



# Best of the West

Produced by Lonely Planet for  Tourism Ireland



 Dingle Harbour, County Kerry

# Best of the West

This is a rewarding foray through the west's ultimate stops, taking in mysterious megalithic remains, historic national parks and lively market towns, all in an epic coastal landscape along the Wild Atlantic Way.

- 1 Céide Fields**  
The world's most extensive Stone Age monument.
- 2 Westport**  
Photogenic Georgian town with tree-lined streets.
- 3 Croagh Patrick**  
Holy mountain with stunning views over Clew Bay.
- 4 Leenane**  
Small village on the shore of dramatic Killary Harbour.
- 5 Galway**  
Bohemian swirl of pubs, cafes and culture galore by the sea.
- 6 Clarinbridge & Kilcolgan**  
Fishing villages renowned for their oysters.
- 7 Adare**  
Postcard-perfect village on the River Maigue.
- 8 Dingle**  
Traditional pubs, enticing craft studios and music everywhere.
- 9 Glengarriff**  
Wilder scenery on the awe-inspiring Beara Peninsula.
- 10 Castletownshend**  
Grand houses and 17th-century stone cottages.
- 11 Union Hall & Glandore**  
Popular summertime yachting destination.
- 12 Cork**  
Thriving, cultured metropolis made glorious by its location.



## Trip at a Glance

 Duration

**6 Days**

919km/571 miles

 Best Time to Go

**July**

For the best selection of summer festivals.

 Essential Photo

**Clew Bay**

Clew Bay's many islands from the foot of Croagh Patrick.

 Best for Wildlife

**Dingle**

Fungie the dolphin in Dingle Bay delivers thrills to young and old.



Westport, County Mayo

## 1 Céide Fields

Céide Fields is the world's most extensive Stone Age monument; half a million tonnes of rock make up its field boundaries, houses and megalithic tombs. Today it's a barren, wind-blasted spot, but five millennia ago a thriving farming community lived here, growing wheat and barley, and grazing sheep and cattle. The award-winning Interpretive Centre gives a fascinating glimpse into these times. But it's a good idea to take a guided tour of the site, or it may seem nothing more than, well, a series of small walls.

## 2 Westport

Bright and vibrant even in the depths of winter, Westport is a photogenic Georgian town with tree-lined

streets, a riverside mall and a great vibe. The town's harbour, Westport Quay, is a picturesque spot for a sundowner. Matt Malloy, the fife player from the Chieftains, opened Matt Molloy's, an old-school pub, years ago and the good times haven't let up. Westport House is a charming Georgian mansion, garden and adventure playground that makes a terrific day's outing for all ages.

## 3 Croagh Patrick

St Patrick couldn't have picked a better spot for a pilgrimage than this conical mountain (also known as 'the Reek'). On a clear day the tough two-hour climb rewards with stunning views over Clew Bay and its sandy islets. It was on Croagh Patrick that Ireland's patron saint fasted for 40 days and nights, and where

he reputedly banished venomous snakes. Climbing the 765m holy mountain is an act of penance for thousands of pilgrims on the last Sunday of July (Reek Sunday).

## 4 Leenane

The small village of Leenane rests on the shore of dramatic Killary Harbour. Dotted with mussel rafts, the long, narrow harbour is perhaps Ireland's only fjord. Slicing 16km inland and more than 45m deep in the centre, it certainly looks like a fjord, although some scientific studies suggest it may not actually have been glaciated.

### Trip Highlight

## 5 Galway

Galway is the long-established, self-proclaimed and generally accepted



 **Dunguaire Castle, Galway Bay**

capital of bohemian Ireland, with a longstanding tradition of attracting artists, musicians and other creative types to its pub- and cafe-lined streets. Steeped in history, the city nonetheless has a contemporary vibe. Remnants of the medieval town walls lie between shops selling Aran sweaters, handcrafted Claddagh rings, and stacks of secondhand and new books. Framing the river east of Wolfe Tone Bridge, the Spanish Arch & Medieval Walls (1584) is thought to be an extension of

Galway's medieval walls. Today the arch reverberates to the beat of bongo drums, and the lawns and riverside form a gathering place for locals and visitors on sunny days.

