

The Burren

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Meet at Shannon Airport; transfer to Lisdoonvarna
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- Day 2/4** Botanical excursions from our base at Lisdoonvarna
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- Day 5** Morning excursion, afternoon transfer to Shannon Airport
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Departs

May

Focus

Plants. Birds and history

Grading

A. Easy day walks although terrain can be uneven

Dates & prices

See website (tour code MAR01) or brochure

Focus

Plants, birds and history

Highlights

- Enjoy the flora of the Burren's limestone pavement
- Spectacular hill and coastal scenery
- Perfect light for photography
- Enjoy warm hospitality & delicious cuisine at our Lisdoonvarna hotel



Cliffs of Moher



Fairy Foxglove



Field Mouse-ear



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Introduction

The Burren is an area of limestone pavement in County Clare, forming a natural rock garden extending over 200 square kilometres. Walking over this pavement is a unique experience in itself. The rock crevices, called scailps in Ireland, support a huge range of plants - Spring Gentians, Bloody Cranesbills, Mountain Avens, Burnet Roses and Shrubby Cinquefoil are amongst the most colourful. The Burren or Dense-flowered Orchid, a much sought-after Burren specialty, which grows nowhere else in northern Europe has a flowering season confined to just two weeks in mid-late May. Irish Saxifrage, (now extinct in Britain) and the Large-flowered Butterwort, from the mountains of south-west Europe, plus many other plant anomalies, grow together in great profusion, making the Burren flora unique. We shall explore the rugged coastline with its views of the Aran Islands and of the Connemara Mountains across Galway Bay. The Moher cliffs are excellent for seabirds, including Puffins and Kittiwakes. We may also climb Black Head to see one of the best examples of a Stone Age ring fort. Our comfortable hotel in Lisdoonvarna is an ideal centre for our exploration and offers excellent Irish food and hospitality. We will have a chance to taste, and maybe take home, some justly famed local smoked salmon.



Dense-flowered Orchid

Day 1

Arrive Lisdoonvarna; Cappanawalla

During the late morning your tour leader and our local driver will meet those of you arriving by air, at



Large-flowered Butterwort

Shannon Airport, and offer a 1-hour minibus transfer to Lisdoonvarna, where we will be staying for four nights in a comfortable village hotel. Some members of our party may prefer to make their own way to the hotel. Check-in is not usually available until 2pm but if arriving earlier, there will be somewhere to store your luggage until we return from the afternoon excursion. Lunch will be enjoyed at a café before our afternoon walk behind the village of Ballyvaughan along a track leading to Cappanawalla, a mountain of shattered limestone pavement. Here we hope to see, in a wet flush, a prolific colony of the Large-flowered Butterwort (*Pinguicula grandiflora*). It is also a good place to observe the Burnet Rose (*Rosa pimpinellifolia*), growing from the scailps (rock crevices) and Mountain Everlasting or Cat's-foot (*Antennaria dioica*). In fine weather, there can be plenty of butterflies on the hillside,

including Wood White, Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Dingy Skipper and the calls of Cuckoos echo around the slopes.

Day 2

Poll Salach & The Rine

Today we drive along the coast road to Poll Salach, a place where the pavement runs into the sea and every scailp seems to have something different in it. We should find Thrift (*Armeria maritima*), Bloody Cranesbill (*Geranium sanguineum*), Goldenrod (*Solidago vigaurea*) and Spring Sandwort (*Minuartia verna*) in abundance here and we will search for the very rare and diminutive Pyramidal Bugle (*Ajuga pyramidalis*).

We will then drive to Black Head, with its lighthouse, where we hope to see the Irish Saxifrage (*Saxifraga rosacea*) and Mossy Saxifrage (*Saxifraga hypnoides*).

After a delicious lunch in Ballyvaughan and a short exploration of the village, which is the central hub of The Burren, we then move on to The Rine, a low spit of land jutting into the sea. New finds here will include Sea Milkwort (*Glaux maritima*), Field Mouse-ear (*Cerastium arvense*) and Sea Mouse-ear (*Cerastium diffusum*) growing along a sandy bank. We will also look out for two rare Sea Lavenders (*Limonium humile* and *L. recurvum* var. *pseudotranswallii*) and Sea Arrow-grass (*Triglochin maritimum*) in the salt marsh and possibly identify some seaweeds too.



On our return to Lisdoonvarna we may have time to visit a marshy peat meadow where an abundance of different species will be found. Here grows another special plant; Irish Marsh-orchid (*Dactylorhiza kerryensis* var. *occidentalis*) as well as the pretty Meadow Thistle (*Cirsium dissectum*).

Day 3

Slieve Carran & Mullach Mor



Today will drive across The Burren to Slieve Carran National Nature Reserve, where we will hopefully find Fly Orchid (*Ophrys insectifera*) and Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) on the pavements as well as Brittle Bladder-fern (*Cystopteris fragilis*) and Hairy Rock-cress (*Arabis hirsuta*) at an old hermitage site and Holy well.

We will have lunch at Cassidy's Pub and Restaurant in nearby Carran, overlooking the glacial turlough valley. Turloughs are winter lakes which almost disappear in the summer.

