

Ireland: Connemara & the Wild Atlantic Way

Bike Vacation Only

In the far reaches of western Ireland, water and land intertwine into a breathtaking tapestry. Rock-strewn mountain slopes and cliffs spill into metallic-blue bays dotted with pearl-like islands. Sweeping bogs share valleys with shimmering lakes. And a scenic network of cycling paths and bike-friendly quiet roads winds through it all. On this Self-Guided cycling tour in Ireland, you'll cycle the region's Great Western Greenway along the beguiling Clew Bay and on the shores of a unique Irish fjord. Ride into charming seaside Irish towns and into the magnificent majesty of Delphi Valley—quintessential Ireland. At the end of each unspeakably rewarding day, expansive resorts and a luxury boutique hotel greet you in traditional Irish style: *Sláinte!*



Cultural Highlights

- Discover Ireland's scenic Bay Coast, part of the magnificent Wild West Atlantic Way, 1,500 miles

of diverse coastal vistas.

- Cycle the Great Western Greenway, Ireland's longest dedicated bike path following a former railway.
- Explore charming coastal towns along your bike route—Westport, Mulranny, Newport, Leenaun and Louisburgh—full of history and rich in pub culture.

What to Expect

This tour offers a combination of easy terrain with moderate, rolling hills. Routes are on paved bike paths and paved narrow country roads, with very little traffic except while riding into and out of some towns. Please verify your bike selection for this tour as it is not always possible to change bikes once you arrive on tour. Travel with your friends and family—we can accommodate multiple guests on this self-guided vacation. Our 24/7 support system is available if needed.

Tour Duration: 7 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 16 - 35

Average Cycling Time: 01:15 - 04:30

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: Transfer Galway to Mulranny / Welcome orientation

We suggest arriving in Ireland at least one day prior to the tour start date. Make your own independent travel arrangements to Galway. For details, refer to your VBT Handbook. Meet your VBT local host at 1:00 p.m., along with any other VBT guests departing on the same day, in the lobby of the Park House Hotel (Foster Street, Eyre Square, Galway, Ireland, Tel +353 91 564924). He or she will be carrying a VBT sign. Your transfer to the charming town of Mulranny will take approximately 1-1/2 hours.

The Welcome orientation with your VBT local host includes:

- An overview of the itinerary
- Bike fitting and equipment familiarization
- Review of the Ride with GPS navigation app

- Important contact information in case you need to reach your VBT local host
- Safety briefing
- Local suggestions (restaurants, things to do, etc.)

Mulranny enjoys a stunning setting on an isthmus between Clew Bay and Blacksod Bay. The magnificent vistas of the vast Nephin mountain range rise across the water. With spectacular landscapes all around, it's no wonder the residents embrace cycling, walking, and other outdoor activities so fully. This inviting town—proclaimed a European Destination of Excellence—is right on the Great Western Greenway, a 26-mile rail trail along the ruggedly scenic coast.

Your hotel is ideally situated overlooking Clew Bay, with pristine beaches and the charming town of Mulranny a short walk away. The Greenway is also right outside your door, making your exploration by bike a breeze. Once you've settled in, spend the afternoon as you wish. Perhaps follow the causeway, built across Trawoughter Bay in 1889, to take in the area's vast marine coastal paradise of sand plains, salt marshes and grassy slopes. You can stop to relax on the beach, too, awarded the blue flag for its exemplary environmental management. You might also take a spin on the Greenway. Browse the shops in town. Or linger at your hotel to enjoy the swimming pool, sauna and other amenities.

For dinner, sample the specialties at your hotel's restaurant or bistro or stroll into town.

Accommodation: Mulranny Park Hotel, Mayo

DAY 2: Mulranny to Achill Island / Stay Put Day

Spend the day as you like, choosing from several cycling routes, exploring Mulranny, or both! Behind your hotel, you can directly access the Great Western Greenway, part of the National Cycle Network of Ireland. At 42 km (26 miles), it is the longest dedicated bike path in the country. The breathtakingly scenic route follows the path of the former Westport-to-Achill light railway, which was laid in the 1890s. With the arrival of the railroad, coastal towns here prospered and grand hotels, such as the Mulranny Park where you're staying, were built to support the economic boom. The railroad closed in 1937 with the popularization of the automobile.

