Quin, Co Clare
- Cruising on the River Shannon
- Dolphin Watch, Carrigaholt, Co Clare
- Dolphin Watching on the Shannon, Kilrush, Co Clare
- Glenar Waterfall, Glencar, Co Leitrim
- Gleniff Horseshoe Drive, Gleniff, Co Sligo
- Tree Canopy Walk, Lough Key Forest & Activity Park, Boyle, Co Roscommon
- Magee’s Handweaving, Donegal Town, Co Donegal
- Mountain Bike Centre, Killfinane, Ballyhoura Mountains, Co Limerick
- Natural Seaweed Baths – regionwide
- Ratho Round Tower, Ballyduff, Co Kerry
- Schull Planetarium, Co Cork
- The literary legacy of North Kerry
- Whale & Dolphin Watching on the West Cork coastline

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Ireland’s West Coast