

## Ireland: Galway & Connemara Coast

### Bike Vacation Only

Nothing compares to cycling County Clare and Connemara—and there's no one who does it like VBT! Starting in the enchanting village of Lisdoonvarna, you'll receive a warm Irish welcome from VBT's local friends—along with world-class cuisine from an authentic Irish chef. As your path winds past the stunning Cliffs of Moher, you'll explore the natural beauty of the Burren's unique biosphere with a regional expert. In Galway, your local Irish trip leaders (many of them musicians) will show you the best venues for traditional music. Turning towards the remote Aran Islands, you'll discover ancient druidic sites and spin past shoals of harbor seals sunning themselves on the rocks. After cycling the stunning landscape of Connemara with us, you'll understand why it's inspired so many centuries of lilting Irish poetry and song.

### Cultural Highlights

- Delight in the lilt of an Irish brogue as a local expert leads you on a guided tour of The Burren.
- Explore the medieval churches, Neolithic tombs, and sacred sites of Noughaval.
- Marvel at the rugged and magical countryside of Connemara, whose mountains, lakes, and peat bogs have inspired poets for centuries.
- View Kilemore Abbey, the oldest Benedictine abbey in Ireland.
- Listen to crashing surf as you trace the coastline of the unspoiled, tranquil Renvyle Peninsula.

### What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain mixed with moderate hills. Our VBT support vehicle is always available for those who would like assistance with the hills. Ideal for enthusiastic beginners to experienced cyclists.

**Tour Duration:** 7 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 5-33 miles

**Average Cycling Time:** 1-4 hours

**Group size:** 14-20 max

### Climate Information

#### Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

April 53°/41°, May 58°/46°, June 61°/51°, July 65°/55°, August 64°/54°, September 61°/51°

**Average Rainfall (in.)**

April 2.3, May 2.1, June 2.7, July 2.1, August 3.1, September 2.8

## **DAY 1: Your VBT Vacation Begins / Travel to Lisdoonvarna via the Cliffs of Moher / Warm-Up Ride**

Meet your VBT trip leaders at the Old Ground Hotel in Ennis at 1:00 p.m. They will be wearing VBT staff garments and carrying a VBT sign. Be sure to have lunch or a snack on your own before the meeting, as the next scheduled meal will be dinner.

Once the group is assembled, travel by private motorcoach from Ennis to Lisdoonvarna, stopping en route at the famous Cliffs of Moher. You'll have approximately one hour to walk around and explore this iconic site, where the cliffs rise up to 600 feet (183 meters) above the crashing Atlantic—offering some of the most breathtaking views in western Ireland.

Continue on to Sheedy's Country House & Restaurant in Lisdoonvarna (total travel time from Ennis is approximately 1.5 hours). This historic property is one of Ireland's most beloved small hotels, with Chef/Owner John Sheedy—now in the seventh generation—regarded as one of the country's finest chefs. After settling in, attend a group safety and bike-fitting session followed by a warm-up ride. Later, gather for a welcome reception and dinner to get to know your fellow travelers.

### Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon: Warm-Up Loop — 8 km (5 miles)

### What to Expect:

This short loop ride from Lisdoonvarna offers the perfect opportunity to fit your bike, shift through the gears, and get comfortable riding on the left-hand side of the road. You'll pedal along quiet country lanes and local roads through peaceful countryside that reflects the slow pace of local life. Midway through the ride, enjoy magnificent views of the wild Atlantic Ocean—and, on a clear day, catch a glimpse of the distant Aran Islands.

Cumulative Distance Range: 8 km (5 miles)

Included Meals: Dinner

## DAY 2: The Burren / County Clare

Today, begin cycling west along the rocky coastline toward the ocean, enjoying sweeping views of Galway Bay. This region, known as The Burren—meaning “rocky coast” in Gaelic—is one of the few places on Earth where arctic, Mediterranean, and alpine plants coexist. As you ride, you’ll see dramatic limestone pavement, caves, underground streams, dolmens, stone forts, wedge and gallery graves, early Christian crosses, historic churches, wooded valleys, and wildflowers nestled in the crevices of the stone. You may also spot prehistoric monuments scattered across this otherworldly landscape, whose vast limestone plateau has often been compared to the surface of the moon. The route takes you around Black Head, a well-known angling spot offering panoramic views of Galway Bay, framed by the distant hills and mountains of Connemara.

During the day, you’ll meet local expert Shane Connelly for a walk and talk about The Burren’s archaeology, agriculture, and history—shared in his delightful Irish brogue.

After lunch on your own in the quaint harbor village of Ballyvaughan, continue riding and soaking in the rugged beauty of the region. This afternoon also offers the chance to visit the Poul nabrone Megalithic Tomb, a Neolithic monument that predates the Pyramids.

