



# Western Way

THE COMPLETE GUIDE



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# Overview

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## Western Way: A Complete Hiking Guide

The Western Way is a 179 km National Waymarked Trail through Galway and Mayo in the west of **Ireland**. It runs from Oughterard on Lough Corrib to Ballycastle on the north Mayo coast and is typically walked in 7 days. Sport Ireland grades it moderate: there is no technical climbing, but the route is long, wet, remote in places and navigation can be patchy. It suits fit walkers who want a quieter, boggier Irish thru-hike than the **Dingle Way** or **Beara Way**.

## Route Overview

The Western Way is a point-to-point walk, generally taken south to north from Oughterard to Ballycastle. It follows the western shore of Lough Corrib, crosses Maam Valley and the Maumturk Mountains via Mam Ean, drops to Inagh Valley, then reaches Killary Harbour and Leenane. From Aasleagh it enters County Mayo, skirts the eastern slopes of Croagh Patrick, passes through Westport and Newport, then pushes into the Nephin Beg range, Wild Nephin, Bellacorick and the Sheskin wilderness before finishing near Downpatrick Head. Services are concentrated in towns, so book accommodation and resupply carefully. Around Westport and Newport, the **Great Western Greenway** is a useful nearby route reference.

## History of the Western Way

Established in the 1980s, the Western Way was one of Ireland's first National Waymarked Trails. It links older local, trading and pilgrim routes through Connemara and Mayo, including the Mam Ean pilgrimage site in the Maumturk Mountains. Along the way it also passes famine-era roads, abandoned settlements and roads associated with Scottish engineer Alexander Nimmo in the early 19th century. Parts of the Connemara section were used as locations in the film *The Field*.

## Notable highlights

- **Lough Corrib:** The route leaves Oughterard along the western side of Ireland's largest lake within the Republic. It gives a gentle opening to the walk before the wetter mountain and bog sections.
- **Mam Ean / Maumeen pass (~259 m):** The high point of the Western Way and an early-Christian pilgrimage site in the Maumturk Mountains. It is the wildest mountain crossing on the route, but not a technical climb.
- **Killary Harbour and Leenane:** Killary Harbour is widely described as Ireland's only true fjord, with Leenane village at its head. This is a key rest and resupply point between the Galway and Mayo sections.
- **Croagh Patrick eastern slopes:** The trail skirts the lower eastern flanks of Ireland's famous pilgrimage mountain. It does not climb to the summit, but the views and setting are a major part of the Mayo section.
- **Nephin Beg range / Wild Nephin:** A remote stretch of blanket bog, forest and open country with no roads through the interior. This is where the route feels most isolated.

- **Ballycastle and Downpatrick Head:** The finish is on the north Mayo Atlantic coast, close to Downpatrick Head and the sea stack of Dun Briste.

## Challenges to expect

Expect wet ground: bog, peat, wet grass, rocky paths and several kilometres of timber bog boardwalk. Around half of both the Galway and Mayo sections follows local tarmac roads, but the off-road parts can be slow after rain. Navigation needs attention where waymarking is patchy. Resupply gaps are long between towns, dogs are not permitted on off-road/forestry sections, and short closures can occur after heavy rainfall.

# Key Data

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Country	Ireland
Distance	179 km
Duration	7 days
Difficulty	Moderate
Trail type	Point to point
Elevation gain/loss	1800 m
Highest point	259 m
Terrain & landscape	Mountainous, Moorland, Bog, Forest, Coastal
Trail surface	Paved, Forestry Track, Boardwalk, Boggy, Rocky, Grass
Accommodation	Hotels, Guesthouses, Hostels, Wild Camping Spots
Average daytime temp.	15°C
Chance of rainfall	High
Estimated cost	\$\$
Optimal season	Spring, Summer, Autumn
Accessibility	Family Friendly, Pet Friendly
Facilities	Water Sources, Campsites
Permits & fees	No permits or fees

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# Introduction

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The Western Way is a quieter, boggier 179 km traverse of Ireland's west, running from Oughterard on Lough Corrib to Ballycastle on the north Mayo coast. It links Connemara lake country, the Mám Éan/Maumeen pass, the Inagh Valley, Killary Harbour and Leenaun/Leenane, then pushes past Croagh Patrick's eastern slopes, Westport, Newport and the Nephin Beg country towards Wild Nephin and Dún Briste — a moderate, waymarked walk for fit hikers who prefer wet ground, big spaces and self-reliant days to busy trail towns.

The route asks for long days, careful navigation, weather-ready kit and comfort on bog, peat, wet grass, rock, forestry tracks and quiet roads. This guide covers how to plan the stages and days, book accommodation, manage food and resupply, arrange transport, understand the terrain, avoid common mistakes and decide whether support services or luggage transfer make sense.

## Stage-by-Stage Guide

The Western Way is best planned stage by stage because services are unevenly spaced. Oughterard, Leenane, Westport and Newport are useful resupply points; Maam, Drummin, Sheskin and Ballycastle need more care with accommodation and transfers. Across the whole route, expect a mix of tarmac roads, bog roads, forestry tracks, open moorland, wet grass and timber boardwalk. Yellow arrows on a black background mark the Way, but waymarking can be patchy, especially in the north Mayo stages, so carry OSi mapping, the official Sport Ireland PDF section maps and a downloaded GPX.

Always check current Sport Ireland closure notices before walking. Sections of boardwalk and riverbank can close after heavy rain, and dogs are not permitted on off-road and forestry sections.

### Stage 1: Oughterard to Maam — approx. 21 km

The opening stage leaves Oughterard on the western shore of Lough Corrib and gives a comparatively gentle start before the wetter, rougher mountain and bog stages ahead. Gradients are modest, but the day is still a full walking stage and includes a mix of quiet tarmac, old drove roads, bog roads, oak woodland, open bogland and forest sections.

Oughterard has the best start-of-walk facilities on this stage, with shops, pubs and accommodation. The route initially gives views across Lough Corrib, with the limestone country of south Galway visible across the water, before moving west into broader bogland. Maam Cross is an important mid-stage point, with a petrol station/shop and nearby services; it is a useful place to break the day, buy basic supplies or arrange a start if the Lackavrea closure affects plans.

A section of timber bog boardwalk near Lackavrea is closed until further notice. Until this reopens, the practical alternative is to start at Maam Cross, using bus or road access from Oughterard or Galway where available. This should be checked before travelling, as closure notices can change.

Maam, also referred to as Maam Bridge, is a small settlement at the junction of the R336 and R345. Keane's Bar at Maam Bridge is a key walker-friendly stop and serves food, but accommodation in Maam itself is limited. Nearby B&Bs and operator-arranged accommodation should be booked ahead rather than left to chance.

Food and water are available at Oughterard, Maam Cross and Maam, but there are long quiet stretches between them. Carry enough for the full day, especially if starting early or walking outside peak hours. Navigation is not difficult in good weather, but old drove roads and bog tracks are not always obvious on the ground. Watch for faded or livestock-damaged waymarks and keep the map to hand.

### Stage 2: Maam to Leenane — approx. 18 km

This is the first properly wild stage of the Western Way and includes the highest point of the route at Mám Éan, also known as Maumeen pass, at about 259 m. The day mixes tarmac road, rough mountain path, rocky ground, grass and some boardwalk, with a more exposed feel than Stage 1.

From Maam the route climbs into the Maumturk Mountains towards Mám Éan. The pass is an early-Christian pilgrimage site, with a small chapel, a St Patrick statue and a holy well. It is not a technical

climb, but the path is rocky and loose in places and the crossing is exposed in bad weather. Mist can make navigation much harder, so this is not a stage to treat casually despite the moderate height.

After the pass, the route descends towards the Inagh Valley, with the Twelve Bens to the west and the Maumturks to the east. Views towards Lough Inagh and the surrounding mountains make this one of the strongest scenic sections of the route. The day finishes at Leenane, also written Leenaun, at the head of Killary Harbour.

There are no reliable shops between Maam and Leenane, so carry lunch, snacks and enough water from the start. Natural water should be filtered or treated. Leenane is a key resupply and overnight point between the Galway and Mayo sections, with pub food, a small shop, hotel, hostel and B&B options, but accommodation is limited and should be booked ahead.

Public transport and road access are more practical at either end than in the middle of the stage. If the weather is poor, pay particular attention to the forecast before committing to the Mám Éan crossing. The waymarks are useful but should not be the only navigation tool on the open mountain ground.

