

## Ireland: Galway & Connemara Coast

### Bike Vacation + Air Package

Spin along the most cherished landscapes of the Emerald Isle and delve into its ancient and modern cultures on this magical Ireland bike tour. From the lunar-like landscape of The Burren, where three distinct ecosystems converge, to the wild beauty of Connemara and the more tranquil Renvyle Peninsula, you'll be dazzled by a cornucopia of scenic wonders and the remains of ancient sacred sites. You'll also spend a day in the remote Aran Islands, where you'll find a history that is the stuff of Druids and pagans. A guided walk with a local historian, opportunities for a refreshing swim, generous special meals—including hearty Irish breakfasts—and a stay at one of the country's most prized accommodations add value this comprehensive exploration.

### 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.

Stroll the remarkable Druid site of Dun Aenghus in the Aran Islands.

Marvel at the rugged and magical countryside of Connemara, whose mountains, lakes, and peat bogs have inspired poets for centuries.

View Kylemore Abbey, the oldest Benedictine abbey in Ireland.

Listen to crashing surf as you trace the coastline of the unspoiled, tranquil Renvyle Peninsula.

Savor hearty Irish breakfasts and the culinary art of one of the country's finest chefs.

### What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain with moderate, rolling hills. Our VBT van support is always available for those who need assistance with the hills. Ideal for enthusiastic beginners to experienced cyclists. Hybrid bicycles are recommended on this tour due to the weathered road conditions. Please note guests with E-bikes will not have an option to ride an E-bike on Aran Island because we use a separate fleet of bikes on that day.

**Tour Duration:** 10 Days

**Average Daily Mileage:** 5 - 33

**Average Cycling Time:** 00:45 - 03:30

### Climate Information

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

Apr 53°/41°, May 58°/46°, Jun 61°/51°, Jul 65°/55°, Aug 64°/54°, Sep 61°/51°

### **Average Rainfall (in.)**

Apr 2.3, May 2.1, Jun 2.7, Jul 2.1, Aug 3.1, Sep 2.8

## **DAY 1: Depart home / Fly overnight to Cork or Dublin\***

Depart home for Ireland. The particulars of your arrival overseas are detailed with your flight itinerary.

\*Please note that the Cork airport will be closed for maintenance from 9/12/21 through 11/22/21. Guests booked in this timeframe will fly into Dublin.

## **DAY 2: Arrive in Cork or Dublin / Transfer to Ennis**

Upon arrival at the Cork or Dublin airports, claim your luggage and clear customs. If your luggage is lost, fill in a PIR form before leaving the customs area; VBT representatives are not allowed into the customs area. Please note: Make certain that your VBT luggage tags are affixed to your bag so your VBT representative can identify you.

As you enter the arrival hall, look for your VBT representative or driver, who will be holding a VBT sign. Please wait here while your representative helps make arrangements for your transfer to your hotel in Ennis (approximately 30 minutes, depending on traffic).

In Ennis, take the rest of the day to explore the town and have dinner on your own.

Accommodation: Old Ground Hotel, Ennis

## **DAY 3: Lisdoonvarna**

You are free to relax or explore Ennis after breakfast this morning. If you like, visit its 19th-century cathedral or medieval friary. Plan to eat lunch or a snack on your own before meeting your VBT trip leaders, as the next scheduled meal is dinner. Meet your VBT trip leaders in the hotel lobby at 12:30 p.m. Your leaders will be wearing VBT staff garments and carrying a VBT sign.

Once the group has gathered, you'll transfer by private motorcoach from Ennis to Lisdoonvarna via the famous Cliffs of Moher. Rising up to 600 feet (183 meters) above the Atlantic Ocean's crashing waves, the Cliffs of Moher are western Ireland's most dramatic vantage point.