Next we drive to Mullach Mor, an area of limestone pavement with a rich flora and several turloughs, Loch Gealain is one of the largest and we shall explore the edges of this. Here we should see large patches of Shrubby Cinquefoil (*Potentilla fruticosa*) and clumps of Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*). If there has

been sufficient draw-down of the turlough we may be lucky to find the tiny Fen or Turlough Violet (*Viola persicifolia*) amongst the Heath Dog-violet (*Viola canina*) and their hybrids. We must look out for the delicate and distinctive Turlough Dandelion (*Taraxacum amarellum*), we should also see the Leopard Marsh Orchid (*Dactylorhiza incarnata subsp. cruenta*) and with luck, the white-flowered variant of Common Spotted Orchid, known as O'Kelly's Orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsia var. okellyi*).

On the return journey we may have time to visit Poulnabrone Portal Dolmen.

Day 4

Caher Bridge Gardens & Formoyle



Today we will purchase our picnic lunch in Lisdoonvarna before heading off for a guided tour of Caher Bridge Garden which makes wonderful use of the only river in The Burren limestone landscape, and we will see what an amazing range plants can be nurtured in this seemingly barren landscape. *"Anyone with even a cursory interest in gardens and plants could not fail to be impressed; Carl has done an astonishing job in converting a wild hillside into a charming and incredibly well-stocked garden."*

We will have our picnic lunch in a suitable picturesque riverside spot and then make our way towards the little ruined chapel of Formoyle. From here we will walk along part of the Green Road (an old walled stock road which stretches across from Ballyvaughan to join the road to Doolin). Here we will find more of the typical, and beautiful, Burren sight of Spring Gentians (*Gentiana verna*) with Mountain Avens (*Dryas octopetala*) in addition, we have a good chance of locating the Burren or Dense-flowered Orchid (*Neotinea maculata*) and many more interesting species.

Day 5

Fanore; Cliffs of Moher; Kilfenora

On our last day we will drive along the coast road to Fanore, where we will explore the sand dunes. In the short turf we will look for Irish Eyebright (*Euphrasia salisburgensis var. hibernica*) and Sea Bindweed (*Calystegia soldanella*), whilst in the rocks we hope to see Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium maritimum*) and we must also look out for Pyramid Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) on the steep dune sides before setting off for a short stop at The Burren Visitor Centre and Cathedral at Kilfenora.

Our final visit will be to the Cliffs of Moher. It is rather spoilt by tourism infrastructure in recent years, we may have to put up with a few coach loads of school parties and tourists. Nevertheless, on a clear day the cliffs are an impressive sight and will offer a chance to enjoy Razorbills, Kittiwakes, Fulmars and Puffins, although views are likely to be quite distant.

Then finally back to catch late afternoon flights home from Shannon Airport.

If you would like to stay on at Lisdoonvarna, we would be delighted to extend your hotel booking. Car hire can also easily be arranged from Shannon Airport or major towns, should you require.

Food & accommodation

Dinner, bed and breakfast are included in the price, and we will be staying at a splendid local hotel which is always extremely popular with group members. Lunches, which will generally be in a pub or restaurant, packed lunches and drinks are not included.

Extra nights can be booked in the hotel via Naturetrek. Please contact us for availability and prices.

Transport

We are likely to be using a bus from a local bus company, complete with knowledgeable local driver!

Recommended reading

The Burren: a Companion to the Wildflowers of an Irish Wilderness

Charles Nelson & Wendy Walsh (Boethius Press, 1991)

Wild Flowers of Britain & Ireland

Marjory Blamey, Richard Fitter, Alastair Fitter

New British Flora of the British Isles

Clive Stace

The Natural History of the Burren

D'Arcy/Hayward (Immel, 1992)

The Book of the Burren

O'Connell (Ed), (Tireolas, 1992 reprint)

Notes

Most floras of the British Isles include Ireland.

Most gift shops in the area have an excellent map of the Burren for around £8 (10 euros).

The bright light off the sea and the limestone peculiar to the Burren, makes the area especially good for photography.

As the weather in this region is extremely variable, we will keep the itinerary flexible.

Flights

Return flights to Shannon are not included in the tour cost, but can be arranged from most major UK airports either privately or through the Naturetrek office. The starting time of the tour will usually revolve around the arrival of the late morning Aer Lingus flight from London Heathrow, usually arriving in Shannon just after 1100 (although sometimes as late as 1pm). The tour will end mid-afternoon on day 4, when members of the tour party returning to Heathrow will have to check-in at the airport for the late afternoon (usually about 1720) Aer Lingus flight back to Heathrow. Anybody arriving in Shannon later than an hour after the Heathrow arrival on day 1 and needing to be back in the airport prior to 1530 or so on day 4 will need to incur extra expense to get themselves from Shannon to Lisdoonvarna and back again.

Flights can also be arranged with Aer Lingus and Ryanair (from Stansted, Birmingham or Manchester) and Flybe (from Glasgow). Schedules vary from year to year; www.skyscanner.net is a useful site in determining which airports service flights to Shannon.

During past years people have also made their way to Shannon from other regional airports using Aer Lingus' connections through Dublin. Check schedules at <http://www.aerlingus.com> or with your local travel agent. On occasions people have also flown to Galway from Manchester with Air Aran, from where we can help organise a taxi to Lisdoonvarna. Please let us know what flights you have booked in good time before the tour.

Alternatively of course you can make your own way to Lisdoonvarna by road, via one of the ferry services from the UK – please let us know your arrangements.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.



Poulnahone