### **Stage 3: Leenane to Drummin — approx. 22 km**

This stage crosses from County Galway into County Mayo and is logistically more awkward than the distance suggests, because Drummin has no accommodation. Most walkers arrange a taxi or operator transfer from Drummin to Westport at the end of the day, then return to Drummin to begin Stage 4.

From Leenane, the route heads towards Aasleagh at the Mayo border, with Killary Harbour behind and the Erriff River valley ahead. Aasleagh Falls is the main landmark early in the stage and is especially powerful after rain. The Western Way then follows the Erriff River through open, sheep-grazed country with mountain views, including Ben Gorm and the Devil's Mother.

Sport Ireland closure notices should be checked carefully for this stage. The Aasleagh/Ashleagh river section from Ashleagh Lodge to Houston's Bridge has been closed due to rain damage, and river sections can be affected after heavy rainfall. Dogs are not permitted along the Erriff River section.

The route then enters Tawnyard Forest and passes Tawnyard Lough, where an ancient crannog is visible on the lough. It continues towards Sheeffry Bridge. From this area, route choice and current mapping matter: the road line towards Drummin is the more reliable option in poor weather, while any higher mountain alternative over rough, boggy ground should be treated as an experienced-walkers-only undertaking and avoided in poor visibility. Check the official map and current signage on the day.

There are no shops or food stops between Leenane and Drummin. Carry all food for the day and enough water, or filter/treat natural sources. Drummin is a tiny village rather than a service centre, so onward arrangements are essential. Westport is the normal overnight base after this stage and has the facilities needed for a proper resupply.

Navigation is more demanding than on the first two stages. Waymarking can be sparse or damaged, the ground is wet in places and forestry sections can be confusing where tracks branch. Carry the official PDF map, OSi mapping and a downloaded GPX. Leave enough time for the walk plus the pre-arranged transfer at the end.

## **Stage 4: Drummin to Westport — approx. 21 km**

Stage 4 is often walked after an overnight in Westport, with a morning taxi back to Drummin. That arrangement avoids trying to find accommodation in Drummin and keeps the itinerary practical for independent walkers.

The walking is a mixture of quiet country road and track, skirting the lower eastern slopes of Croagh Patrick. The Western Way does not climb Croagh Patrick's summit; it passes below the mountain, giving views of its distinctive cone and, as the route approaches Westport, broader views towards Clew Bay.

This is not the most remote stage of the route, but facilities between Drummin and Westport are still limited. Carry food and water from the start, particularly if walking early. The road and track surfaces are generally more straightforward than the wet mountain and bog sections, though road walking is still a feature and walkers should stay alert to local traffic.

Westport is the most useful service town on the whole Western Way. It has hotels, guesthouses, B&Bs, hostels, restaurants, pubs, supermarkets and outdoor supplies. It is also a key transport hub, with Westport Rail Station connecting towards Dublin Heuston via Athlone and Castlebar, and Bus Éireann services. This makes it a sensible place for rest, resupply, replacement kit and joining or leaving the trail.

Navigation is usually less complex than on Stage 3, but do not rely only on waymarks. Keep the route line available, especially where tracks and minor roads meet. Croagh Patrick is an obvious landscape feature, but it should not be used as a substitute for proper navigation.

## **Stage 5: Westport to Newport — approx. 12 km**

This is the shortest day on the standard seven-day itinerary and is useful as a partial rest day before the long, remote north Mayo stages. The walking is generally less committing, with quiet roads and tracks, modest gradients and views beginning to open towards the Nephin Beg range.

Leaving Westport, the route transitions away from the busier Croagh Patrick and Clew Bay area towards quieter country north of the town. The stage finishes in Newport, a small market town on the N59, with the historic Newport Viaduct visible in the town.

Facilities are much better at the end of this stage than on the two days that follow. Newport has B&Bs, guesthouses, hotel accommodation, coffee shops, restaurants, pubs and takeaway food. It is the last important resupply point before the long Newport–Sheskin–Ballycastle push, so buy food here for the next remote stage rather than assuming anything will be available later.

Public transport is more practical here than in the northern interior. Newport is close to Westport and Castlebar by road, with Bus Éireann and Local Link services serving the area. Timetables can be limited and should be checked before travelling.

Navigation is relatively straightforward by Western Way standards, but the same caveat applies: keep the map or GPX accessible. The short distance also makes this a good day for admin — drying kit, checking closure notices, topping up food and confirming accommodation or transfers for Sheskin and Ballycastle.

## **Stage 6: Newport to Sheskin — approx. 32 km**

This is the longest and most remote stage of the seven-day Western Way itinerary. Treat it as the crux of the route for logistics, navigation and self-reliance. There are essentially no dependable services

between Newport and Sheskin, and mobile signal can be weak in the interior.

From Newport, the route works into forest, moorland and bog country on the eastern fringe of Wild Nephin National Park. The landscape becomes progressively wilder, with forestry tracks, bog roads, wet moorland paths and long stretches of soft, uneven ground. This is Atlantic blanket bog country, and after rain the walking can be slow, wet and tiring.

Letterkeen Woods and the Brogan Carroll Bothy are important landmarks on the stage. The bothy stands at the junction of the Western Way and the Bangor Trail and provides a dry, basic shelter. A dedicated wild camping spot lies north of the bothy along the Western Way. This area is the only realistic overnight option before Sheskin if the full stage is split, but anyone relying on it should be fully equipped and self-sufficient.

Lough Feeagh and the surrounding Nephin landscape give this stage its distinctive remote character. The route also passes towards Bellacorick, a small settlement on the N59, but facilities are very limited and it should not be treated as a reliable resupply point.

Sheskin is a remote forested area rather than a town. Sheskin Lodge is the main accommodation option associated with the stage, but availability is limited and it must be booked well ahead. Some itineraries use Bangor Erris as an alternative base with taxi transfer to and from the trail. Independent walkers should arrange this before leaving Newport.

Stock up fully in Newport. Carry all food for the day, emergency surplus and enough water, or be prepared to filter and treat natural water. Bogland runoff is not automatically safe to drink. Navigation is at its most demanding here: waymarking is patchy, some open bog sections have minimal markers, and mist or low cloud can make the landscape disorientating. Carry paper OSi mapping, the official PDF section maps and a downloaded GPX, with a charged phone or GPS and backup power. Solo walkers should leave route plans and expected arrival times with someone reliable.

## **Stage 7: Sheskin to Ballycastle — approx. 28 km**

The final stage is more straightforward than the Newport to Sheskin crossing, but it is still long, quiet and lightly serviced. Do not treat it as an easy finish simply because the coast is approaching.

From Sheskin, the route uses forest trails through Sheskin Forest Park before moving through bog and moorland and onto quiet country roads descending towards the north Mayo Atlantic coast. Some descriptions of the wider Bellacorick to Ballycastle section include stretches of N59 road walking, so check the current official map and take care on any road sections.

There are no reliable food or resupply points between Sheskin and Ballycastle. Carry a full day's food and water from the start, with extra in case progress is slow on wet ground. Forestry trails can be easy underfoot, but bog and moorland sections may still be saturated, and timber or wet track surfaces can be slippery.

Ballycastle is the finish for HikeList's Oughterard to Ballycastle Western Way itinerary. This is Ballycastle in County Mayo, not Ballycastle in County Antrim. The town has pubs, small shops, B&Bs, guesthouses and hostel accommodation, but options are limited and should be booked ahead, particularly in summer.

Public transport from Ballycastle is sparse. Local Link buses serve the area and Bus Éireann connections towards Ballina and Westport are limited, especially at weekends. Many walkers pre-arrange a taxi towards Ballina for onward rail connections. Do not wait until arrival to solve onward travel.

If time and transport allow, Downpatrick Head lies west of Ballycastle on the Wild Atlantic Way and is the obvious post-walk detour, with views of the Dún Briste sea stack. The Céide Fields are also west of Ballycastle and have a seasonal visitor centre. These are not needed to complete the trail, but they are worth allowing for when planning the final night or onward journey.

# Recommended Itinerary

## Standard 7-day itinerary

This is the most practical way to walk the Western Way from Oughterard to Ballycastle. It uses the natural overnight points on the route, keeps the first half manageable, and preserves a short Westport–Newport day before the long, remote push through the Nephin Beg range.

