

A Trek for Two Around The West of Ireland

Friday 4th September

Transfer from Shannon Airport to The g Hotel, a Virtuoso hotel in Galway. Day at leisure to recover from the transatlantic flight.

Sat 5th

There is a short drive, out of the city (approx 30 min) to the start point of the ride, at Oughterard. Here you will have your first sight of the horse or pony which is to become your companion for the week. The horses and ponies are assigned to the riders, according to the rider's ability, weight, height etc. After tacking up the ride departs and heads straight into the mountains for a long ride that will finish at Maam Cross, the site of the famous October horse fair.



The trail takes the riders past the ruins of cottages abandoned since the famine, in the 1840's, which decimated the Irish population. As the trail winds its way through the spectacular scenery the view is magnificent, spanning the horizon is the vast expanse of Lough Corrib, the largest lake in southern Ireland.

After lunch the ride continues through the mountains, traversing the bogs and rocks and wading through streams. Way below the trail is the 'Quiet Man Bridge', made famous by the John Wayne movie. The day ends with the first of many canters along the abandoned Galway to Clifden railway line. At the end of the day the horses are turned loose into a lakeside pasture while the Hendricksons travel to their accommodation.

Sunday 6th

Having spent the night at the lakeside pasture at Maam Cross the horses are refreshed and ready to begin the ride from Maam Cross to Ballinafad. The first stage of the ride goes through Willie's land at Maam Cross, where a path takes the riders alongside the beautiful Lough Sindle and past the remains of a long forgotten lime kiln, hidden in a grove of hazel trees. Some of the trees in the area are ancient, yet they remain tiny, bent by the harsh Atlantic winds that batter this area during the winter. Lunch is eaten on a small village green, while the horses graze.

After lunch it is back into the saddle for the final stage of the days ride, through silent woodlands and through the beautiful Inagh Valley. On a clear day riders can see right over the spectacular Connemara landscape to the coast at Rosmuc. The day ends with another canter along the old Galway to Clifden railway line, before the horses are turned out in a pasture at Ballinafad, before the riders return to their accommodation.

Monday 7th

The horses are rounded up and saddled before the ride leaves Ballinafad. This morning the horses wade through a wide mountain stream before heading up into a short stretch of mountain above the ancient Ballinafad cemetery.

The riders then go through the grounds of Ballinahinch Castle, enjoying a long canter through the woodland beforehand. The castle was once the home of an Indian Prince and also Richard Martin who founded the humane society for the protection of animals.

There is a long canter along the old railway line. The grassy track is great fun for a long canter. The horses are set free on the edge of bogland close to Clifden while the Hendricksons eat lunch.



Then it is back into the saddle for the afternoon ride which goes along a grassy track close to Clifden and then heads inland over the Roundstone Bog, site of the landing of the historic flight of Alcock and Brown, who piloted the first transatlantic biplane and the site of the Marconi wireless station. Then we follow the coast to the seaside pasture where the horses will spend the next few nights. The Hendricksons then head to their accommodation in Clifden where they will spend the next few nights.

Tuesday 8th

This is a full day spent on the fabulous Mannin Bay beach. There is mile after mile of sandy beach where riders can gallop and jump over the small stone walls and sandy banks.



This is an unforgettable day. Swim your mount in the clear water of the ocean. It is a unique and very special experience as the horse begins to swim under you. The horses dry off and rest in a beach side pasture while the riders eat a picnic lunch on over the beach over looking the ocean. Then it is back into the saddle for another ride along the beach to discover more of the wonders of this coastline.

Wednesday 9th

The ride begins at the sea and ends at Toombeola, inland over the mountains. The ride follows the coastline, passing small farmsteads, where generations of small farmers have lived and worked. The coastline is beautiful, the water often the colour of a tropical sea. The ride continues into Errisbeg mountain along an old grassy track before our lunch stop, which is eaten in the mountains, overlooking the pasture where the horses eat. Then they are saddled for the ride that takes us high into Errisbeg mountain high above the seaside village of Roundstone. Watch out for the leprechauns that are known to inhabit this area. Below is the stunning scenery of Dogs Bay, which curves out into the Atlantic Ocean. The horses spend the night in a pasture at Toombeola while the Hendricksons travel back to Clifden for the night. Today there could be some fishing opportunities in the local lakes and rivers – fly fishing for brown trout.

Thursday 10th

The Hendricksons are collected from Clifden for this, the final day of the trail. After the horses have been saddled the ride heads straight up into the mountains overlooking Cashel Bay. The trail today goes through the mountains right around the beautiful bay, past long

abandoned villages, where the potato ridges still remain, a memory of a long forgotten way of life. Lunch is eaten close to the small village of Cashel while the horses graze.



Then the horses are resaddled for the final leg of the trail which takes the Hendricksons through Cashel and then along the coastline around Cashel Bay to Willie's Mountain, Shanndonnell, where the ride ends.

The horses are unsaddled and set free into the mountain pasture while the Hendricksons set off towards Kerry, stopping at The Mustard Seed at Echo Lodge in Adare on the way down for the night.

Friday 11th

In the morning transfer from Adare to Sheen Falls, a 2 hour journey.

Sat 12th

Depart from Sheen falls back to Shannon, a 3 hour journey.

Alternative accommodations:-

My advice is to spend the last two nights at Gregans Castle, a country house hotel on the Burren, very peaceful. Or head up to Ashford Castle, the 5* resort on the banks of Lough Corrib.