If you ride the northern side of Clew Bay, you have sweeping views of some of its 365 islands, "one for every day of the year," the locals might tell you. Famously, John Lennon purchased one of them in 1967. Among them are Ireland's finest example of drumlins, limestone bedrock scoured by the retreat of glaciers. Six of them are inhabited year-round.

Either of today's routes leads you to Achill Island, accessible by bridge, and the seaside village of Achill Sound, which is 8 miles away from Mulranny. This sleepy island is graced with soaring cliffs, wide beaches and deserted boglands—a rich and varied coastal wilderness that has inspired a vibrant arts community. Several loop-ride options can keep you biking for hours here, surrounded by magnificent sea views and gentle hills.

Find a spot for a delicious seafood lunch, then explore a while and return to Mulranny the way you came, or choose a different route.

Today's Rides:

Mulranny Greenway loop short option: 36.6 km (23 miles)

Mulranny Greenway loop via Clogmore long option: 62.6 km (39 miles)

Mulranny Greenway loop via Keel longer option: 73.5 km (46 miles)

What to Expect: The shorter route (16 miles) departs along the Great Western Greenway from behind your hotel. Follow it to the small town of Achill Sound for a coffee stop. You can either return to Mulranny the way you came, or return along beautiful coastal backroads with wide open views of Clew Bay, for a loop totaling about 23 miles.

Longer options bring you onto Achill Island along wonderful un-trafficked country roads, with expansive views of Clew Bay to the south. You can choose to return either along the Greenway, or via two longer loops that trace a coastal backroad.

Accommodation: Mulranny Park Hotel, Mayo

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3: Mulranny to Westport on the Great Western Greenway / Move on Day

Enjoy a glorious day of cycling the Great Western Greenway at a pace that suits you. The bike path traces Clew Bay as it bends southward toward Westport, your final destination. Enjoy the ease of gentle gradients and some of the most idyllic scenery in the west of Ireland before meeting gently rolling hills and the scenic descent into the quaint fishing town of Newport, an ideal spot to break for lunch. Later, a gradual ascent delivers you into the former weavers' community of Westport on the Black Oak River. Vibrant and steeped in Irish charm, a stunning Romanesque church and a spectacular 19th-century red sandstone viaduct are among its historic treasures. Its stone-built houses and tree-lined lanes are a pleasure to explore.

You have two nights to savor the delights of this scenic village, either on two wheels or two feet. This evening, stroll into town, where you may happen on a pub and enjoy the Irish tunes of local musicians. Or savor the cuisine of your hotel's dining room.

Today's Rides:

Mulranny to Westport on the Great Western Greenway short option: 31.4 km (20 miles)

What to Expect: Depart your hotel directly onto the paved Greenway, which gradually ascends for about 2 miles then rolls gently, skirting the hills on your left and Clew Bay and tiny seaside villages to your right. The town of Newport is a little over mid-way at 11 miles, a nice lunch stop. The last 4 miles into Westport gradually ascend with some short and steep ups and downs. As you approach your hotel, you may encounter some town traffic.

Mulranny to Westport on and off the Greenway Cycle long option: 38.8 km (24 miles)

What to Expect: Depart your hotel directly onto the paved Greenway, which gradually ascends for about 2 miles then rolls gently, skirting the hills on your left and Clew Bay and tiny seaside villages to your right. The town of Newport is a little over mid-way at 18 km (11 miles), a nice lunch stop. The last 7 km (4 miles) into Westport gradually ascend with some short and steep ups and downs. As you approach your hotel, you may encounter some town traffic.