After dinner at the hotel, consider strolling into town to enjoy live music in Lisdoonvarna, a lively hub of traditional Irish folk music.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Lisdoonvarna to Ballyvaughan — 29 km (18 miles)

Afternoon: Ballyvaughan to Lisdoonvarna — 24 km (15 miles)

### What to Expect:

Today’s loop ride takes you to the rocky coastline, where you’ll enjoy sweeping views of the wild Atlantic Ocean to your left and The Burren to your right. Along the way, you’ll pass old castles, towers, an ancient Celtic Holy Well, and Black Head. The afternoon ride, while slightly more undulating, brings you inland and offers even more striking views of this hauntingly beautiful landscape. Be sure to bring walking shoes with you or stow them in the support vehicle, and consider packing swim gear if you’d like to take a refreshing dip at Fanore Beach.

Cumulative Distance Range: 29 – 53 km (18 – 33 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 3: Kilfenora and Carran / Galway**

Cycle or take the van to Kilfenora, the “City of Seven Crosses,” known as the site of a sixth-century monastery. Stop to visit the Burren Centre, St. Fachtnan’s Cathedral, and view the impressive 12th-century Celtic crosses at this once-important spiritual center of western Ireland.

Continue over rolling hills and through lush countryside, passing old stone walls on your way to Noughaval, where you may choose to visit medieval churches, Neolithic tombs, and other sacred sites. From there, ride on to Carran, home to the isolated Corcomroe Abbey. Now in ruins, this cross-shaped abbey was once occupied by Cistercian monks and remained active for about 400 years.

From Carran, board a private motorcoach to Galway, a historic harbor town turned vibrant city. Your trip leaders will share recommendations for favorite eateries, pubs, and shops. Lunch and dinner are on your own today. Spend your free time exploring Galway’s lively Eyre Square, where you can shop for woolens, books, and other treasures, or visit historic landmarks such as Lynch’s Castle, the Roman Catholic Cathedral, and other notable churches.

Please note: ATMs will not be available again until you arrive in Dublin, so be sure to carry enough cash for the next few days of your tour.

### **Today's Ride Choices**

Morning: Lisdoonvarna to Corcomroe Abbey — 36 km (22 miles)

### **What to Expect:**

Today’s route follows quiet country lanes and gently rolling pastoral landscapes.

Cumulative Distance Range: 36 km (22 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

## DAY 4: The Aran Islands

Enjoy a full, traditional Irish breakfast before catching the shuttle and ferry to Inishmore, the largest of the three Aran Islands. The ferry crossing takes approximately 40 minutes. Bikes for today's ride are provided by a local rental shop; while they are not VBT bikes, they are well-suited for your island exploration. After a short introductory ride, many guests choose to treat this as a mostly non-cycling day, opting instead to walk or hike around the island. Inhabited for centuries, the remote Aran Islands are home to some of the finest prehistoric monuments in Europe. If you explore the eastern end of the island near Kilronan Harbor, consider a visit to Ionad Árann, the island's Heritage and Interpretive Center.

Lunch is on your own today. In the afternoon, enjoy a short walk to the impressive Dún Aonghasa (Dun Aenghus), one of the most remarkable Druidic sites in Ireland. Spectacularly perched on the edge of a high cliff, this sacred stone fort—over 2,000 years old—stands as one of the most striking prehistoric ruins in Europe. Though clearly defensible, its dramatic location suggests a ceremonial or religious purpose, possibly linked to seasonal rites and bonfires visible from the mainland. While here, take time to explore additional Celtic monuments, mystic stones, and ancient holy wells scattered throughout the island.

Your trip leaders will also share information about an optional ride available today.

Tonight, you'll stay in one of the island's charming guesthouses, and dinner is included.

Please note: Plan to use your daypack for all overnight needs. Your main luggage will not travel with you to the islands; instead, it will be sent ahead and will be waiting in your room upon arrival in Connemara.

### Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Kilronan Harbor to Kilmurvey House — 8 km (5 miles)

### What to Expect:

Cycling from the east to the west of the island, you'll follow a low coastal route lined with endless stone walls and fields, marked by the distinctive clints and grykes of the bare limestone escarpments—geological features that connect the Aran Islands to The Burren. Don't forget to bring your bathing suit—there's an option for a refreshing swim in the Atlantic at Kilmurvey Beach.

If you're staying at the Aran Islands Hotel rather than Kilmurvey House:

Morning: Kilronan Harbor Return – 16 km (10 miles)

Cumulative Distance Range: 8 km (5 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 5: Ferry to Rossaveel / Connemara**

This morning, ride from your hotel back to the pier at Kilronan and return your bike to the rental shop. The 12:00 noon ferry takes you to Rossaveel, where you can either bike or shuttle into Connemara, Ireland's "Wild West." In this rugged and enchanting region—framed by the Twelve Bens mountain range and the Roundstone Bog—you'll encounter glittering beaches, shimmering lakes and rivers, and Ireland's iconic peat bogs. This romantic landscape has long inspired painters and writers, and it remains a stronghold of traditional Irish culture, language, music, and folklore.

Later, arrive at your welcoming hotel on the shores of Lough Inagh. Take time to relax and freshen up before gathering with your small group for dinner, thoughtfully prepared by the hotel chef.

Important note: For tours featuring the Aran Islands Hotel, you'll have the option to enjoy a morning ride around the island before meeting at the pier in Kilronan to catch the noon ferry to the mainland.

