

The Aran Islands are a bastion of traditional Irish culture and are famous for their distinctive knitwear and traditional costumes, austere landscape crisscrossed with stone walls, stunning coastal views and prehistoric stone forts.

To reach the Aran Islands, we will take a ferry through Galway Bay, departing from the port at Rossaveal. The ferry will take about 1.5 hours, but approaching from the northeast coast of the islands offers a smooth passage. Then we will take a mini-van tour of the island of Inishmore.

Language

Irish (Gaeilge—you might know it as “Irish Gaelic”) is the first language of the islands. Inishmore is one of the last strongholds for the Irish language and is a prime destination for students wishing to improve their standard of Irish. During the Cromwellian occupation in the 17th to 19th centuries, Irish was forbidden. However, the Islanders continued to use the language in private, which ensured its survival. They are proud of their linguistic heritage and the language is spoken just as much among the younger population.

Inishmore (Inis Mór)

The largest of the three Aran Islands, Inishmore is approximately 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) in length and 3 kilometers (1.8 miles) in width, with a population of about 1100 people.

Kilronan

The main village of Inishmore is Kilronan, which has seen much development in the past 10 years allowing modern conveniences to coexist comfortably with traditional practices and culture. The harbor is usually full of yachts and fishing boats. Here you can also find the Aran Sweater Market.

Fishing

Fishing has always provided a vital source of food for the islanders. Today, most fishing is rock fishing but some still fish using the old *Currach* (rowing boats), which can be seen dotting the coast. The range of fish caught here include cod, whiting,



mackerel, monkfish, john dorey and pollack, as well as lobster and prawns during the season.

Aran Sweaters

The exact origins of the Aran Sweater are unknown, but the intricate and unique designs are thought to be inspired by the Celts, and the first Aran garments were produced on the islands by the first century A.D. Many Aran stitches hold spiritual meaning, and it is thought that the fishermen of the islands began to wear the sweaters as religious garments in the hopes that they would offer protection from the dangers of the Atlantic. The stitches can also represent different aspects of island life, including the moss found on the cliffs, the stone walls originally built to divide the land, fishermen's ropes, and even the symbols of clans and families.

Ancient Ring Fort Dun Aengus (Dún Aonghasa)

This spectacular stone fort was built at the highest point of the cliffs on the southern coastline and offers spectacular views of the west coast of Ireland. One of the most important prehistoric sites in Western Europe, the fort shows evidence of human activity dating back 2,500 years and covers 14 acres. The semicircular fort rests on the edge of a sheer cliff, perched 100 meters above the ocean. The inner court is 50 meters across, surrounded by a wall that was 6 meters high and 5 meters thick at the base. Beyond that, the sharp, pointed stones of the ramparts provide additional defense from

any attacks on land, along with the “chevaux-de-frise”, tall blocks of limestone set vertically into the ground to deter attackers.

The cliffs

The cliffs stretch along the entire southwestern side of the island and some say that the spectacular views rival those of the Cliffs of Moher.

Inishmaan (Inis Meáin)

The “middle island” is the second largest of the Aran Islands, with a population of about 160 people. Walking is the only mode of transportation, and it is about a one mile walk uphill from the harbor to the island’s only pub. The island is a center for diving, with its beautiful marine life and clear waters. There are several empty beaches and ruins of early settlements, including the 4000-year-old fort of Dun Chonchuir.



Inisheer (Inis Oirr)

The “east island” is the smallest of the three islands, with a population of about 300 people. The island allows a glimpse into the traditional way of life practiced by the Irish speaking community and the preservation of the Celtic culture. The island’s attractions include its golden beaches and crystal-clear blue waters, a lighthouse, a 15th century tower house that stands within a stone fort, a bronze age burial mound, a church dating from the 10th century and the remains of the 1960 shipwreck of the MV Plassy.

