

Suggested Itineraries

The Mustard Seed Hotel in County Limerick overlooks the sleepy rural village of Ballingarry set in the heart of the countryside. Guests at our county Limerick accommodation can experience the tranquillity, clean air and delightful walks in the surrounding hills and countryside. Cycling, angling, shooting and horse riding are all available nearby.



For the golf enthusiast, there is an excellent choice of courses all within easy driving distance.

Lahinch - 93 km

Ballybunion - 67 km

Tralee - 70 km

Adare - 13 km

The Mustard Seed at Echo Lodge is the ideal base for touring the south-west region of Ireland. The Dingle peninsula, Killarney and the Ring of Kerry, the Cliffs of Moher and the Burren are all within driving distance. Adare - "Ireland's prettiest village" - is ten minutes drive away. Spend an afternoon treasure hunting in the antique shops and craft centres.

The Library at Echo Lodge is filled with an interesting collection of books for that rainy day by the fire.

1. Ballingarry village and surrounds

Spend an easy day strolling through the rural village of Ballingarry. There are ruins of an early Norman castle in the middle of the village. While it is situated on private property and access is poor, it is worth a stroll as the condition is excellent considering its age. The spire of the Roman Catholic Church can be seen for miles around and the church itself is similar to a small cathedral with palatial décor.

The village is overlooked by Knockfernia, a 286m high hill sacred to Donn Firinne, Celtic god to the Otherworld, or Death. The hill has many strange legends and stories.

Also known as the 'hill of truth,' a great expanse of territory embracing six counties, many mountain ranges and the Shannon estuary can be seen from the summit on a clear day. There is a rough track for walkers, which leads to the top.

As the famine took effect in the 1840's, local who were evicted from their own houses fled to Knockfernia, which at the time was commonage. They built simple mud huts and fed on the roots of wild vegetation. As the starvation intensified, all the inhabitants died.

Today, the simple mud huts remain, partially restored, as a stark reminder of their suffering.

Weather permitting; this trek is the ideal way to work up an appetite for dinner!!

2. Surrounding District

Adare (13km) is one of Ireland's prettiest villages. The heritage centre (www.adareheritagecentre.com) will provide you with the local history and there are several [craft shops](#) to browse in. There are several historic ruins to explore. The Trinitarian Abbey, now the Catholic Church, dates back to 1230. The Augustinian Priory was founded in 1325, was restored in 1807 and now serves as the Church of Ireland. The Franciscan Friary, Desmond castle and the Church of St. Nicolas are located in the heart of the Adare Manor Golf Club. Along the main street, there are some well preserved, inhabited thatched cottages, one of Adare's best known features.

Curraghchase forest park is 15 minutes drive from Adare. This state forest and park has nature trails, forest walks, and a lake and picnic area. Curraghchase House, an 18th century building was the home to poet Aubrey de Vere. It is now a picturesque ruin having been destroyed by fire in 1941.

Limerick City (www.limerick.ie) is 20 minutes drive from Adare. Here you can visit the hunt museum (www.huntmuseum.com) and also King John's Castle (www.shannonheritage.com/KJC.htm)

The castle, built around 1200, is one of the finest examples of Norman architecture in Ireland. There are several multi-storey car parks in the city centre with a good range of shops for all ages.

Finish the day by discovering the pre Celtic history at Lough Gur (www.shannonheritage.com/loughgur.htm) or finish the evening at the medieval banquet at Bunratty Castle (www.shannonheritage.com/Bunratty_Ban.htm) for authentic entertainment.

An alternative to travelling to Limerick City the N69 route from Adare will take you along the coast road heading west. Stop in Askeaton (www.askeatonbynet.com) one of Ireland's oldest villages, to explore the ancient ruins. From there travel to Foynes where the famous Irish coffee originated and visit the aviation museum. (www.flyingboatmuseum.com). Next stop is Tarbert, the link for the car ferry to Co. Clare. If you yearn for a swim in the sea water on a summer's day or take a walk on the beach during the winter continue on the R551 to our nearest sea side resort of Ballybunion, home of the renowned golf courses. Branch onto the R523 and continue to Listowel.

Listowel, a good shopping town is famous for its literary heritage and birthplace of John B Keane. The route home to Ballingarry is the R555 to Abbeyfeale and N21 to Newcastle West where you branch onto

the R520 to Ballingarry.