Then, continue on to Sheedy's Country House & Restaurant in Lisdoonvarna (total travel time is approximately 1½ hours). This historic hotel is truly an Irish institution and one of Ireland's best-loved

small hotels and restaurants. Chef/owner John Sheedy, a seventh-generation owner, is considered one of Ireland's finest chefs! After settling in, attend a group safety and bike-fitting session and take a warm-up ride. Later, get to know your fellow travelers at a welcome reception and dinner.

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 8 km (5 miles)

*Afternoon*

Warm-up Loop: 8 km (5 miles)

**What to Expect:** This short loop ride from Lisdoonvarna gives you the opportunity to fit your bike, shift the gears, and practice riding on the left-hand side of the road. You ride along some quiet country lanes as well as local roads.

The calm peaceful countryside will allow you to get a sense of the of the local community's slow pace of living. View the magnificent wild Atlantic Ocean and even catch a glimpse of the Aran Islands in the middle of today's ride.

**Accommodation:** Sheedy's Country House & Restaurant, Lisdoonvarna

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

## DAY 4: The Burren / County Clare

Today, begin cycling west along the rocky coastline toward the ocean, enjoying views of Galway Bay. This region, known as The Burren ("rocky coast" in Gaelic), is one of the few places on Earth where arctic, Mediterranean, and alpine plants thrive side by side. As you ride, view limestone paving, caves, underground streams, dolmens, stone forts, wedge and gallery graves, Christian crosses, old churches, and wooded valleys, as well as the endless wildflowers growing in sheltered crevices in the limestone pavement. You might also spot prehistoric monuments scattered throughout this otherworldly landscape, whose limestone plateau has been compared to the surface of the moon. You'll ride around Black Head, a famous angling point that commands a magnificent view of the whole of Galway Bay, with a backdrop of the Connemara hills and mountains in the distance.

After lunch on your own in the quaint harbor village of Ballyvaughan, continue to admire the rugged beauty of this region. During the day, meet up with a local expert, Shane Connelly, for a walk and talk on The Burren's archaeology, agriculture, and local history—delivered in a delightful brogue. This afternoon, you will also have time to visit the Poul nabrone Megalithic Tomb, a Neolithic structure that predates the Pyramids.

After dinner at the hotel, maybe stroll into town and enjoy live music in Lisdoonvarna, a center of traditional Irish folk music.

Today's Ride Choices:

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

*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 magnificent views of the wild Atlantic Ocean to the left and The Burren to the right. You will ride past old castles, towers, an ancient Celtic Holy Well, and Black Head during your morning ride.

The afternoon's ride, although slightly more undulating, brings you inland and offers further impressive views of this achingly haunting landscape.

Please bring walking shoes with you or stow them in the support vehicle. You may also want to bring swim gear, as there is an option to swim at Fanore Beach.

Accommodation: Sheedy's Country House & Restaurant, Lisdoonvarna

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 5: Kilfenora and Carran / Galway**

Cycle or shuttle by van to the City of Seven Crosses, Kilfenora, the site of a sixth-century monastery. Stop to view the Burren Centre, St Fachtnan's Cathedral, and the 12th-century Celtic Crosses at this site, which was once a spiritual center of immense importance in western Ireland.

Then, pass over rolling hills, through green countryside, and past old stone walls on your way to Noughaval, where you may stop to visit medieval churches, Neolithic tombs, and sacred sites. Continue on to Carran. Its isolated Corcomroe Abbey was once home to Cistercian monks. The cross-shaped abbey, now in ruins, functioned for about 400 years.

From Carran, you'll take a private motorcoach to Galway, an ancient harbor town that is now a thriving city. Your trip leaders can provide tips on favorite eateries, pubs, and shops. Eat lunch and dinner on your

own in Galway. In between, walk to Eyre Square in the center of town to shop for woolens, classic books, and other treasures. Or choose to explore historic sites such as Lynch's Castle, the Roman Catholic Cathedral, and other churches.

Please note: ATMs will not be available after Galway until you arrive in Dublin, so please ensure you have enough cash for the next few days of your tour.

