



Overland
IRELAND
SMALL GROUPS. BIG EXPERIENCES.

Ireland Trip Planning Guide



TO THE EMERALD ISLE IN 2026!



How long have you dreamed of exploring Ireland's rolling green hills, exploring its compelling mix of culture and history, and discovering its fun and fascinating towns and cities? Well, 2026 is the year to make it happen! With its mix of breathtaking landscapes, rich heritage, and famously warm hospitality, the Emerald Isle is the perfect destination for couples, families, and friends looking for a truly unique travel experience.

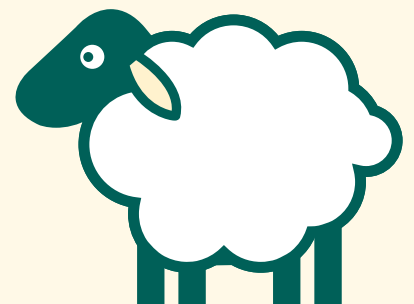
At Overland Ireland, we believe travel should be more than checking sights off a list. It's about getting under the skin of a place, hearing local stories, and enjoying authentic activities. That's why we have crafted our [small-group Ireland tours](#) to showcase the raw, unfiltered side of the place we call home. And we take the same approach when designing [tailor-made tours of Ireland](#) from scratch!

So let's get started. Here's your complete guide to planning a trip to Ireland in 2026. If you think of any questions as we go, please don't hesitate to [get in touch](#).

Why Ireland? An Overview of Our Country's Regions & Highlights

One of the things that makes Ireland so special is its variety. In just a few hours, you can travel from dramatic cliffs to rolling farmland, from lively cities to quiet fishing villages. With the right guidance, you can experience it all – the landscapes, the history, and the legendary Irish hospitality that makes every journey memorable.

To get your Ireland trip planning started, here's a look at some of the country's most captivating regions:



The Wild Atlantic Way

Stretching over 1,500 miles along Ireland's western seaboard, the Wild Atlantic Way is one of the world's great coastal routes. Expect rugged cliffs, windswept beaches, and plenty of lively towns where traditional music spills out of pub doors. It's a region that embodies the raw, untamed spirit of Ireland – and where many of Overland's tours spend their most unforgettable days.

Galway & the West

[Galway is the cultural heart of Ireland](#) and a must-visit on any trip along the Wild Atlantic Way. The city hums with creativity, from its medieval streets and bustling festivals to its thriving food and arts scenes. It's a place that perfectly balances tradition and modern Irish life.

Just outside the city, you'll find Connemara – a landscape of bogs, lakes, and mist-covered mountains that feels almost otherworldly. The Aran Islands, accessible by ferry, offer a step back in time with windswept stone walls, Irish-speaking locals, and views that stretch endlessly across the Atlantic.

Kerry & Cork

Further south along the Wild Atlantic Way lie the counties of Kerry and Cork, two jewels of Ireland's southwest coast. Kerry is home to the world-famous Ring of Kerry and the Dingle Peninsula, where emerald-green hills tumble toward the ocean and winding roads reveal breathtaking views at every turn. The Skellig Islands, just off the coast, add a touch of ancient mystery to the region.

Cork, Ireland's second-largest city, is known for its charm and character. It's a city with a distinctly local feel – full of artisan markets, riverfront cafes, and friendly conversation. Beyond the city, West Cork offers some of the most beautiful coastal drives in Ireland, with colorful villages like Kinsale and Clonakilty providing perfect stops for seafood and scenery.



The Ancient East

Step into Ireland's storybook past in the Ancient East – a region where every hill, ruin, and riverside seems to whisper tales of bygone eras. Here you'll find prehistoric tombs older than the pyramids, grand Norman castles, and monastic ruins hidden in misty valleys. Wander through Kilkenny's medieval streets, discover Viking heritage in Waterford, and trace the footsteps of saints and scholars in Ireland's oldest landscapes. This region feels timeless – the kind of place where history doesn't just sit behind glass; it surrounds you.