Day	From	To	Approx. distance	Why this stage makes sense	Services/accommodation notes
1	Oughterard	Maam / Maam Bridge	21 km	A sensible opening day from a well-serviced Connemara town into quieter country west of Lough Corrib. It gives time to settle into the route before the Mám Éan crossing on Day 2.	Oughterard has the best start-line services: shops, pubs, restaurants, pharmacy, ATM and a good choice of B&Bs, guesthouses and hotels. Maam is much smaller, with limited accommodation and basic resupply around Maam Bridge; book well ahead. Maam Cross, around 5 km before Maam, may be used by some walkers if Maam is full. Check current closure notices before walking this stage.
2	Maam	Leenaun / Leenane	18 km	One of the key mountain days. The route crosses Mám Éan / Maumeen pass, the high point of the Way at about 259 m, then continues towards the Inagh Valley and Killary Harbour.	No services at Mám Éan, so leave Maam with food and water. Leenaun is a major resupply and rest point, with a village shop/post office/filling station, cafés, pubs and several accommodation options including hotel, lodge, hostel-style and B&B stays.
3	Leenaun / Leenane	Drummin	22 km	A demanding transition from Connemara into County Mayo, passing Aasleagh and crossing boggier ground around the Sheeffry Hills. It positions the next day well for the walk towards Westport.	Leenaun is the place to stock up before leaving. Drummin has very limited services and no substantial accommodation choice in the hamlet itself. Many non-camping walkers pre-arrange a taxi transfer to Westport or another nearby base, returning to Drummin the next morning. Check current notices for the Aasleagh / Ashleagh section before relying on the mapped line.

Day	From	To	Approx. distance	Why this stage makes sense	Services/accommodation notes
4	Drummin	Westport	21 km	A well-balanced day that brings the route around the lower eastern slopes of Croagh Patrick and into the largest service town on the trail. The Western Way does not climb Croagh Patrick's summit.	Westport is the main accommodation, laundry, food and transport hub on the route, with supermarkets, chemists, ATMs, restaurants, pubs, hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs. It is the best place for a rest night if time allows.
5	Westport	Newport	12 km	A deliberately short stage before the longest and most remote day. Use the easier mileage for recovery, foot care, laundry and food planning.	Newport has a good range for a small town: hotel, B&Bs, self-catering, pubs, shops, cafés and takeaway food. It is the last practical town stop before the remote Nephin Beg / Wild Nephin section, so leave with enough food for Day 6 and the Sheskin overnight.
6	Newport	Sheskin	32 km	The longest day and the most committing section of the Western Way. It crosses remote blanket bog, forestry and open country in the Nephin Beg range, with little road access and limited mobile signal.	Do not treat Sheskin as a normal village stop. There are no village services. The practical overnight is Letterkeen Bothy in Wild Nephin National Park, or wild camping nearby if properly equipped. Non-campers should arrange a taxi transfer out to accommodation in advance, commonly to Bangor Erris or Crossmolina, with a return transfer next morning. Dogs are not permitted on off-road/forestry sections in the national park area.
7	Sheskin	Ballycastle	28 km	A long final day across open north Mayo bogland, finishing at the Atlantic coast near Downpatrick Head and Dún Briste. It is still a remote stage, not a relaxed coast-path finish.	Ballycastle is a small finish village with limited B&Bs, pubs and shop options; opening times should be checked before relying on them. Public transport is sparse, so most walkers pre-arrange onward transport or a taxi to Ballina for wider bus and rail connections.

## Slower itinerary: 9–10 days

A slower schedule suits walkers who want more weather flexibility, prefer not to stack hard days back-to-back, or want time in Leenaun, Westport or the Killary / Croagh Patrick areas. The most useful additions are:

- **Add a night in Leenaun** after Day 2, especially if the Mám Éan crossing is done in poor weather or if time around Killary Harbour is a priority.
- **Add a rest or logistics day in Westport**, the easiest place on the route for laundry, resupply, accommodation choice and public transport.
- **Reduce the impact of Day 6** by arranging a pre-booked pick-up or camping plan in the Nephin Beg / Wild Nephin section. There are no ordinary village services in the middle of this stretch, so exact stopping points and access arrangements must be checked on official mapping before booking.

This version is also the safer choice if walking in unsettled weather, as short closures can affect boardwalk, river and bog sections after heavy rain.

## Faster itinerary: 6 days

A 6-day Western Way is only suitable for strong, efficient walkers who are comfortable with wet ground, long road-and-bog days and self-reliant navigation.

The most straightforward compression is to combine **Day 4 and Day 5** into a longer **Drummin → Westport → Newport** day of about **33 km**. This keeps the defined overnight points but removes the recovery day before the remote northern section, so it should only be used by walkers who are already confident over consecutive long days.

Other faster variations involve pushing beyond the standard stage ends in the Galway half, but accommodation and services are sparse around Maam, Mám Éan and the open mountain sections. Any non-standard overnight or pick-up point should be checked against official mapping before booking.

## Using baggage-transfer or self-guided packages

Self-guided operators such as Hillwalk Tours and Footfalls commonly package the Western Way as an 8-day trip by adding an arrival day before the 7 walking stages. These itineraries are useful for walkers who want accommodation pre-booked, baggage moved daily and taxi support for awkward overnights such as Drummin or the remote Sheskin / Letterkeen section. Even with support, the walking days remain long and often wet underfoot, so the 32 km Newport–Sheskin stage still needs treating as a serious remote day.

# Planning the Route

## How many days to allow

Seven walking days is the standard plan for the Western Way from Oughterard to Ballycastle. That pace suits fit walkers who are comfortable with long, wet days and who can keep moving over bog, forestry tracks, local roads and open country.

The route is not well suited to being rushed. A 5–6 day schedule leaves little margin for poor weather, slow going on wet ground, route closures or awkward accommodation logistics. A slower 8–9 day plan is more comfortable, especially if you want a rest or resupply day in Westport before the remote northern Mayo stages.

A practical approach is:

Schedule	Best for	Main drawback
5–6 days	Very fit walkers travelling light and already comfortable with Irish bog walking	Long days, tighter transport and accommodation logistics, little room for delays
7 days	Most end-to-end walkers	Requires careful booking at the sparse overnight stops
8–9 days	Walkers wanting more recovery time, a Westport stopover or a less pressured northern section	More nights to book, and some intermediate stops still have limited options

Most commercial self-guided packages focus on the Oughterard to Westport part of the route rather than the full walk to Ballycastle. Hillwalk Tours and Footfalls Walking Holidays offer supported itineraries with accommodation, baggage transfer and route material, but current prices, dates and exact routing should be checked before booking.

## Daily stages are shaped by accommodation, not just distance

The Western Way has several natural overnight towns, but long gaps between them. This is the main planning issue on the route. Oughterard, Leenane, Westport and Newport are the easiest places to use for accommodation and resupply. Maam, Ballycastle and some of the intervening rural stops have much thinner choice. Drummin, Sheskin, Sheeffry Bridge and the Bellacorick area should not be treated as normal service villages.

Route section	Planning implication
Oughterard to Maam	A manageable first day, but accommodation at Maam is limited and should be booked before committing to this stage.
Maam to Leenane	Crosses Mám Éan / Maumeen and drops towards the Inagh Valley and Killary Harbour; Leenane is an important accommodation and resupply stop.
Leenane to Drummin	Services thin out after Leenane. Any overnight plan around Drummin needs to be arranged in advance.

Route section	Planning implication
Drummin to Westport	Westport is the first major full-service town after Leenane and is a natural recovery, laundry and resupply point.
Westport to Newport	Shorter and logistically easier than most other days; useful as a half-day or as part of a rest-and-resupply strategy.
Newport to Sheskin	One of the key planning stages: long, remote and with no reliable on-trail services. Carry food from Newport and have the overnight plan fixed.
Sheskin to Ballycastle	Another remote northern stage with limited services until the finish. Ballycastle has accommodation and a small shop, but options are limited.

For walkers not using a baggage-transfer package, the northern arc from Newport through Sheskin to Ballycastle needs the most care. Carrying a tent or arranging a definite lift or overnight stay may be necessary depending on availability. The Brogan Carroll / Letterkeen Bothy in Wild Nephin National Park is free to use, but advance online registration is required through the National Parks and Wildlife Service; this should be arranged before relying on it.

## Where to shorten or split the walk

The Western Way is easy to divide in the southern half and much harder to divide in the remote north.

Good shortening points include:

- **Leenane / Leenaun** — a natural break after the Galway section, with services and bus access.
- **Westport** — the most practical end point for many walkers, with full services, rail and bus connections. Many supported itineraries finish here.
- **Newport** — useful for those wanting to walk the southern Mayo section but avoid the remote Newport–Ballycastle arc.