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 36 km (22 miles)

*Morning*

Lisdoonvarna to Corcomroe Abbey: 36 km (22 miles)

What to Expect: Today's route is along quiet country lanes and some undulating pastoral landscapes.

Accommodation: Park House Hotel, Galway

Included Meals: Breakfast

## DAY 6: The Aran Islands

Eat a full, traditional Irish breakfast before catching the shuttle and ferry to Inishmore, the largest of the three Aran Islands. (Ferry crossing is around 40 minutes.) Bikes are supplied today by a local bike-rental shop. Although not VBT bikes, they will be perfect for your island stay. After a short island ride, some guests enjoy this as a mainly non-cycling day, choosing instead to walk or hike around the island.

Inhabited for centuries, the remote Aran Islands contain some of the finest prehistoric monuments in Europe. If you choose to explore the eastern end of the island near Kilronan Harbor, you may opt to visit its Ionad Aran, the island's Heritage and Interpretive Center.

Lunch is on your own today. Afterward, you have a short walk up to the impressive Dun Aengus, among the most remarkable Druid sites. Spectacularly perched on the edge of a high cliff, this sacred site is at least 2,000 years old. The fort is impressively large among prehistoric ruins. Although clearly defensible, the particular location of Dun Aengus suggests that its primary purpose was religious and ceremonial rather than military. It may have been used for druidic seasonal rites involving rituals and bonfires that could be seen from the mainland. While you're here, wander among some of the other mystic Celtic stones, monuments, and holy wells.

There's also an optional ride that your trip leaders will inform you about on the day.

Lodging tonight is in one of the guesthouses on the island, and dinner is included.

Please note: Plan to use your daypack for all of your overnight needs. Your larger luggage will not accompany you to the islands, but instead will be sent ahead and will be waiting in your room in Connemara.

Today's Ride Choice:

Cumulative Distance Range: 8 km (5 miles)

*Morning*

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

What to Expect: Cycling from the east of the island to the west, you'll trace the low coastal route, passing endless rows of stone walls and fields with the renowned clints and grykes of the bare limestone escarpments from The Burren, of which these stunning islands were originally part.

Please bring your bathing suit, as there is an optional swim in the Atlantic Ocean at Kilmurvey Beach.

Accommodation: Kilmurvey Guesthouse, Inishmore

Alternate Accommodation: Aran Islands Hotel, Inishmore

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 7: Ferry to Rossaveel / Connemara**

This morning, ride from Kilmurvey House back to the pier at Kilronan, leaving your bike at the rental shop. The 12:00 noon ferry takes you to Rossaveel, where you can bike or shuttle into Connemara, Ireland's "Wild West." In this rugged and magical countryside, framed by the Twelve Bens mountain range and Roundstone Bog, you'll encounter glittering beaches, shimmering lakes and rivers, and Ireland's famous peat bogs. This romantic landscape has inspired many famous paintings and literary figures over the years, and many ancient Irish traditions and customs are preserved here, revealing a rich linguistic, musical, and folklore heritage.

Later, arrive at your inviting hotel, set on the shores of Lough Inagh. Enjoy time to relax and freshen up before your small group gathers for dinner, prepared by the hotel chef.

Important note: For those tours that feature the Aran Islands Hotel, you will have an optional morning ride around the island before meeting at the pier in Kilronan to catch the noon ferry to the mainland.

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

Please note: For those whose tours feature Rosleague Manor on nights 5 and 6, your hotel is located on the quiet shores of Ballinakill Bay, several miles/kilometers north of Lough Inagh.

Today's Ride Choices:

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

*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 spin across a landscape that becomes a mixture of rivers, lakes, woodlands and rich meadows with breathtaking views of the dramatic Twelve Bens mountain range on the left and Maumturk mountains on the right. Watch out for the stacks of peat turf along the final section before arriving at the hotel.

You may wish to cycle to lunch and take a support vehicle ride to the hotel. Alternatively, you may cycle to lunch, take a break, and jump back on your bike for the final breathtaking five miles (8 km) through the Inagh Valley.

