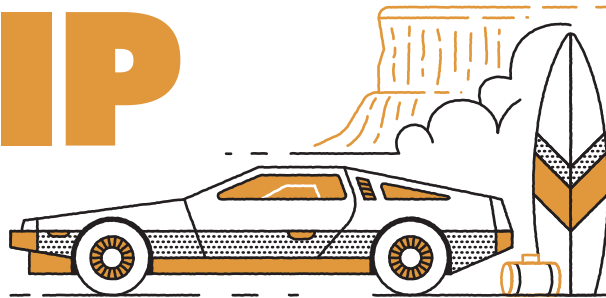


# ROAD TRIP

## THE BURREN, IRELAND



► **Miles:** 55 • **Days on the Road:** 3 • **Scenic Overlook:** Corkscrew Hill on Road N67 • **Archaeology:** Poul nabrone Dolmen near Ballyvaughan



Framed by its mighty Cliffs of Moher, the Burren region of western Ireland is a wonder of lunar landscapes, megalithic monuments, and beautiful botany. The 205-square-mile UNESCO Global Geopark is one of the only places in the world where arctic, alpine, and Mediterranean plants grow side by side. The name “Burren” derives from the Irish

Gaelic for “stony place,” and the dramatic rocky setting has captivated creatives from Tolkien to Spielberg. It’ll take hold of you too, especially if you follow this route in the spring, when wildflowers paint the hillsides in hues of pink, yellow, and blue. The narrow roads are more fit for cows than cars, so drive slowly and practice the traditional one-finger salute—index finger, that is—with oncoming locals.

—Serena Renner

Paths edging the Cliffs of Moher offer broad views of the Atlantic Ocean.





#### 1. ENNISTYMON

### First Bite

Roughly 30 miles from Shannon Airport, the **Cheese Press** in Ennistymon is the best place to stock up on road trip provisions and sample delicious bites from the Burren Food Trail. The specialty grocery, opened in 2017 by Sinéad Ní Gháirbhith of the St. Tola goat cheese company, stocks more than 40 varieties of Irish cheese plus Burren-roasted Anam Coffee, organic veggies from Moy Hill Farm, sandwiches with house-baked sourdough, and local kombucha. Check the shop's Facebook page for events such as tastings and yoga.

#### 2. LAHINCH

### Tide Me Over

In this salt-swept town, **Ben's Surf Clinic** has a knack for getting aspiring shredders comfortable in North Atlantic waves. Those who prefer land can forage for edible seaweed on walks with **Wild Kitchen**. After collecting sea lettuce, truffle-flavored pepper dulse, and nutrient-rich dillisk, you can taste them in dishes paired with elderflower "champagne."

#### 3. CLIFFS OF MOHER

### Sheer Beauty

Yes, there will be crowds, but this extraordinary escarpment is a must-see. Brave the tour buses to reach the **Cliffs of Moher Visitor Centre**, a concrete and stone edifice carved into a grassy headland. Displays themed around the local landscapes and culture fill the cavernous interior, while walkways lead to viewing platforms and the 19th-century O'Brien's Tower, which marks the cliffs' highest point (about 700 feet above the roiling sea). On a clear day, the vista extends from the puffin-peppered Great Sea Stack to the Gaelic-speaking Aran Islands. For more sights, explore the **Cliffs of Moher Coastal Walk** or take a boat trip with the **Doolin Ferry Company**.

#### 4. DOOLIN

### String Section

You know you've reached Doolin when you spot colorful sweater shops and perennial pubs such as **McGann's**, **McDermott's**, and **O'Connor's**, where local music legends play. Check out **Ekotree**, a new design studio that puts a high-tech spin on traditional Irish knits.

#### 5. LISDOONVARNA

### Smokin' Hot

On the drive in, crank up the Christy Moore tune "Lisdoonvarna." Then head to **Burren Smokehouse** to taste the smoked salmon that's fed three U.S. presidents. Park it for the night at **Wild Honey Inn**; its gastropub earned a Michelin star in 2018.