Accommodation: Westport Plaza Hotel, Westport

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4: Westport / Stay Put Day

Enjoy today's Stay Put Day to follow your whims. Head out for a ride, explore farther afield, stroll into town to a café and browse the shops, or simply relax in your hotel's spa.

Westport was voted by readers of the *Irish Times* as the best place to live in Ireland and you'll discover why today. Scenically located at the end of Clew Bay, it is one of the few towns in Ireland that was formally planned and it exudes a wealth of beauty and charm.

Perhaps you'll visit Westport House, often called the most beautiful house in Ireland. The 30-room historic manse is open for tours and for afternoon tea, and you can stroll a two-mile footpath among its lovely grounds. Alternately, play a round of golf or set out on a horseback ride nearby. Or embark a ferry from Roonagh Quay (a 14-mile taxi ride) to visit Clare Island, once the home of pirate queen Grace O'Malley, lord of a 16th-century Irish dynasty. This sparsely populated island of dramatic cliffs offers

spectacular views of Clew Bay and the surrounding mountains.

If you want to stay on your bike today, set out on an easy-going 20-mile loop ride that will still give you ample time to explore Westport's shops and sites and enjoy your hotel's spa amenities.

Today's Ride:

Westport loop: 20 miles

What to Expect: Today's loop ride delivers you into the countryside after about a mile of riding in town traffic. Then, narrow country roads lead through pastures heading north. At almost 4 miles, the route turns due west toward Clew Bay until you see the island of Inish Turk Beg, where you turn south paralleling the coast. You ride past the ruins of Castleaffy Castle at about 9 miles, and later past the Westport Golf Course. Hug the coast and then turn northeast at Knockaraha, returning to your hotel along town streets and bike lanes.

Accommodation: Westport Plaza Hotel, Westport

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5: Westport to Delphi Valley / Move on Day

After breakfast, head out on a beautiful ride as the peak of Croagh Patrick watches over your progress. The summit draws local pilgrims—many of them barefoot—on Reek Sunday, the last Sunday in July. The holiday commemorates St. Patrick, who spent 40 days fasting on the mountain in the year 441. Your route continues to trace the lovely waters of Clew Bay with its many small islands. You may pause in the quaint village of Louisburgh for lunch at an inviting pub. If you are passing through in July or August, visit the small heritage center here before you return to the road. This fascinating little museum chronicles the life of Grace O'Malley, the renowned pirate queen who ruled the region in the 16th century. You can also gain some insight into the 19th-century famine.

Your afternoon ride is sure to be a highlight of your week as you pedal into the stunning Delphi Valley, flanked by picturesque lakes. You might stop to admire the stillness and serenity of Doo Lough, a 2.5-mile-long freshwater lake amid long mountain ridges. This is quintessential Ireland: green slopes rising to rock-strewn summits reflected in mirror-like pools. Most impressively, flat-topped Ben Bury, the highest peak in Connemara at 2,671 feet, soars above it all.

By ride's end, you arrive in Delphi, situated on the Owengar River in a stunning valley surrounded by the Mweelrea Mountains. Settle into your resort hotel, taking in breathtaking views and savoring classic, creative Irish fare in the dining room.

Today's Ride:

Westport to Delphi Resort: 41.7 km (25.9 miles)

What to Expect: Ride out of town in some traffic, then cycle into the countryside on narrow roads. You skirt Clew Bay, getting occasional glimpses of the water, for about 10 km (6 miles). Then pass small settlements and green pastures with some rolling and short steep hills. At about 22.5 km (15 miles), arrive at your halfway point in Louisburgh (22.5 km, 14 miles), a perfect lunch stop. After, head due south toward the Delphi Valley. You start a gradual ascent at 24 km (15 miles) for about 5 miles, then enjoy an exhilarating downhill to Doo Lough Lake and a scenic spin through rolling terrain to your hotel.

Accommodation: Delphi Resort, Delphi

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6: Delphi / Stay Put Day

A wide array of activities immerses you in the beauty of the Delphi Valley and its surroundings. Your hotel can assist you with arrangements, whether you're indulging in a spa day, heading out on some adventure activities in the great outdoors or cycling more of the area's beautiful landscapes.