Extending beyond Ballycastle is possible on the traditional continuation towards Ballina, but that is outside the HikeList Oughterard to Ballycastle route. Anyone adding it should check the current Sport Ireland information first, especially because closure notices can affect northern sections.

## Section hiking

Section hiking is practical, but unevenly so.

The **Galway section from Oughterard to Leenane** works well as a standalone long weekend. Oughterard has bus access from Galway, and Leenane has services and onward bus links.

The **Leenane to Westport section** is also practical for section hikers. Bus Éireann Route 423 links Clifden and Westport via Leenane, with services from Westport train station; current times and fares should be checked before travelling.

The **Westport to Newport section** is the easiest short section. It is a modest half-day and follows part of the Great Western Greenway, making it suitable for walkers who want a lower-commitment day.

The **Newport to Ballycastle section** is the least convenient for casual section hiking. It is remote, transport is sparse, mobile signal can be unreliable, and accommodation or camping logistics must be planned in advance. Ballycastle has no rail connection; onward travel usually requires a local bus link, taxi or pre-arranged transfer via Ballina or another larger town.

## Transport planning

Public transport works best at the start, at Westport and on some southern sections. It becomes much more limited in north Mayo.

- **Oughterard start:** Bus Éireann Route 419 links Galway and Clifden via Oughterard. Galway has Irish Rail services, including the Dublin–Galway line.
- **Westport:** the most useful transport hub on the route, with a railway station and bus connections. It is the best place to start or finish a section hike.
- **Leenane:** useful for section access, particularly with Route 423 between Clifden and Westport.
- **Ballycastle finish:** no rail service. Plan the exit before walking the final stage; a taxi, local link bus or pre-arranged transfer may be needed.

Do not leave the Ballycastle exit plan until arrival. After a long final day, limited evening transport can create avoidable problems.

## Accommodation and resupply priorities

Accommodation should be booked before starting, especially in summer, at weekends and on the northern stages. Many accommodation options close in winter, and the route is not a good winter accommodation-to-accommodation walk.

The most important resupply points are **Oughterard, Leenane, Westport and Newport**. Ballycastle has limited services at the finish. Between Newport and Ballycastle there are no dependable shops on the trail, so leave Newport with enough food for the final two walking days plus a margin.

A sensible food plan is:

- buy or carry lunch before leaving each main town;
- leave Newport with two days of food for the remote northern stages;
- carry emergency food in case weather, closures or navigation issues slow progress;
- do not assume that rural stage ends such as Drummin or Sheskin have shops, meals or open accommodation.

Water planning is less about scarcity and more about access to reliable drinking points. The route crosses wet country, but that does not mean safe drinking water is always available where needed. Start each long stage with enough water, particularly when leaving Leenane, Westport and Newport.

## Navigation, maps and closures

The Western Way is waymarked with a yellow arrow on a black background, but navigation should not rely on waymarks alone. Marking is generally easier to follow on the southern sections and more patchy on the remote northern stages from Newport onwards.

Carry:

- **OSi Discovery Series sheets 37, 38, 31 and 23** at 1:50,000;
- the free **Sport Ireland PDF section maps** for both Galway and Mayo, printed or saved offline;
- an offline GPX track on a phone or GPS device;
- a power bank for the longer northern stages.

Sport Ireland's Galway and Mayo trail pages should be checked immediately before departure for closures and diversions. Short-notice closures can follow heavy rain, especially on boardwalk, bog and river sections.

Specific closure issues have included:

- the **Aasleagh River section from Aasleagh Lodge north to Houston's Bridge**, closed due to rainfall damage;
- a **2 km boardwalk near Lackavrea**, closed as unsafe;
- the **Bellacorick to Bunnyconnellan section**, closed until further notice. This lies beyond the HikeList Ballycastle finish towards Ballina, but anyone extending the route should check it carefully.

Closure status changes, so always use the current Sport Ireland pages rather than an old itinerary or downloaded route description.

## Weather, ground conditions and pace

Plan for rain even in summer. The Western Way crosses Atlantic-influenced country where bog, wet grass, peat and standing water are normal. Waterproof boots are strongly recommended, and gaiters are useful on the boggier stages.

Road walking also affects pacing. Around half of the route follows local roads, bog roads or tarmac lanes, with the Mayo and Galway sections both containing substantial road mileage. This can make navigation easier in places, but it is hard on feet over several consecutive days. Build in time for foot care and do not judge the route only by ascent figures.

Seasonally:

- **Spring** can offer improving ground conditions, though storms and newly reopened accommodation need consideration.
- **Summer** gives the longest daylight and most open services, but midges can be a nuisance in boggy areas; a head net is worth carrying.
- **Autumn** is often the best balance of quieter trails, fewer midges and good walking conditions, though days shorten later in the season.
- **Winter** is not recommended for most walkers because of short daylight, saturated ground and limited accommodation.

## Permits, dogs and access

No permit is required to walk the Western Way, and there is no trail fee. The exception is planned use of facilities such as the Letterkeen / Brogan Carroll Bothy, where advance registration is required.

Dogs are not permitted on off-road sections of the Western Way. Restrictions apply on sensitive off-road and forestry sections, including the Erriff River section and the off-road stretch between Sheeffry Bridge and Drummin. This route should not be planned as a dog-friendly long-distance walk.

## Towns, Villages and Overnight Stops

The Western Way has a sharp divide between proper service towns and very quiet rural stopping points. Oughterard, Leenane, Westport and Newport are the places to organise accommodation, meals and resupply. Maam Bridge has limited services; Drummin, Bellacorick and Sheskin require careful planning, transfers or camping.

Route section	Practical service level	Planning note
Oughterard	Full start-town services	Best place to arrive the night before and buy food for Day 1.
Maam Bridge	Very limited	Book ahead; do not rely on shop resupply.
Maam Bridge to Leenane	No services over Mám Éan	Carry food and water for the full day.
Leenane	Good for a small village	Key overnight and meal stop before the Mayo section.
Leenane to Westport via Drummin	Sparse to none	One of the main service gaps; accommodation around Drummin must be arranged in advance.
Westport	Full services	Best resupply, rest, laundry and transport hub on the route.
Newport	Useful small-town services	Last reliable town before the remote north Mayo stages.
Newport to Ballycastle via Bellacorick and Sheskin	Very sparse / no reliable services	Carry supplies for at least two days and arrange the Sheskin overnight or transfer before leaving Newport.
Ballycastle	Limited finish-village services	Book accommodation and onward transport before arrival.

### Oughterard

Oughterard is the start of the Western Way, on the western shore of Lough Corrib. It is a proper village rather than just a trailhead, and it is the most convenient place to spend the night before starting.

Accommodation is available in B&Bs, guesthouses and self-catering properties within easy reach of the route. Camillaun Lodge, on the Owenriff River, is close to the Western Way start, while the Western Way Hotel is near the town centre. There are also several smaller B&B options, so most walkers should be able to find a suitable first-night base if booked in advance.

For food and supplies, Oughterard is the first important resupply point. There is a supermarket, pharmacy, butcher, post office and a Saturday local market. Powers Thatched Pub on Main Street and Faherty's Bar are useful food-and-pub options before the walk begins. This is the place to buy snacks and lunch food for the first stage, rather than expecting to stock up properly at Maam Bridge.

Transport is relatively straightforward by Western Way standards. Bus Éireann Route 419 runs between Galway and Clifden via Oughterard, and Citylink also serves the Galway–Oughterard corridor. Galway city

has rail links from Dublin, making Oughterard one of the easier access points on the route. Timetables should still be checked before travelling, especially if arriving late in the day.

## **Maam Bridge / Maum**

Maam Bridge is the usual end of Day 1 from Oughterard, after roughly 21 km. It is a small crossroads hamlet in the Maam Valley, not a full-service town, so expectations need to be modest.

Accommodation is very limited and should be booked before starting the route. Keane's Bar is the heart of the village and has historically operated as an inn. B&B accommodation exists in the wider area, including Tiernakill Farmhouse B&B, and Peacockes Hotel on the Maam Cross road may be an option, but its position relative to the trail should be checked before booking. Self-catering cottages are also available in the wider Connemara area.

Keane's Bar is the main local stop for food and drink, known for pints, hot drinks and toasted sandwiches. It also has a hardware/general store next door, but this is not a dependable resupply point for a multi-day walker. Carry what is needed from Oughterard.

