

The Western Way



The view from Croagh Patrick.

Every hiker knows it: a trip that, for whatever reason, is at the top of the list "Unforgettable". Because you have performed (far) above expectations, or have had to perform. Because the nature around you was so impressive and unique. Because the conditions during the trip were extreme. Certain tours simply have something special, so they will remain forever etched in your memory.

The Western Way is one such trip. A more than 200 kilometres long, marked hiking trail through the spectacular landscapes of the counties of Galway and Mayo that ends at the border with the county of Sligo. This county is located in the distant, desolate and forgotten northwest of Ireland. The entire route can be walked in twelve to thirteen stages. The route has no significant climbs, the total ascent along the way is 1,700 meters. The route follows old forest paths, heath paths, post roads, "green roads", parts without a path where you walk from marker post to marker, and occasionally pieces of asphalt. Decking has been laid out here and there, but you have to take into account some rather wet routes, especially after a rain shower. It's tempting to try to jump from poll to poll for a few more miles, but once you've realized the futility of it, you just start socking without stopping.



Walking through the moorlands.

You're on your own now!

The defining theme of this walking tour is: '*you're on your own now!*', the reason that the Western Way is at the top of our list. After all, you do not have the experience every day that you do not meet a person in the outside world between half past nine in the morning and half past six in the evening. On such a day, you take a break from civilization, so to speak. This gives you plenty of room to take in the fascinating wilderness, to discover how many shades of brown there are in a moorland. See what sun and wind "do" with peat bogs and hilltops, what the vast uninhabited and pristine landscape with the Nephin Beg mountains does to you, and how soothing a continuous pattern of ferociously pounding waves of the North Atlantic on the steep rocks of Downpatrick Head can be.



Folk music in de pub.

The Gaeltacht

From a sparsely populated area, to a region with flourishing cultural traditions is a small step here. Large parts of the walking area belong to the Gaeltacht. These are areas where the Irish language is the vernacular, where you can still hear the original Irish folk music in a pub, where you are invited to sing a song and then be treated to an extensive Irish folk song, lubricated and enthused by the Guinness. At closing time you will most likely come to the conclusion that, when it comes to singing, we are still miles behind the Irish.

The Gaeltacht is also the area that experienced the greatest depopulation during the Great Famine of 1845-1850. You will encounter countless memories of that time during the trip. The *National Famine Memorial* by John Behan, an impressive statue of a "coffin ship", for example, at the foot of the Croagh Patrick (at 750 meters altitude). This is a sacred mountain and pilgrimage site for the Irish. You can take a day to make the climb.



Glencullen

Wild beauty

Of course you will also pass through many other inhabited parts during the route. These are also very worthwhile to visit, if only to find a B&B for the night. Walking around the northern slopes of the Maumturk mountains and then via an old stagecoach road with some farms Leenaun is a very beautiful stage. Along the way you will also visit Westport, a town with almost 6000 inhabitants. But what you ultimately remember, after years of the route, is the overriding feeling of the pristineness and the "*wild beauty*", as Oscar Wilde once described it.

General tips for the route

- Prepare well: there is shelter on the way, but this is sometimes difficult to find.
- The weather can be very variable.
- Bring good maps or gpx and a compass, along with plenty of food and drink.
- Good maps are, for example, the maps of the Ordnance Survey of Ireland 1:50,000, numbers: 37, 38, 44, 45 and 31.
- Prepare for wet stretches.
- Prepare for places without phone coverage.
- Some routes are not suitable for beginners, don't go out alone.
- Upon departure, have your B&B call the B&B of arrival about your expected time of arrival.
- Free camping is often tolerated.
- For a great video about the "most remote mountain in Ireland" : see elsewhere.

Below some fotos : "You're on your own now"