You can treat yourself to the resort's spa treatments at the Wellness Center. Or choose from up to 20 active outings either on or off the property, including a ropes course, ziplining, canoeing, kayaking and surfing. These are all exhilarating ways to experience the area from different perspectives.

If you'd like another day on the bike, a short ride directly from the property leads you to the end of the Delphi Valley and around the tip of Killary Harbor. Here, the small village of Leenaun offers lovely views over the harbor. At ten miles long and 150 feet deep, this is Ireland's only fjord. Embark a relaxing 90-minute cruise here, marveling at the rise of the mountains on either side as you ply the shimmering waters.

A longer option brings you to the doorstep of Kylemore Abbey, a Benedictine Monastery on the grounds of Kylemore Castle. A magnificent vision in white amid the green hills, the castle became a monastery 100 years ago when it was purchased by nuns fleeing Belgium during World War I. Enjoy lunch on the dramatic grounds, perhaps among the manicured gardens. If you'd like time to pamper yourself back at the resort, a taxi transfer back to your hotel is included. Or you can cycle back to get the most mileage out of your day along quiet, scenic roads.

Today's Rides:

Delphi Resort to Leenaun out and back: 23.3 km (15 miles)

What to Expect: Cycle narrow, paved roads the entire day. After a gentle descent for about a mile, head east over some rolling hills that overall have little elevation gain. Enjoy water views to your right throughout the ride until you reach the tip of the fjord at Aasleagh, where you turn west and follow the southern shore of the fjord to Leenaun. To return, you retrace the same route, gaining slightly more elevation than on your outbound ride.

Delphi Resort to Kylemore Abbey, transfer back: 39.6 km (24 miles)

What to Expect: Phone your local host, no later than this morning, to arrange a meeting time for your return transportation. Cycle narrow, paved roads the entire day. After a gentle descent for about a mile, head east over some rolling hills that overall have little elevation gain. Enjoy water views to your right throughout the ride until you reach the tip of the fjord at Aasleagh, where you turn west and follow the southern shore of the fjord to Leenaun. Your route is flat along the fjord for another 3 miles. At the 15-km (10-mile) mark, begin an ascent of about a mile and ride some rolling hills until you reach Kylemore Abbey, where lunch and snacks are available for purchase.

Delphi Resort to Kylemore Abbey ride out and back: 66.5 km (41 miles)

What to Expect: Cycle narrow, paved roads the entire day. After a gentle descent for about a mile, head east over some rolling hills that overall have little elevation gain. Enjoy water views to your right throughout the ride until you reach the tip of the fjord at Aasleagh, where you turn west and follow the southern shore of the fjord to Leenaun. Your route is flat along the fjord for another 5 km (3 miles). At the 15-km (10-mile) mark, begin an ascent of about a mile and ride some rolling hills until you reach Kylemore Abbey (around 40 km, 25 miles), where lunch and snacks are available for purchase. To return to the hotel, you head east, then joining the outbound route at 48 km (30 miles), return on rolling and slightly ascending terrain.

Accommodation: Delphi Resort, Delphi

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 7: Transfer to Dublin

Enjoy breakfast at your hotel. At 9:00 a.m., a complimentary transfer of about 4.5 hours is provided to the VBT Self-Guided Air+ hotel in Dublin (Schoolhouse Hotel, 2-8 Northumberland Rd, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4)

along with any other VBT Self-Guided guests. Dublin overflows with cultural riches, from the ancient to the avant-garde. Medieval, Georgian and modern architecture provide a backdrop to a friendly, bustling capital that claims literary giants such as Wilde, Shaw, Joyce, Yeats, Beckett and O'Casey as native sons. VBT provides you with City Information and recommendations for what to see and do in Dublin. Use the rest of the day to relax or to begin exploring the city.

Included Meals: Breakfast