Public transport to Maam Bridge itself is sparse. A private car, taxi or pre-arranged lift is usually the practical option if joining, leaving or diverting from the route here. Do not assume a usable same-day bus connection without checking current timetables.

Maam Bridge is a useful overnight because the next stage climbs towards Mám Éan early in the day. A confirmed bed and an evening meal here make the first two days much easier to manage.

## **Mám Éan / Maumeen**

Mám Éan, also known as Maumeen, is not an overnight stop or service point. It is the high point of the Western Way, at about 259 m, crossed on the stage between Maam Bridge and Leenane.

There is no accommodation, food, shop or transport at the pass. The site is important as an early-Christian pilgrimage place, with a chapel, St Patrick statue and holy well, but walkers should treat it as a remote mountain crossing. Carry lunch, snacks and enough water from Maam Bridge, and do not plan any resupply until Leenane.

## **Inagh Valley**

The Inagh Valley lies on the descent towards Killary and Leenane, with the Twelve Bens framing the route. It is one of the most memorable landscape sections of the Galway half of the Western Way, but it is not a practical service base for most walkers.

Accommodation and food should be planned around Maam Bridge and Leenane rather than the valley itself. If considering a deviation to accommodation in or near the Inagh Valley, check location, road access and transfer arrangements before booking. This should be checked before travelling.

## **Killary Harbour**

Killary Harbour is reached before Leenane and marks one of the key changes in the route, from the Maumturk crossing towards the village at the head of the fjord. It is a major scenic feature, but the practical overnight stop is Leenane rather than the harbour shore itself.

Food, accommodation and onward transport should be organised in Leenane. Any accommodation advertised around Killary rather than in the village should be checked carefully for distance from the Western Way and whether evening meals are available.

## **Leenane / Leenaun**

Leenane, also spelt Leenaun, is the end of Day 2 and one of the most important overnight stops on the Western Way. It sits at the head of Killary Harbour near the Galway–Mayo border and has far better hiker services than Maam Bridge.

Accommodation options include the Leenane Hotel, a historic waterfront hotel with restaurant and bar; Killary Adventure Centre / K2 The Killary Centre / Otter Hostel, which offers budget-friendly hostel-style accommodation, private rooms, a drying room, dining space and bar; Portfinn Lodge, with B&B accommodation and seafood restaurant; and smaller options such as Doirenacleigh Lodge, Tir na nOg, Killary House B&B and self-catering around Aasleagh Lodge Cottages. Availability can tighten in season, so booking ahead is sensible.

Food options are good for a village of this size, but not unlimited. The Leenane Hotel restaurant, Portfinn Lodge restaurant, the Purple Door Café and the bar at Killary Adventure Centre are useful options. Opening hours can be seasonal, so evening food should be checked when booking accommodation.

Shopping is limited. There is no supermarket comparable to Oughterard or Westport, so Leenane should be treated as a meal-and-bed stop rather than a full resupply town. Carry enough food onward if accommodation does not provide packed lunches or breakfast.

Bus Éireann serves the wider Galway–Westport corridor through the Leenane area, but services are infrequent. Taxis from Westport or Clifden may be practical for access or bail-out, provided they are arranged in advance.

Leenane is worth treating as a key logistics point. It gives a proper night indoors after Mám Éan and before the more awkward service gap towards Drummin and Westport.

## **Aasleagh**

Aasleagh is passed on the Day 3 stage after leaving Leenane. Aasleagh Falls is a notable local landmark at the foot of Killary, but for Western Way planning this is a scenic point rather than a service stop.

There is no dependable accommodation, food shop or pub at Aasleagh itself for walkers to rely on. Continue planning the day around Leenane at the start and Drummin or a pre-arranged transfer/accommodation point at the end.

## **Sheeffry Bridge**

Sheeffry Bridge lies in the rural Mayo section between Leenane and Drummin. It is not a service town and should not be planned as a resupply point.

Some accommodation may exist in the wider Sheeffry and Erriff valley area, but locations vary and may not sit directly on the trail. Anyone using accommodation here should confirm distance from the Western Way, whether collection is available and whether evening meals or packed lunches can be provided. This should be checked before travelling.

## Drummin

Drummin is the usual end of Day 3 from Leenane, after roughly 22 km. It is a small rural hamlet, and this is one of the trickiest overnight points for independent walkers.

There are very limited or no services in Drummin itself. Accommodation may be available in the wider Sheeffry or Erriff valley area, and some self-guided operators place clients in guesthouses around this part of the route. Independent walkers should not arrive expecting to find a bed, pub meal or shop. Book accommodation or arrange a transfer before leaving Leenane.

Food planning is important here. Carry enough from Leenane for the day and for the following morning unless accommodation has explicitly offered dinner, breakfast and a packed lunch. Wild camping may be a practical option on the more remote sections where suitable and responsible, but it should not be treated as a fallback for poor accommodation planning.

Transport is limited. A taxi or pre-arranged lift is the realistic option if needing to leave or rejoin the route around Drummin.

## Croagh Patrick eastern slopes

The Western Way skirts the lower eastern slopes of Croagh Patrick on the approach towards Westport. It does not climb to the summit, and this section should not be planned as a separate mountain ascent unless extra time and transport have been arranged.

There are no major hiker services on the slope section itself. The practical aim for the day is to continue to Westport, where accommodation, food, shops and transport are all available. During the Croagh Patrick pilgrimage season, and especially around Reek Sunday on the last Sunday of July, accommodation in and around Westport can fill quickly.

## Westport

Westport is the largest and most useful service town on the Western Way. It is the usual end of Day 4 from Drummin, after roughly 21 km, and it is the best place on the route for rest, resupply and transport.

Accommodation ranges from guesthouses and B&Bs to mid-range hotels and self-catering. Options include Hotel Westport, The Wyatt Hotel in the town centre and numerous smaller B&Bs. As a broad guide, double rooms can be around €85–150+ per night depending on season and standard, but current prices should be confirmed before booking. Book well ahead in July and August, during major events, and around Croagh Patrick pilgrimage dates.

Westport has the strongest food scene on the route. Matt Molloy's is the best-known pub, with live traditional music, and there are numerous restaurants, cafés and pubs around The Mall and Bridge Street. It is also a good place for breakfast before the shorter walk to Newport.

For supplies, Westport is essential. Tesco Superstore at Westpoint Shopping Centre on Altamount Street provides a full resupply, and there are pharmacies, fruit and veg shops and other town services. This is the place to restock properly before the northern half of the Western Way. Do not leave Westport assuming Newport alone will cover every need for the remote stages ahead.

Transport links are good. Westport station has direct Irish Rail services to Dublin Heuston, and Bus Éireann services connect with places including Galway, Dublin and Ballina. Ireland West Airport Knock is about 48 km away, with onward travel by car, taxi or pre-arranged transfer. Westport is therefore the best start, finish or break point for section hikers.

## Newport

Newport is the usual end of Day 5 from Westport, a shorter stage of about 12 km. It is a small heritage town on the Black Oak River and is well supplied for its size, but it is still much smaller than Westport.

Accommodation options include Newport House Hotel, a Georgian country house hotel by the river; Hotel Newport in the town centre; Brannens of Newport B&B, which is used to Mayo Greenway and Western Way walkers; and Riverside House, a Georgian guesthouse. Book ahead, particularly if the short Westport–Newport stage is being used as a rest-and-recovery day.

Food and drink options include Kelly's Kitchen on Main Street, Blue Bicycle Tea Rooms, Nevin's Newfield Inn outside town, The Gráinne Uaile pub and Walsh's Bridge Inn. Newport also has a Friday street market with local produce such as cheeses, bread, fish and eggs.

For supplies, Newport has general shops, a convenience store and a pharmacy. It is sufficient for topping up, but it is not a full resupply town on the scale of Westport. Buy the main two-day food load in Westport, then use Newport to add fresh items, snacks and anything forgotten.

Transport is comparatively good for rural Mayo. Bus Éireann runs between Westport and Newport, and TFI Local Link Mayo provides connections towards Ballina via Castlebar. Timetables should be checked before travelling.

Newport is a critical planning point because it is effectively the last reliable town before Ballycastle. After leaving, the route enters a long, remote section through Bellacorick, Sheskin and north Mayo bogland where food and accommodation cannot be assumed.

## Nephin Beg range / Wild Nephin

The Nephin Beg and Wild Nephin section is the most remote part of the Western Way. It is not a town or village stop, but it strongly affects overnight planning between Newport, Sheskin and Ballycastle.