Northern Ireland and The Causeway Coastal Route

Few drives in the world rival Northern Ireland's Causeway Coastal Route. It's a breathtaking road winding between cliffs, beaches, and charming seaside villages. Every turn brings a new view, from the hexagonal stones of the Giant's Causeway to the dizzying heights of the Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge. Stop to explore Dunluce Castle, a dramatic ruin perched on the edge of a cliff, or detour inland to the Glens of Antrim for quiet forest walks and waterfalls.

In Belfast, discover a city transformed. Once the heart of shipbuilding, Northern Ireland's capital is now a hub of creativity and culture. Visit Titanic Belfast, explore the murals that tell the city's turbulent story, and enjoy some of the best food and live music anywhere on our island.

We love heading north of the border, which is why we wrote the [Complete Guide to Visiting Northern Ireland](#). Be sure to check it out when you have finished here!



The Hidden Heartlands

Tucked between Ireland's famous coasts, the Hidden Heartlands offer a quieter kind of magic. This is where winding rivers, mirror-like lakes, and rolling pastures create postcard-perfect scenery, but without the crowds. Wander through sleepy villages, uncover ancient monasteries like Clonmacnoise, or enjoy a slow afternoon kayaking on the River Shannon.

It's the Ireland of gentle conversation and timeless charm, where locals still greet you with a smile and every pub feels like home.

Each region has its own character, which is why so many travelers choose a guided or [self-drive tour](#) of Ireland that strings together as many of these highlights as possible.

Do you want to discover even more about Ireland's regions? Don't miss our picks for the [most beautiful counties in Ireland](#).



Best Times to Visit Ireland in 2026

Ireland is beautiful year-round, but the experience changes with the seasons. Whether you're chasing long summer evenings or peaceful spring landscapes, there's always something to look forward to. Here's what each season brings – and why 2026 is the perfect time to start planning your trip.

Spring in Ireland (Mar to May)

Spring in Ireland feels full of promise. The countryside bursts into color with wildflowers, fresh green fields, and newborn lambs dotting the hillsides. April, in particular, is a wonderful month to visit. It's warm enough for outdoor adventures and quiet enough to enjoy popular sights before the summer buzz begins. It's a favorite time of year for hiking, cycling, and exploring local villages.

- **Average temperatures:**
54 to 60°F (12 to 16°C)
- **Daylight:** Around 11 to 15 hours

Summer in Ireland (Jun to Aug)

Summer is when Ireland truly shines. Long daylight hours mean more time to explore (up to 17 hours of light in June and early July), and every town and village seems to come alive. July and August are peak months for festivals, music sessions, and outdoor adventures. It's the best time to experience Ireland's famous warmth and energy, from kayaking on Dingle Bay to joining a local celebration on the Wild Atlantic Way.

Our blog [What to Expect When Visiting Ireland in the Summer?](#) takes a closer look at what's in store for visitors during this season.

- **Average temperatures:**
64 to 70°F (18 to 21°C)
- **Daylight:** Up to 17 hours in June

Autumn in Ireland (Sep to Oct)

Autumn wraps Ireland in soft, golden light. It's harvest season, so you'll find food and drink festivals, cozy pubs serving hearty local fare, and plenty of scenic drives through colorful countryside. It's still warm enough to hike, golf, or cycle, and the slower pace of travel makes it a great time to connect with locals.

- **Average temperatures:**
57 to 63°F (14 to 17°C)
- **Daylight:** 10 to 13 hours

Winter in Ireland (Nov to Feb)

Ireland's winter has its own kind of charm. Towns glow with festive lights, Christmas markets fill the streets, and castle hotels feel extra cozy with open fires and hearty meals. It's a peaceful time for travelers looking for a relaxed and authentic escape.

- **Average temperatures:**
46 to 50°F (8 to 10°C)
- **Daylight:** 7 to 9 hours

A quick note on our Ireland tours:

Overland Ireland's guided small-group tours take place from spring through autumn, the best months for exploring Ireland's landscapes and meeting new friends along the way. For those who prefer to travel independently, our [self-drive tours of Ireland](#) run year-round, letting you design your own adventure, whatever the season.



