

Westport – Louisburgh – Clare Island

Day Tour

Westport-Louisburgh-Clare Island

Leave Westport taking the R335 to Louisburgh. As you pass the Quay, it is worth visiting the **Clew Bay Heritage Centre** located at the Harbour. The centre provides a genealogical service and accommodates a wide selection of historical and archaeological artefacts.

On leaving The Centre continue on the Louisburgh Road. On your right enjoy the breathtaking views of Clew Bay with its numerous islands, (tops of submerged drumlins) and to your left, the glory of Croagh Patrick, Ireland's "Holy Mountain" and one of Ireland's most famous landmarks, soaring to a height of 762 metres. St. Patrick is reputed to have spent forty days and nights praying and fasting on the summit, in 441 A.D. as part of his efforts to convert pagan Ireland to Christianity. A recent archaeological survey has shown that the summit of Croagh Patrick was a Bronze Age hillfort, complete with stone ramparts and dwellings.

At Murrisk, approx. 6 miles from Westport on the right hand side of the road, opposite Croagh Patrick, is the **National Famine Monument**, unveiled by President Mary Robinson in 1997, which commemorates all those who died in the great Famine of 1845-49. The road to the right leads to the ruins of the 15th century Augustinian Murrisk Friary, on the shore of Clew Bay.

Towards Louisburgh there are many fine Blue Flag beaches along the coastline, Bertra, Old Head and Carrowmore.

Louisburgh, (the name in Irish, Cluain Cearban, means The Meadow of the Buttercups), was renamed after the uncle of the Marquis of Sligo who, in 1758, helped capture the French fortress of Louisburgh in Nova Scotia.

Go straight through Louisburgh. About a mile along this road take a turn right, signposted Roonagh Quay. From here two ferry services operate to **Clare Island**, (duration of trip 20 minutes). Check Tourist Information Office in Westport for ferry times.

Clare Island, at the mouth of Clew Bay, is the largest island in the bay, with a population of approx. 150. On a rocky headland at the harbour is the 15th century castle which was once the stronghold of Granuaile, the pirate queen. There is a beautiful sandy Blue Flag Beach surrounding the main harbour.

Clare Island's remarkably varied terrain offers the ideal territory for both serious hill-walkers and the casual visitor out for a stroll. Within easy walking distance of the harbour is the 13th century Cistercian Abbey, which contains rare medieval wall and ceiling paintings.

The last ferry leaves the island at approx. 7.00 p.m. Alternatively, there is hotel, hostel, and B&B accommodation available on the island.