This area has blanket bog, forest and open country, with few road crossings and no dependable shop or pub resupply. Wild Nephin National Park borders the route area and has designated wild camping areas. Letterkeen Bothy, near the Letterkeen car park area, and an Adirondack-style mountain hut with fire pit close to the main trail area can provide practical shelter options, but these should be treated as part of a planned remote-stage strategy rather than an excuse to under-plan.

Carry sufficient food, waterproofing and navigation tools before entering this section. If using camping or a bothy, check current access, closures and park guidance before walking.

## Bellacorick

Bellacorick is a small rural locality in north Mayo where the Western Way crosses a public road during the remote bog and forest section. It is best understood as a road crossing, not as a resupply point.

There are no reliable shops or accommodation. A pub or bar has historically existed in the area, but it should not be relied on for food, drink or opening hours. Carry everything needed from Newport.

Bellacorick sits near Bellacorick Bog, part of the largest peatland in Ireland, with the Wild Nephin area nearby. For walkers, its main value is as a potential access or pick-up point if a transfer has been arranged in advance. Public transport should not be assumed.

## **Sheskin**

Sheskin, usually associated with Sheskin Forest, is the notional end of Day 6 from Newport and the start of Day 7 to Ballycastle. This is the most logistically difficult overnight on the standard 7-day itinerary.

There is no village service base at Sheskin: no reliable shop, pub or accommodation. The forest traverse through north Mayo bogland is long and remote, and this section should not be treated lightly.

Some self-guided walking operators handle this night by transferring walkers to accommodation in the broader Ballina or Crossmolina area, then returning them to the trail. Independent walkers may need to arrange a taxi transfer, use a planned wild-camping option, or build a different itinerary around available accommodation. This should be fixed before leaving Newport.

Food planning is non-negotiable here. Carry enough from Newport for the full Newport–Sheskin day and the onward day to Ballycastle unless a transfer or accommodation package explicitly provides meals and packed lunches.

## **Ballycastle**

Ballycastle is the finish of the Western Way on HikeList's Oughterard-to-Ballycastle route. It is a small village on the north Mayo Atlantic coast, close to Downpatrick Head and the sea stack of Dún Briste.

Accommodation is limited but available. There are B&Bs and self-catering cottages in and around the village. Because Ballycastle is small, accommodation should be booked before starting the final stages rather than arranged on arrival.

Food options are modest. June's Café is useful for breakfast, lunch and daytime food, while Healy's Bar offers evening meals. There is also a local craft and tourist information point on upper Main Street. Shopping is very limited, so do not expect a supermarket or pharmacy at the finish.

Onward transport is sparse. There is no direct train from Ballycastle; Ballina, about 28 km away, is the practical gateway for rail and Bus Éireann connections. Ireland West Airport Knock is about 55 km away and requires taxi, car or pre-arranged pick-up. Arrange departure transport before reaching Ballycastle, particularly if finishing late in the day.

Many walkers will prefer to stay overnight in Ballycastle rather than travel out immediately. If time and energy allow, Downpatrick Head lies about 6 km (around 4 miles) north and makes a strong coastal finish after the inland bog and forest stages.

## Getting to the Start

The Western Way starts in **Oughterard, County Galway**, at the public car park on **Clifden Road / N59, Fough West** on the western side of the town. The approximate trailhead GPS is **53.428599, -9.319421**. Oughterard has no railway station, so almost all public-transport journeys route through **Galway city**, then continue by bus or taxi for the final leg.

Before setting out, check the current Sport Ireland trail notices for the Galway section. The **Oughterard-Maam stage has had a 2 km boardwalk closure near Lackavrea Forest**, with an alternative route in place. This should be checked before travelling.

### By train

The nearest railway station is **Galway Ceannt Station**, in Galway city centre beside Eyre Square. There is **no train station at Oughterard**.

Irish Rail / Iarnród Éireann operates direct intercity trains from **Dublin Heuston to Galway Ceannt**, with journey times usually around **2 hours 15 minutes to 2 hours 45 minutes**. Services normally run several times daily, often every 2–3 hours, but fares and times vary by date. Book ahead at Irish Rail for the best fares and check the current timetable before committing to onward travel.

Galway is also reachable by rail from **Limerick and Ennis via Athenry**, though the Dublin–Galway line is the main route for most walkers arriving from outside the west of Ireland.

From Galway Ceannt Station, walk to the nearby Galway bus and coach stops around Eyre Square for the onward bus to Oughterard, or take a taxi if arriving late or carrying heavy kit.

### By bus

Buses from Galway to Oughterard run along the **N59 Galway–Clifden road**. This is the normal final connection for walkers using public transport.

Operator	Route	Where to board in Galway	Oughterard stop / direction	Typical journey	Notes
Bus Éireann	419 Galway–Clifden via Oughterard	Galway Bus Station	Oughterard	About 34–40 minutes	Frequency varies through the day; less frequent in evenings and on Sundays
Citylink	923 Galway–Clifden via Oughterard	Galway Coach Station	Oughterard, including stop listed as “Opp The Angler’s Bar”	About 30 minutes	Daily service, usually less frequent than city routes

Single fares are typically in the region of **€6–€12**, depending on operator and booking method. This should be checked before travelling.

There is **no direct bus from Dublin to Oughterard** as a through trailhead connection. Travel first to Galway city, then change for Oughterard. Timetables on the Galway–Oughterard corridor change

seasonally, so do not plan a first-day walking start around an old timetable, especially on Sundays or bank holidays.

## By car

From **Galway city**, drive northwest on the **N59** to Oughterard. The journey is roughly **27 km** and usually takes about **25–30 minutes**.

The trailhead public car park is on **Clifden Road / N59, Fough West, Oughterard**. It is convenient for starting the walk, but the Western Way is a point-to-point trail and leaving a car at the start creates a significant end-of-walk transfer problem. Do not assume the trailhead car park is suitable for unattended seven-day parking; check locally before leaving a vehicle.

For independent walkers with a car, the main options are:

- **Start from Oughterard and arrange a return transfer from Ballycastle** at the end. This is a long transfer: Ballycastle to Oughterard is about **180 km by road**, around **2.5 hours** in normal conditions.
- **Leave the car in Galway**, take the bus or taxi to Oughterard for Day 1, then return to Galway after finishing by arranging transport from the Mayo end of the route. This is often simpler than trying to retrieve a car from Oughterard.
- **Use a self-guided operator** if booking a packaged itinerary with accommodation and baggage transfer; car logistics can often be arranged as part of the wider plan.

A taxi from Galway city to Oughterard typically takes about **24–25 minutes** and may cost roughly **€50–€65**. This should be checked with a local Galway taxi operator before relying on it, particularly for early starts or late arrivals.

## From the nearest airport

There is no scheduled commercial airport at Galway. The practical airports for the Western Way start are **Dublin Airport**, **Shannon Airport** and **Ireland West Airport Knock**.

Airport	Best onward route to the start	Typical journey to Galway	Notes
Dublin Airport	Direct coach to Galway, then bus/taxi to Oughterard	About 2 hours 45 minutes to 3 hours by coach	Usually the simplest international arrival route
Shannon Airport	Bus to Galway, then bus/taxi to Oughterard	About 1 hour 30–40 minutes	Useful for arrivals from the south or west
Ireland West Airport Knock	Bus to Galway, then bus/taxi to Oughterard	About 1 hour 45 minutes	More useful for Mayo access, but workable for Oughterard via Galway

From **Dublin Airport**, direct coaches operated by companies such as **Citylink / GoBus** run to Galway Coach Station, often frequently at peak times. Typical fares are around **€15–€22 single**, but this should be checked before travelling. Dublin Airport has no direct rail link; taking the train means first transferring from the airport to **Dublin Heuston**, then taking the train to Galway.

From **Shannon Airport**, Bus Éireann / Expressway services connect to Galway Bus Station, with multiple daily departures. Fares and seasonal services should be checked before booking flights.

From **Ireland West Airport Knock**, Bus Éireann Route 64 links the airport with Galway. This is not the most direct airport for starting in Oughterard, but it is a viable option if flight times suit.

## Where to stay before starting

The two sensible choices are to stay in **Oughterard** itself or in **Galway city**.

**Oughterard is the best option for an immediate start.** It puts you at the trail town the night before, avoids a morning transfer, and makes it easier to begin early on the first stage to Maam.

Accommodation is limited compared with Galway, so book ahead in summer and at weekends. Options include town B&Bs and guesthouses such as **The Western Way B&B on Camp Street** and **Camillaun Lodge on the Owenriff River**, along with other small hotels and B&Bs in and around the town.