Festivals in Ireland Worth Timing Your Trip Around

Attending local festivals is a fantastic way to sample local life in Ireland. They bring communities together and offer an excuse to have a party... Not that we need much excuse here in Ireland! With this in mind, it's always a good idea to see if your travel dates line up with any of the year's most popular celebrations.

Looking for some inspiration? Here's a selection of our favorite events. And if you're hungry for more, be sure to read our blog [Top Irish Festivals to Pair with Our Small-Group Tours of Ireland](#).

- **St Patrick's Festival (March):** The quintessential Irish festival! Celebrated nationwide, but Dublin hosts the biggest parade.
- **Galway International Arts Festival (July):** A world-class mix of theater, music, and street art in the bohemian city of Galway.
- **Fleadh Cheoil (August):** The biggest celebration of traditional Irish music. The festival moves to a different venue each year, with Belfast hosting in 2026.
- **Cork Jazz Festival (October):** A renowned five-day jazz event that attracts fans and talented musicians from around the world.
- **Halloween in Derry (October):** Experience the frights of Europe's largest Halloween festival, Derry Halloween. This truly is Halloween HQ!

If St Patrick's Day is on your radar, we've got something you'll love! Read our blog [St Patrick's Day in Ireland: All You Need to Know](#) to find out more about the ultimate Ireland celebration!



Practical Travel Tips for Ireland

Planning your first trip to Ireland? You'll understandably want to make sure things go smoothly while you're here. Our team knows a thing or two about exploring this incredible country – we've been doing it day in, day out for years!

These are the travel tips we always share with anyone planning a trip to Ireland.



Packing

Ireland's weather is famously changeable. Bring layers, a waterproof jacket, and comfortable walking shoes. Even in summer, evenings can be cool, so a warm jumper (sweater) is handy. Our blog [What to Pack on a Trip to Ireland](#) is filled with even more valuable local insights!

Driving

If you're planning a self-drive trip, remember that in Ireland we drive on the left. Roads in rural areas can be narrow and winding, but that's part of the charm. Allow more time than you think between stops – you'll want to pull over for photo breaks often!

Tempted to hit the road under your own steam? If you're leaning toward a road trip, be sure to read our advice about [navigating Ireland's roads](#). It's a first-timer's guide for US drivers!

Itinerary Choices

You can see Ireland by car on a self-drive tour or join a guided small-group trip where someone else takes the wheel. Both have their perks: self-driving means total flexibility, while guided tours take away all the stress of navigation.

If you're struggling to decide between the two, we recommend reading our blog [Guided Tours of Ireland vs. Self-Drive Tours](#) of Ireland next.

Money & Customs

The euro is used in the Republic of Ireland, while Northern Ireland uses the British pound. Credit cards are widely accepted. Tipping is appreciated but not obligatory; around 10% in restaurants is typical. In taxis, you can just say "keep the change" to the driver, and, for guided tours, the industry standard for tipping outstanding service is between €15 and €20 per day. Of course, this is totally up to the guest!

In pubs, just be sure to buy your round at the bar! [Our Guide to Tipping in Ireland](#) is a great resource on this topic.

Local Etiquette

The Irish are famously friendly. A simple "hello" when you walk into a shop or pub goes a long way. And don't be surprised if locals strike up a chat! Remember, in Ireland, we love the craic! This is a versatile Irish term that broadly means fun or a good time.

Sample Ireland Itineraries & Overland Highlights

At Overland Ireland, our small-group and self-drive tours offer a mix of experiences designed to showcase the best of our country. Our tours range in length, offering one-of-a-kind vacations to suit every traveler. Let us introduce just some of our incredible Irish experiences:

10-Day Ultimate Ireland Tour

Our flagship tour covers the Cliffs of Moher, Dingle, Killarney National Park, Galway, Northern Ireland, and so much more. You'll experience Ireland's best landscapes and cultural highlights, from the Wild Atlantic Way to vibrant cities around the country.

For the complete picture, visit the [Ultimate Ireland Tour](#) page.