Accommodation: Lough Inagh Lodge, Connemara

Alternate Accommodation: Rosleague Manor, Connemara

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

## **DAY 8: Kylemore Abbey / Renvyle Peninsula**

Cycle along Lough Inagh toward Kylemore Abbey—the oldest Benedictine abbey in Ireland. Built 350 years ago, it now is home to a community of nuns. Enjoy views of this iconic structure, and then roll past stunning coastal views of crashing surf, silver bays, and rocky coastlines as you trace the unspoiled, tranquil Renvyle Peninsula. This serenely magical place was the inspiration for renowned works of art by Yeats, Gogarty, and Oscar Wilde and remains unchanged today. Perhaps you'll stop and wiggle your toes in the sand before an included lunch in a small hotel along the beach.

Pedal back to the hotel at your own pace, then relax a while before a festive farewell dinner.

Please note: For those whose tours feature Rosleague Manor on Nights 5 and 6, your hotel is located on the quiet shores of Ballinakill Bay, several miles/kilometers north of Lough Inagh.

Today's Ride Choices:

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

*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 is through the dramatic and pristine Connemara landscape to Kylemore Abbey, then continues on to the Renvyle Peninsula.

Your return ride takes you past Glassilaun Beach, a long expanse of white sand with beautiful views. Continue along Lough Fee, with its spectacularly impressive glaciated valley, and onto the bog road to Lough Inagh Lodge.

If you wish to go swimming at Glassilaun Beach, please bring a swimsuit.

Accommodation: Lough Inagh Lodge, Connemara

Alternate Accommodation: Rosleague Manor, Connemara

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 9: Dublin / Free time**

Depart by coach at 8:00 a.m. for Dublin and the Schoolhouse Hotel (approximately five hours). There is no VBT representative on the coach ride.

Important: Upon arrival at the hotel, please reconfirm with the hotel receptionist the time of your transfer to the Dublin airport for your return flight home. You have the remainder of the day free to take in a bit of the atmosphere of Dublin and to seek out one of the city's many restaurants, pubs, or outdoor cafés for lunch and dinner on your own.

VBT provides you with City Information, which includes helpful tips and recommendations on what to see and do in Dublin.

Accommodation: Schoolhouse Hotel, Dublin



Included Meals: Breakfast

## DAY 10: Depart for home

After breakfast\*, transfer to the Dublin airport for your return flight\*\*.

\*For guests with early-morning departures, breakfast at the hotel may not be available. Please check with the front desk to verify the times that breakfast is served.

\*\*VBT recommends that you check your transfer time in your "Transfer Reminder." VBT transfer times and departure points are finalized in advance and cannot be modified for individual guests. If you extend your stay beyond the scheduled program dates, return transportation to the airport is at your own expense.

Included Meals: Breakfast

## Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

### Old Ground Hotel (Day: 2)

The Old Ground Hotel is a former manor house dating to the 18th century. Its magnificent ivy-clad exterior retains the splendor of a bygone age, while the interior boasts the conveniences of a modern hotel. The hotel is not air conditioned, but WiFi is available throughout.

### Lough Inagh Lodge (Days: 7,8)

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.

### Park House Hotel (Day: 5)

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.

### **Schoolhouse Hotel (Day: 9)**

A hidden gem close to the heart of the city, the Schoolhouse Hotel is just a 10-minute walk to Trinity College, the National Museum, Grafton Street, and other city attractions. Built in 1861, this charming boutique hotel takes its name from its early years as a school. Perhaps you'll savor French and Irish specialties in the trendy restaurant set within former classrooms. Unwind in the spa, fitness center, and indoor pool. And retire to one of 31 air-conditioned, en-suite guestrooms, each named for a famous Irish writer. Free WiFi is available throughout the hotel.

### **Sheedy's Country House and Restaurant (Days: 3,4)**

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!