3. Cork, the rebel county

Cork city is approx. 1 hour drive (N20) from Ballingarry. The European capital of culture for 2005 is located just beyond Blarney where you can visit the famous Blarney Castle (www.blarneycastle.ie) to kiss the 'stone of eloquence.' The Blarney Woollen Mills flagship store is worth a visit to pick up traditional memories of your travels.

Kinsale, 30 minutes south of Cork City, is one of the most picturesque and fashionable resorts on the south west coast. It is famous for its yachting, gourmet restaurants and of course the 'Old Head golf course.' There are guided tours available of 'Charles Fort' a 17th century star shaped fortress and the 16th century Desmond castle is also worth exploring.

The town of Cobh is situated 30 minutes south east of Cork city on Great Island, one of the three large islands in Cork harbour which are now all joined by roads and bridges. Cobh harbour is one of the largest and safest anywhere, being capable of taking the largest vessels afloat.

On the quayside there is a memorial to the victims of the Lusitania, many of whom are buried in the old church cemetery. The ship was sunk off Kinsale in 1915 by German submarines. Cobh (formerly known as Queenstown) was the last port of call for the Titanic before she embarked on her fateful maiden voyage. Cobh, the Queenstown story, is displayed in the heritage centre and is an imaginative illustrative story of emigration from Cobh during the famine period in 1845 and afterwards.

On your journey home, you can side track from the main N20 route, to Doneraile (R522) to visit the forest park and demesne. Doneraile is a small town steeped in history and is the perfect stop for a picnic and a walk.

4. Ring of Kerry

One of the most famous and popular road circuits in the south west of Ireland, the ring of Kerry traverses the coastline of the Inveragh peninsula with lots of tourist sites along the way.

Beginning in Killorglin, one and a half hours from Ballingarry, the ring is 179 km long and will provide an extensive and fulfilling day trip. It is best to travel anti-clockwise to avoid meeting the coach tours 'head on.'

The scenery is breathtaking and continues to amaze even us, the Irish folk! Allow plenty of time at the end of the ring to stroll through the streets of Kenmare, a noble heritage town with lots of great shops and restaurants.

Homewards towards Killarney, the tourist capital of the region. Visit Muckross House and gardens (www.muckross-house.ie) the torc waterfalls and Killarney national park.

If all that exploring sounds like too much hard work, Killarney alone will make a perfect, easy day trip being just over 1 hour's drive from Ballingarry.

5. Dingle peninsula

Beginning at Tralee, 1 hour from Ballingarry, the Dingle peninsula like the ring of Kerry has a spectacularly scenic peripheral road. Tiny villages are situated in coastal pockets along the route. The Blasket Islands are situated 3 miles off Dunquin Pier and there is a ferry crossing available.

Dingle is the most westerly town in Europe and the chief town of the peninsula. A progressive town, it still retains much of the old world atmosphere of a fishing village.

6. Cliffs of Moher and The Burren

There are two options when planning to travel to the west coast. You could take the N21 to Limerick city and then the N18 towards Ennis (as you would go to Shannon airport) or you could also take the scenic route by travelling along the N69 towards Tarbert where the car ferry (www.shannonferries.com) will take you across to Killimer. The journey is 20 minutes and there is a regular service.

From Killimer continue along the coast road (N67). Kilrush and Kilkee are popular sea side towns. Doonbeg is famous for its golf course and Miltown Malbay for its traditional music festivals.

Take the R478 from Lahinch to the Cliffs of Moher, one of Irelands most spectacular sights. Standing 230 metres above ground level at their highest point and 8 km long, the cliffs boast one of the most amazing views of Ireland.

Continue to the Burren (www.theburrencentre.ie) on the R481. This limestone plateau covers over 300sq. km and is of extreme importance to geologists, botanists and archaeologists from Ireland and beyond. It is the longest karstic limestone area in Western Europe. With its many rare alpine plants, gentians, mountain avens, maidenhair ferns, underground rivers and grykes, it is sure to delight any explorer. The Burren has many reminders of ancient history with megalithic tombs, Celtic crosses, a ruined Cistercian abbey and several wedge tombs. On a clear day there are great views of Galway bay and the Aran Islands.

The route home can be the R476 to Ennis and then the N18 to Limerick city, passing Bunratty. If you still have daylight and energy, you can stop to tour the castle and folk park (www.shannonheritage.com/Folk_Park.htm) and drop into Durty Nellie's for a sun downer! From Limerick the N21 will bring you to Adare and the R519 to Ballingarry.