5-Day Spectacular South & West Active Tour

Focused on Ireland's magical south and west regions, this tour takes in Cork, Kinsale, parts of the Ring of Kerry, the Dingle Peninsula, and Galway. It's a perfect balance of coast, countryside, and culture.

Sound like your kind of adventure? Read the full itinerary for the [Spectacular South & West Ireland Active Tour](#).

7-Day Northern Way Self-Drive Tour of Ireland

Explore Northern Ireland's highlights on a road trip you'll never forget. Visit Belfast, Newgrange, the Giant's Causeway, Derry, Donegal, and more. A must for history buffs and fans of dramatic scenery!

Looking to hit the road with independence and flexibility? Discover what else is on the [Northern Way Self-Drive Tour](#) itinerary.



Tailor-Made Tours of Ireland: Luxury, Flexibility, and Unforgettable Experiences

If you've ever dreamed of a trip to Ireland that is completely yours, with every detail planned to match your interests, pace, and style, our tailor-made tours of Ireland are exactly what you're looking for. Perfect for couples, families, or small groups, these bespoke journeys allow you to see the Emerald Isle your way, without compromise.

Why choose a tailor-made tour?

With Overland Ireland, flexibility is at the heart of every custom itinerary. Whether you want to explore dramatic coastlines, step inside historic castles, sample Ireland's finest culinary experiences, or trace your ancestral roots, we'll design a journey that balances adventure, culture, and relaxation. Unlike pre-planned tours, you set the priorities, and we make them happen.

Luxury with local charm

Our tailor-made trips combine comfort and authenticity, from boutique hotels and country manor stays to charming coastal inns. Imagine waking up in a centuries-old castle, enjoying a locally sourced breakfast, then stepping out to explore rolling hills, secret bays, or lively village markets, all at your own pace.

Adventure, culture, and connection

Fancy a bit of adventure? Kayak on the Wild Atlantic Way, hike hidden trails, or cycle through the heartlands. Interested in history? Visit medieval castles, monastic ruins, and [Ireland's UNESCO sites](#) with your own private guide. Or focus on music, food, and local experiences! Every itinerary is as unique as you are.

Peace of mind and expert guidance

Planning your dream trip can feel daunting, but with Overland Ireland, you have an expert team behind you. We handle all the logistics, suggest experiences you might never have found on your own, and ensure that every moment reflects your interests. It's stress-free, unforgettable, and entirely yours.

Next steps

Find out all about [our tailor-made tours of Ireland](#) and let us bring your dream trip to life. Don't forget to browse our full range of Ireland tours to find the perfect fit for your needs. And for added peace of mind, discover what makes us the trusted choice for exploring the Emerald Isle in our blog [Why Travel with Overland?](#)

Local Insights & Ireland's Hidden Gems

Ireland's iconic sights – the Cliffs of Moher, the Giant's Causeway, or the Blarney Stone – are famous for a reason. They're spectacular, and you won't want to miss them. But at Overland Ireland, we believe the real magic lies in the hidden gems off the beaten path; the places where you can feel the heart and soul of our country.

Our small-group tours and tailor-made itineraries focus on these authentic experiences, guided by locals who know the land and its stories. By working exclusively with smaller, locally owned operators, family-run accommodations, and expert guides, we ensure that your visit not only delights you but also supports the communities you encounter.

Every stop, every activity, and every meal helps sustain local culture and businesses, so your journey leaves a positive footprint.

Some of our favorite hidden experiences include:

- **Watching a sheepdog demonstration** in the countryside, where skilled handlers and their dogs showcase centuries-old farming traditions.
- **Walking quiet stretches of the Copper Coast in Waterford**, where rugged cliffs and secluded coves feel untouched.
- **Exploring ancient monasteries and round towers** tucked away in the Midlands, far from the crowds.
- **Stopping at tiny village pubs for traditional music sessions**, where the welcome is warm, the laughter infectious, and the stories endless.
- **Discovering ancient castles and ruins** where you might be the only visitor, giving you a private glimpse into Ireland's layered history.

