

Atlantic Islands

HIGHLIGHTS

- Visiting the sheer cliffs and jagged quartzite crags on the wild north coast of **Tory Island** (p146)
- Enjoying panoramic views over the Mayo and Connemara coastline from Knockmore on **Clare Island** (p150)
- Exploring prehistoric forts, wild limestone pavements and stone-walled fields on the **Aran Islands** (p153)
- Wandering among the melancholy ruins of **Great Blasket Island** (p158)

Highest peak in the region: Knockmore, Clare Island, 462m

Ireland's wonderfully fragmented Atlantic coast provides countless opportunities for walkers. Perhaps the most engaging and adventurous of these can be found on the country's many islands. Contrast the ruins of Great Blasket Island, melancholy and redolent of hardship, loss and emigration, with the vibrancy of the Aran Islands, given new life by tourism, internet-assisted business and an influx of people eager to live on a far-flung fringe of Europe.

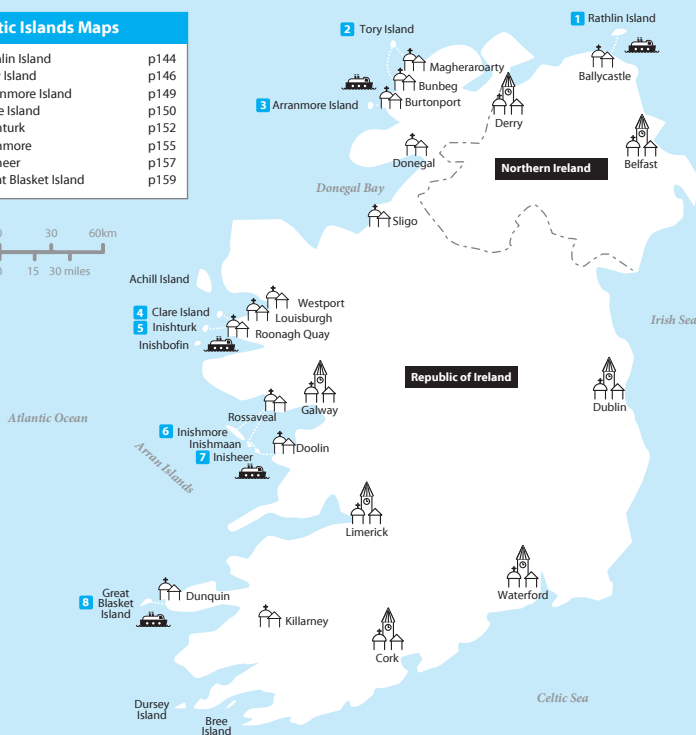
The islands have long and often turbulent histories, intertwined with fascinating and unusual cultures. The people are resilient and pragmatic, qualities derived from the need to survive in a wild and ultimately unforgiving environment. The natural world seems closer here too: cars are few, meadows grow uncut, and relinquished lands provide a haven for a huge diversity of insect and plant life. Birds, in particular, thrive on the islands, more whales than you would imagine cruise by in the deep, offshore waters, dolphins and porpoises hunt in the quiet bays, and seals find rocky headlands on which to rest. Of course walkers benefit too, able to travel in peace along soaring cliffs and grassy boreens (country lanes), with the restless ocean a constant companion.



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Atlantic Islands Maps

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3 Arranmore Island	p149
4 Clare Island	p150
5 Inishturk	p152
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PLANNING

The official website www.irelandsislands.com covers all the islands in this chapter, as well as a host of others.

Place Names

On many of the islands, Gaelic (Irish) is the

first language written and spoken. Places, road signs and place names are often written in Gaelic only, without the usual English translation. To facilitate navigation through these areas, Gaelic names have been given as appropriate throughout this chapter.

FERRY DELAYS & RESERVATIONS

Heavy swells and rough seas can halt ferry sailings at any time of the year. If you are planning a visit to the islands, try to wait for settled conditions, or allow an extra day or two in case you have to wait out the weather. Visitors staying overnight on the islands are not guaranteed return passage the following day if the weather turns bad. Outside the summer months, services to more remote islands like Tory can sometimes be disrupted for weeks on end.

Whatever the weather, it's always best to call ferry operators in advance to confirm sailing times and make any necessary reservations.