## **Clarinbridge & Kilcolgan**

Clarinbridge and Kilcolgan are at their busiest during the Clarinbridge Oyster Festival, held during the second weekend of September. The oysters, which are actually at their best from May through the summer,

are celebrated year-round at Paddy Burke's Oyster Inn, a thatched inn dishing up heaped servings in a roadside location, and at Moran's Oyster Cottage, an atmospheric pub and restaurant overlooking Dunbulcaun Bay.

## **Adare**

Often dubbed 'Ireland's prettiest village', Adare centres on its clutch of perfectly preserved thatched cottages built by its 19th-century English landlord,



## **Galway's Festivals**



 **Galway during festival season**

The city's packed calendar of events turns Galway into what feels like one nonstop party – streets overflow with revellers, and pubs and restaurants often extend their opening hours. Highlights include the following:

**Clúirt International Festival of Literature** Top-name authors converge on Galway in April for one of Ireland's premier literary festivals.

**Galway Arts Festival** A two-week extravaganza of theatre,

music and comedy in mid-July.

**Galway Film Fleadh** One of Ireland's biggest film festivals, held in July.

**Galway Race Week** Horse races in Ballybrit, 3km east of the city, are the centrepiece of Galway's biggest, most boisterous festival from late July to early August.

**Galway International Oyster Festival** Oysters are washed down with plenty of pints in the last week of September.

the Earl of Dunraven, for the workers constructing Adare Manor. Today, the cottages house craft shops and some of the county's finest restaurants, and there are prestigious golf courses nearby. Dating back to around 1200, Adare Castle, a picturesque feudal ruin, saw rough usage until it was finally wrecked for good by Cromwell's troops in 1657.

#### Trip Highlight

### 8 Dingle

If you've arrived via the dramatic mountain-top Connor Pass, the fishing town of Dingle can feel like an oasis at the end of the earth – and maybe that's just what it is. Chocolate-box quaint, though grounded by a typical Kerry earthiness, its streets are crammed with brightly painted grocer-pubs and great restaurants, secondhand bookshops and, in summer, lots of visitors.

Dingle's most famous 'resident' is Fungie the dolphin. Boats leave Dingle's pier daily for one-hour dolphin-spotting trips. In the warmer months, there's a two-hour boat trip to swim with Fungie. On dry land, the Dingle Oceanworld aquarium has a walk-through tunnel and a touch pool.

### 9 Glengarriff

Hidden deep in the Bantry Bay area, Glengarriff is an attractive village that snares plenty of passers-by. The tropical Italianate garden on

Garinish Island is a top sight. This little miracle of a place was created in the early 20th century, when the island's owner commissioned the English architect Harold Peto to design him a garden on the then-barren outcrop. The camellias, magnolias and rhododendrons especially provide a seasonal blaze of colour.

#### Trip Highlight

### 10 Castletownshend

With its grand houses and stone cottages that date back to the 17th and 18th centuries and tumble down the precipitously steep main street, Castletownshend is one of Ireland's most intriguing villages. At the bottom of the hill is a small quayside and the castle (operating as a B&B), after which the village is named. En route there's a chapel with fine stained-glass windows designed by renowned Irish artist Harry Clarke.

### 11 Union Hall & Glandore

The pretty waterside villages of Union Hall and Glandore burst into life in summer when fleets of yachts tack into the shelter of the Glandore Harbour inlet. A tangle of back roads meander across the area; you should meander here, too. Accessible from Glandore via a long, narrow causeway over the estuary, Union Hall was named after the 1800 Act of Union, which abolished the separate Irish parliament.

### 12 Cork

Cork City's food scene is reason enough to visit. Cork's English Market is a local – no, make that national – treasure. It could just as easily be called the Victorian Market for its ornate vaulted ceilings and columns. Scores of vendors sell some of the very best local produce, meats, cheeses and takeaway food in the region. On a mezzanine overlooking part of the market is one of Cork's best eateries, Farmgate Café. Everything from rock oysters to ingredients for Irish stew and raspberry crumble is sourced from the market below. The best seats are at the balcony counter overlooking the passing parade of shoppers.



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