**Galway city is better for transport choice.** It has far more hotels, hostels, guesthouses and restaurants, especially around Eyre Square and the city centre, and is the easiest place to reach by train or long-distance coach. The trade-off is the morning transfer to Oughterard. Early buses on the Galway-Oughterard corridor usually allow a same-morning start, but this should be checked before travelling, particularly on Sundays, bank holidays or if aiming to walk the full first stage without rushing.

## Getting Home from the Finish

The HikeList version of the Western Way finishes in Ballycastle, a small village on the north Mayo coast. Ballina, about 28 km south, is the practical transport hub for onward travel: it has the nearest railway station, long-distance buses, more accommodation and taxi operators. Treat Ballycastle as a limited-service rural finish rather than a place where onward transport can be improvised late in the day.

### By train

There is no railway station in Ballycastle. The nearest useful station is **Ballina**, reached first by bus or taxi from Ballycastle.

From **Ballina railway station**, Irish Rail / Iarnród Éireann services run on the Ballina branch line to **Manulla Junction**, where they connect with the Dublin Heuston–Westport main line.

Journey	Practical notes
Ballycastle → Ballina	Use a local bus if your finish time fits the timetable, or pre-book a taxi.
Ballina → Dublin Heuston	Usually around 3 hr 20 min to 3 hr 30 min including the connection at Manulla Junction.
Ballina → Westport	Connect via Manulla Junction. Useful if retrieving a car or linking with other Mayo travel plans.

Train frequency is not metro-style; services generally run every few hours rather than constantly. Check current times at [irishrail.ie](http://irishrail.ie) before fixing accommodation, taxi pick-ups or flights.

### By bus

Buses are the key public-transport option out of Ballycastle, but they are limited and timetable-dependent. There is **no reliable late-evening fallback** from the village, so walkers finishing the final Sheskin to Ballycastle stage late in the day should either stay overnight in Ballycastle or pre-book a taxi to Ballina.

#### Ballycastle to Ballina

Operator / route	Typical usefulness for walkers	Notes
<b>McGrath Coaches</b>	Main regular local bus link between Ballycastle and Ballina	Monday–Saturday coverage, with stronger weekday service. Timetables include a late-morning Ballycastle departure for Ballina and a weekday afternoon Ballycastle to Ballina service. Check the current timetable before relying on it.
<b>TFI Local Link Route 4649</b>	Local Link option for Ballycastle to Ballina	Operates Monday–Friday. Book or check through TFI Local Link Mayo: <b>094 9005150</b> or <a href="mailto:mail@locallinkmayo.ie">mail@locallinkmayo.ie</a> .
<b>Bus Éireann Route 445</b>	Ballina–Ballycastle service via Killala	Journey is about 30 minutes. Current departures should be checked directly with Bus Éireann before travel.

Ballina is the best onward hub once off the trail. From Ballina, long-distance bus options include:

Route	Where it helps
<b>Expressway / Bus Éireann Route 22</b>	Ballina to Dublin Busáras and Dublin Airport. Useful for Dublin city or flights; some services stop at Dublin Airport.
<b>Expressway Route 52 / GoBus Route 430</b>	Ballina to Galway. Useful for returning towards the start region or connecting south-west.
<b>Bus Éireann Route 458</b>	Ballina towards Sligo and Enniskillen. Useful for northward connections.

Long-distance bus times vary by day of week and season. Check current schedules and book ahead where possible, especially if travelling on a Sunday or public holiday.

## By car/taxi

A taxi is the most reliable way to leave Ballycastle if the final walking day runs late, the weather slows progress, or the bus timetable does not line up. The road transfer to Ballina is about **25–30 minutes** and typically costs around **€40–55**. Confirm the fare when booking.

Ballina-based operators serving the area include:

Operator	Contact
<b>Ballina Taxi Co-Op</b>	<b>096 73333</b>
<b>Ballina Taxi Atlantic</b>	<b>087 9163052 / <a href="mailto:info@ballinataxiatlantic.com">info@ballinataxiatlantic.com</a></b>

For anyone who left a car at the start in **Oughterard**, the finish-to-start transfer is long and expensive if taken as a solo taxi. More practical options are to:

- arrange a shuttle through a self-guided walking operator if using one;
- leave the car at a larger transport hub such as Ballina or Westport and use public transport for the trail logistics;
- pre-book a private transfer if travelling as a group and splitting the cost.

Do not assume taxis will be available at short notice in Ballycastle itself. Book from Ballina before the final walking day if onward travel matters that evening.

## From the nearest airport

The closest airport for the finish is **Ireland West Airport Knock (NOC)**, about **40 km from Ballina** by road. A taxi or private transfer from Ballina to Knock typically takes around 40–45 minutes and costs roughly **€30–45**, but prices should be confirmed before booking. Public transport is possible only indirectly, with a change via **Charlestown**, so allow plenty of time if flying the same day.

For wider international connections, **Dublin Airport** is often more practical. From Ballina, either:

- take the train to **Dublin Heuston** and then cross to the airport by onward city transport; or

- use **Expressway / Bus Éireann Route 22**, which links Ballina with Dublin and includes Dublin Airport stops on some services.

**Shannon Airport** is much farther south, around 190 km from Ballina, and is mainly relevant if using a private transfer, a self-guided operator's arrangements, or a hire car.

## Where to stay at the finish

Staying overnight is often the simplest option after the final 28 km stage from Sheskin to Ballycastle. It removes pressure to hit a daytime bus and gives a buffer for slow boggy ground, poor weather or tired legs.

In **Ballycastle**, the key walker-friendly option is **Burkes of Ballycastle Accommodation**, which offers hostel dorm rooms, family ensuite rooms, self-catering apartments and a townhouse. It has a drying room, free breakfast and WiFi, and is a useful fit for wet long-distance walkers. Prices start from around **€46 per night**, but Ballycastle is small, so book ahead and confirm current rates.

Food and evening options in Ballycastle are limited but sufficient if planned: the village has a café/restaurant and a few pubs, including Healy's Pub and Connolly's Pub. Do not expect town-level supermarket choice at the finish.

If you need stronger transport links, more beds, late food options or an early train/bus the next morning, continue by taxi or bus to **Ballina** and stay there instead. Ballina has multiple hotels, B&Bs and guesthouses, plus the railway station and long-distance bus connections. Walkers staying an extra night in Ballycastle may also want to visit **Downpatrick Head** and the sea stack **Dún Briste**, about 6 km from the village centre.

# Which Direction Should You Walk?

## Standard direction: Oughterard to Ballycastle

Walk the Western Way south to north, from Oughterard in County Galway to Ballycastle in north Mayo. This is the standard direction used by the route's stage structure, published walking itineraries and supported self-guided packages, and it is the direction that makes the most sense for most independent walkers.

The reverse direction is possible, but it is less convenient: it starts in the most remote end of the trail, puts the hardest transport problem at the beginning, and gives a less satisfying finish than reaching the Atlantic coast at Ballycastle.

Direction	Best for	Main drawbacks
<b>South to north: Oughterard → Ballycastle</b>	Most walkers; easiest access; best scenery build-up; natural stage flow	Remote transport at the finish needs planning
<b>North to south: Ballycastle → Oughterard</b>	Walkers with a lift or pre-arranged transfer to Ballycastle; anyone deliberately wanting the wildest stages first	Harder start logistics; limited weekday bus; less dramatic finish; more likely headwinds on exposed northern stages

## Transport strongly favours starting in Oughterard

Oughterard is much easier to reach without a car. Bus Éireann Route 419 links Galway city with Clifden via Oughterard, with daily services and a journey of roughly 43 minutes from Galway Ceannt Station to Oughterard. Galway is also a major public transport hub, with rail and coach links from Dublin and other Irish cities.

Ballycastle is far more awkward as a starting point. Bus Éireann Route 445 links Ballina, Killala and Ballycastle, but it is a limited weekday service, typically only one or two runs per day, with a journey of about 30 minutes between Ballina and Ballycastle. Current timetables should be checked before travelling, especially for weekends and public holidays.

For a south-to-north walk, this means the straightforward transport leg comes first: travel to Galway, continue to Oughterard, then start walking. The difficult transport leg comes at the end, where it can be managed with a planned overnight in Ballycastle or Killala, a weekday bus to Ballina, or a pre-arranged taxi or transfer. Trying to reach Ballycastle first for a north-to-south walk is usually the less forgiving option.