Alternatively, you may choose to relax at the hotel or explore the village before rejoining your trip leaders and fellow travelers at the pier.

### **Today's Ride Choices**

Morning: Kilmurvey House to Kilronan Harbor — 8 km (5 miles)

Afternoon: Rossaveel Ferry to Lough Inagh Lodge — 50 km (31 miles)

### **What to Expect:**

Disembark the ferry in Rossaveel and begin your ride across a landscape that gradually transforms into a mix of rivers, lakes, woodlands, and lush meadows, with breathtaking views of the dramatic Twelve Bens mountain range on your left and the Maumturk Mountains on your right. Keep an eye out for the neatly stacked peat turf along the final stretch before reaching the hotel. You may choose to cycle to lunch and

then ride in the support vehicle to the hotel, or take a break at lunch and hop back on your bike for the final, stunning five miles (8 km) through the Inagh Valley.

If you're staying at the Aran Islands Hotel rather than Kilmurvey House:

Morning: Optional Island Ride – 10 km (6 miles)

Cumulative Distance Range: 8 – 58 km (5 – 36 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 6: Kylemore Abbey / Renvyle Peninsula**

Cycle along Lough Inagh toward Kylemore Abbey, the oldest Benedictine abbey in Ireland. Built over 350 years ago, it is now home to a community of nuns. Take in views of this iconic structure before continuing on past stunning coastal scenery—crashing surf, silver bays, and rugged shorelines—as you trace the unspoiled, tranquil Renvyle Peninsula. This serenely magical landscape inspired the works of Yeats, Gogarty, and Oscar Wilde, and it remains remarkably unchanged today. Perhaps you'll pause to wiggle your toes in the sand and enjoy an included lunch before returning to the hotel.

Pedal back at your own pace, then relax and unwind before a festive farewell dinner.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Lough Inagh Lodge to Kylemore Abbey and Renvyle House Hotel – 22.5 km (14 miles)

Afternoon: Renvyle House Hotel to Lough Inagh Lodge – 30.5 km (19 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's route takes you through the dramatic and pristine Connemara landscape to Kylemore Abbey, continuing on to the tranquil Renvyle Peninsula. On your return, you'll pass Glassilaun Beach—a stunning stretch of white sand with beautiful coastal views—before riding along Lough Fee and its spectacular glaciated valley. The journey finishes along the scenic bog road leading to Lough Inagh Lodge. If you'd like to swim at Glassilaun Beach, be sure to bring a swimsuit.

If you're staying at Rosleague Manor rather than Lough Inagh Lodge:

Morning: Rosleague Manor to Kylemore Abbey and Renvyle House Hotel – 32 km (20 miles)

Afternoon: Renvyle House Hotel to Rosleague Manor – 13 km (8 miles)

Cumulative Distance Range: 22.5 – 53 km (14 – 33 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 7: Travel to Ennis / Your VBT Vacation Ends**

Transportation is provided to The Old Ground Hotel in downtown Ennis, arriving at approximately 12:00 p.m. Your tour concludes here. Alternatively, you may choose to arrange your onward travel directly from your Connemara hotel.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## **Accommodations**

May vary depending on departure date.

### **Sheedy's Country House and Restaurant (Days 1-2)**

Welcome to one of Ireland's best-loved small hotels and restaurants! Located next to Ireland's only natural spa at the scenic edge of The Burren, Sheedy's Country House Hotel was built in the early 1700s and is now a true Irish institution. A 2002 renovation upgraded the hotel with thoroughly modern comfort while retaining its historic charm. The pubs in the center of the village of Lisdoonvarna are just a two-minute walk away—but you experience the tasty creations of John Sheedy, owner of the hotel and one of Ireland's finest chefs!

### **Park House Hotel (Day 3)**

Your stay in Galway features the Park House Hotel, renowned for its warm hospitality, delicious cuisine, luxurious accommodations, and exceptional service. The hotel's superb location puts you right in the heart of the lively city center. In your room, enjoy a sense of privacy that is rare in the city, as well as climate control, a TV, trouser press, and private bath with shower and hairdryer. Free WiFi is available throughout the hotel.



### **Kilmurvey House (Day 4)**

This small, quaint, family-run guesthouse is located at the base of Dun Aengus, a famous Druid site. Its 12 cozy rooms are tucked away in an 18th-century stone house, which is not air conditioned. You're invited to call one of these rooms home while you explore the beautiful and historic Aran Island of Inishmore, off the Galway coast.

### **Lough Inagh Lodge (Days 5-6)**

On the shores of Connemara's sparkling Lough Inagh, this elegant lodge boasts spectacular views. The warm hospitality you'll enjoy is borne of the true Irish friendliness that is so typical of this region. After exhilarating cycling days, put your feet up in front of an open log fire in the library, or hoist a pint in the oak-paneled bar. Hikes, fly-fishing, and golf are also available. All 12 rooms offer a view of either the lake or the Twelve Bens mountain range and are furnished to the highest standards. Your room features a TV, private sitting area, and private bath with shower. The hotel is not air conditioned but does offer WiFi throughout.