#### 6. KILFENORA

### Downright Divine

The birthplace of one of Ireland's oldest *ceili* dance bands, Kilfenora looks like it's been petrified by the surrounding peat bogs. The gabled **Kilfenora Cathedral** is known for its high crosses, particularly the oversize Doorty Cross that depicts Saint Peter blessing Kilfenora's upgrade from a monastic to a diocesan site in the 12th century. Agriculture's also key here. Learn about it with Eva and Stephen Hegarty on a tour of their **Burren Free Range Pork Farm**, complete with samples of products made from the British Saddle-back swine. A stay in the farm's **Burren Glamping** trailer comes with a break-fast of thick-cut bacon, tender sausage, eggs, and toast with homemade jam.

#### 7. CARRAN

### On the Scent

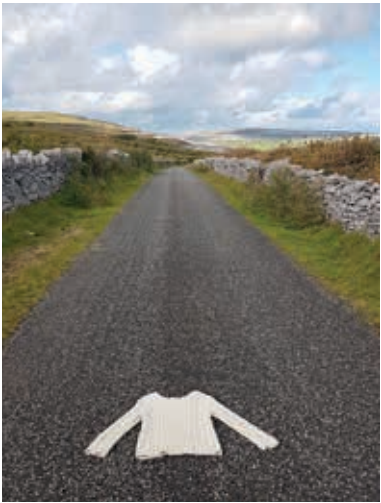
Tucked into the rocky highlands of the Carran, the **Burren Perfumery** distills the essence of the surrounding flora into small-batch fragrances, lotions, soaps, and candles. The newest perfume, launching in spring, incorporates meadowsweet and wild ivy, which visitors can smell in the flourishing herb garden out back. To get beneath the Burren's stone surface, however, book a tour of the **Slieve Carran Nature Reserve** with **Heart of Burren Walks**. Enthusiastic guide Tony Kirby shares facts and legends about the Carran Turlough (a disappearing lake), Saint Colman's Hermitage, ancient monuments, and the hardy wildflowers that manage to bloom from cracks in the limestone.

#### 8. BELL HARBOUR

### Ocean Bound

As you head back to the coast, turn into the 300-year-old family farm that houses **Hazel Mountain Chocolate**. A window into the kitchen lets visitors watch as the confections—infused with Burren honey, hazelnuts, elderberry, and seaweed—are handcrafted from bean to bar. Continue to the late 12th-century **Corcomroe Abbey** and the adjacent remains of an Iron Age hilltop fort. Then hunt for **Julia's Lobster Truck**, which slings fish and chips, steamed mussels, and lobster rolls on weekends outside **Daly's** bar.

**Top left and bottom right: knitwear by Ekotree; clockwise from top right: foraged fare from Wild Kitchen, a guest room at Gregans Castle Hotel, Burren Perfumery.**



#### 9. FLAGGY SHORE

### Fish and Scripts

If you miss the seafood truck, you can still get your fill of local scallops, crab, lobster, and gigas oysters on the waterfront at **Linnane's Bar**, located in a centuries-old former cottage-pub-post office. A sweet spot for dessert is **Café Linnalla Ice Cream**. The most westerly ice cream parlor in Europe scoops creative flavors, from foraged blackberry to Baileys Irish Cream with sea salt to wild sea buckthorn (which tastes surprisingly like peach). Take your cone on a walk to the owners' eighth-generation dairy farm, which supplies milk for the ice cream. Then amble out to the fossil-strewn **Flaggy Shore**, described by poet Seamus Heaney in "Postscript" as a place that can "catch the heart off guard and blow it open."

#### 10. BALLYVAUGHAN

### Artists' Retreat

As twilight falls, settle in at **Gregans Castle Hotel**, a luxe hideaway frequented by Heaney as well as J.R.R. Tolkien and Steven Spielberg. In the rooms—named after local wildflowers, places, and people—antique furnishings sit beside family heirlooms and modern art. Tolkien fans should book the Martyn Suite, the former home's kitchen, where the owner, Frank Martyn, and the author gathered for drinks in the 1950s. For an end-of-the-road splurge, indulge in the restaurant's nine-course tasting menu, which features Irish delicacies such as spring lamb, rich cheeses, cherries, and wild mushrooms. Raise a glass of wine to the *craic* (good times), and say, "Slainte!"