These are the moments you'll remember long after your trip; the stories you'll tell friends, the photographs you'll cherish, and the connections you'll make with both people and place.

By traveling with Overland, you experience the raw, authentic Ireland – the landscapes, the culture, and the communities that make our country so special. For even more hidden gems to inspire your trip planning, why not check out our picks for the [best lesser-known historical sites in Ireland and Northern Ireland?](#)



Why Overland Ireland?

Choosing the right partner is key to an unforgettable trip to the Emerald Isle. At Overland Ireland, we combine local expertise, small-group flexibility, and immersive experiences to create journeys that go beyond the typical tourist trail.

From tailor-made itineraries and boutique accommodations to authentic cultural experiences and connections with local communities, our tours are designed to show you the real Ireland in comfort, style, and at your own pace.

Below, you'll find a quick visual snapshot of what makes Overland Ireland different, and why travelers consistently rate us so highly. The stories and reviews from past guests speak for themselves, and you can find examples of these in the next section.



Passionate Local Guides

Let our guides entertain you with their passion for history, local experiences, stories and wonderful recommendations at each location on tour.



Exceptional Experiences

Don't settle for a good time! Have the time of your life with exceptional experiences, culture, heritage and Irish 'Craic'.



Off The Beaten Track

Overland Ireland has very high standards. We pride ourselves on taking our guests off the beaten track to locations discovered by our local friends and guides around the Emerald Isle.

Reviews from Past Guests on Our Ireland Tours

We understand that you want to book your tour of Ireland with confidence. As keen travelers ourselves, we know that there's no better endorsement of a company than reviews from previous guests. So, let us share with you some of our recent feedback:

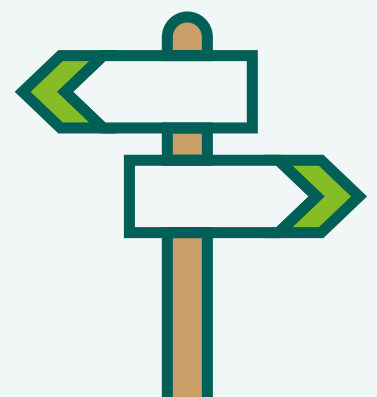
“We had a wonderful 10-day adventure with Overland Ireland. Everything was organised, the tours were wonderful, and the accommodation was all first class. Our driver/guide, Hugh, was extremely knowledgeable and was also able to make slight changes depending on the weather. He actually made our trip even more enjoyable and everyone enjoyed the “craic”. Thank you, Hugh, for a great trip. Thoroughly recommend Overland Ireland for your visit to Ireland.”

- Robyn Smith on Google

“I had a great time on a 5-day Zest tour with my holiday group and our wonderful guide Mark. The tour was very well-organised and I have many fond memories of it. Mark is a very thoughtful and knowledgeable guide with an excellent sense of humour. He made sure we were well looked after and recommended good places to eat and drink. Kayaking in Dingle and visiting a sheep farm were the highlights for me. I will be back on another Overland Ireland tour. Thank you!”

- Miss A on TripAdvisor

And these are only the beginning! Head over to the [Our Reviews page](#) and find out how highly even more of our previous guests rated their time with us.



Planning Ahead: Why 2026 is the Perfect Time to Visit Ireland

If you're reading this Ireland Trip Planning Guide for 2026, we feel safe in assuming that you're taking a proactive approach to arranging your travel plans. Great idea! The good news is that 2026 is the perfect time to plan your Irish adventure.

Booking early means securing the best dates, hotels, and activities. With so many cultural events and festivals planned, it's set to be an incredible year. By planning now, you'll have peace of mind and plenty of time to look forward to the journey. And Overland Ireland is here to guide you every step of the way.

Make 2026 the Year You Say YES to Ireland!

So, are you ready to say YES to Ireland in 2026? Whether you'd like the freedom of a [self-drive adventure](#), the ease of a [small-group tour](#), or a [tailor-made itinerary](#) crafted just for you, Overland Ireland will make it happen.

Get in touch today, and let's start planning your dream vacation on the Emerald Isle.