## The scenery builds better south to north

The south-to-north direction gives the route a stronger natural progression.

The opening from Oughterard along the western side of Lough Corrib is a gentler start before the wetter upland and bog sections begin. The route then moves into the Maumturk Mountains, crossing Mám Éan / Maumeen pass, the high point of the Way at about 259 m, before dropping towards the Inagh Valley, Killary Harbour and Leenane.

Further north, the Mayo section brings the eastern slopes of Croagh Patrick, then Westport and Newport, before the route commits to its most remote country: the Nephin Beg range, blanket bog, forestry and open ground around the edges of Wild Nephin National Park. Finishing at Ballycastle, close to Downpatrick Head and Dún Briste, gives the walk a clear Atlantic endpoint.

In reverse, the route begins with the dramatic coastal and wild northern stages and ends beside Lough Corrib at Oughterard. Oughterard is a practical and pleasant trailhead, but it is a quieter finish than emerging from the bog and uplands onto the north Mayo coast.

## **Climbing is not a major factor either way**

There is no decisive climbing advantage in either direction. The Western Way has about 1,800 m of total ascent overall, and the highest point, Mám Éan / Maumeen pass, is modest by mountain standards and is not a technical climb. Whether it is walked northbound or southbound, the route still involves long wet stretches, bog, peat, wet grass, rock, forestry tracks, local roads and boardwalk.

Direction will not make the ground drier or the navigation easier in poor visibility. The practical advantage of the standard south-to-north direction is that the route's stage planning and walking descriptions align more naturally with how most people tackle the Way.

## **Wind gives a modest advantage to south-to-north**

Prevailing winds in Ireland are generally from the south-west, with westerlies common in summer. On a south-to-north walk, that wind is more likely to come from the side or rear-left rather than directly into the face. On the exposed northern stages towards Sheskin and Ballycastle, where the route trends more towards the north-west, a south-westerly can be more helpful.

This is only a modest advantage. Weather on the west of Ireland is variable, and any direction can bring headwinds, heavy rain or poor visibility. Even so, walking north to south makes it more likely that the long, exposed northern stages are tackled into the prevailing wind.

## **Accommodation and resupply also flow better northbound**

The standard seven-day south-to-north itinerary reaches useful service points at natural intervals: Maam, Leenane, Westport and Newport all fall at sensible stage ends or mid-route positions. Westport and Newport are particularly useful before the more remote final section.

The hardest logistics come late: Newport to Sheskin and Sheskin to Ballycastle are long, remote days with fewer services. Northbound, these arrive after several days of walking, when most hikers are better adapted to the terrain, daily rhythm and weather. Southbound, the same remote northern stages come immediately, which can be a harsh opening if accommodation, food and transport have not been tightly arranged.

## **Recommendation**

Walk the Western Way **south to north, from Oughterard to Ballycastle**. It is the standard direction, starts from the easier transport hub, gives the best scenery progression, offers a slight prevailing-wind advantage, fits the normal accommodation flow, and finishes with the strongest sense of arrival on the north Mayo Atlantic coast.

Choose the reverse only if there is a specific reason, such as a lift to Ballycastle, fixed accommodation, or a desire to tackle the wild northern stages first. If walking north to south, check the Ballina–Ballycastle bus timetable carefully before booking anything, and do not rely on arriving in Ballycastle at the weekend without a confirmed transport plan.

## Accommodation Along the Route

Accommodation on the Western Way is workable for inn-to-inn walkers, but only with advance planning. The route is not lined with frequent villages: beds are concentrated in Oughterard, Leenane, Westport, Newport and Ballycastle, while Maam, Drummin and Sheskin are the pressure points. The northern Mayo section is the most awkward, especially Newport to Sheskin and Sheskin to Ballycastle, where walkers need either camping/bothy plans, a pre-arranged transfer, or a self-guided package.

July and August are the busiest months and should be booked well ahead. May, June and September usually give more flexibility, but the smallest overnight stops still need early contact. Do not start assuming a bed can be found on arrival at Maam, Drummin or Ballycastle.

Place	Accommodation level	Best for	Notes
Oughterard	Good	Pre-walk night	Several B&Bs and guesthouses. The Western Way B&B is a named trail option and is Fáilte Ireland 3-star approved. Useful for starting rested rather than travelling and walking on the same day.
Maam / Maam Bridge	Limited	All walkers, but book ahead	One of the thinnest accommodation points. Tiernakill Farmhouse B&B is on the Western Way route, around 10 minutes' walk from Maam Bridge, with en-suite rooms. Some walkers use Airbnb locally. Camping near the bridge is possible but can be poor after heavy rain, when the river may flood.
Leenane / Leenaun	Good	All walkers; rest and resupply	A key overnight stop between the Galway and Mayo sections. Portfinn Lodge is on the trail, with en-suite rooms and views over Killary Harbour. Leenane Hotel is a seasonal hotel option, typically closing in early January and reopening in late March; dates should be checked when booking. There are multiple B&Bs.
Drummin / Aasleagh / Sheeffry Bridge area	Very limited	Self-guided walkers or those arranging transfers	Drummin is not a full service village. Most walkers needing a proper bed use an operator-arranged transfer or pre-book a local pick-up. Strong walkers sometimes push on towards the Croagh Patrick / Murrisk area, but that changes the stage balance.
Westport	Excellent	All walkers; restock and recovery	The main accommodation and service hub on the route. Options include central hostels, hotels, B&Bs and camping. The Old Mill Holiday Hostel is central, while Croagh Patrick Hostel in Murrisk suits walkers approaching from the west before entering Westport. Westport House Campsite is a camping option near town. Book early in July–August.

Place	Accommodation level	Best for	Notes
Newport	Good	All walkers	A smaller but useful town with several walker-friendly options. Brannens of Newport is central and particularly relevant to Western Way walkers. Hotel Newport and Greenway View B&B are other town options. The short Westport–Newport stage makes this a logical easier night before the remote Nephin Beg section.
Sheskin / Nephin Beg	None / bothy	Campers, bothy users, self-guided walkers	There is no village accommodation at Sheskin. Letterkeen Bothy in Wild Nephin National Park is a free-to-use mountain refuge, with a dedicated wild camping spot about 2 km north along the Western Way. It can be busy on summer weekends. Walkers wanting a bed normally arrange a taxi or pick-up to Bangor Erris, where Hillcrest House B&B caters for Western Way walkers.
Ballycastle	Limited but hiker-focused	Finish-night accommodation	Small coastal village with limited choice, so book ahead. Burkes of Ballycastle is the main walker-friendly option, with dorms and en-suite family rooms, kitchen, laundry, drying room, Wi-Fi and breakfast. Current prices should be checked before booking.

## The awkward nights: Maam, Drummin and Sheskin

Maam is the first bottleneck. Tiernakill Farmhouse is the obvious on-route B&B, but there are few alternatives, so this night should be secured before committing to the rest of the schedule. If staying in informal local accommodation, confirm exactly where it is in relation to Maam Bridge and whether any road walking or pick-up is involved.

Drummin is more of a route point than a village stop. For a seven-day itinerary, this is often the night that determines whether the trip is genuinely inn-to-inn or partly transfer-supported. Pre-arranged taxi transfers, self-guided operators, or a longer day towards the Croagh Patrick / Murrisk side are the usual solutions.

Sheskin is the most remote overnight. There is no normal village accommodation here. The practical choices are to use Letterkeen Bothy or the nearby wild camping provision, arrange a lift out to Bangor Erris for a B&B night, or book through an operator that handles the transfer and returns you to the route next morning.

## Where there is strong choice

Westport is the best place for a rest, laundry, resupply and a broader range of beds. It is the only overnight stop on the HikeList seven-day schedule with a genuinely wide spread of hostels, hotels, B&Bs and camping. Newport and Leenane are smaller but still dependable if booked ahead.

Oughterard is worth using as a pre-walk night rather than arriving late and beginning tired. Ballycastle works well as a finish, but it is not a large resort town; secure a room before walking the northern Mayo stages.

## Camping, bothies and hostels

The Western Way can be walked with a mix of B&Bs, hostels and occasional camping, but camping should not be treated as a way to avoid all planning. Wet ground is common, and low-lying riverside spots can be unsuitable after rain. Near Maam Bridge, camping is particularly weather-dependent because of flood risk.

The most useful non-commercial shelter is Letterkeen Bothy in Wild Nephin National Park. It is free to use, but it is a mountain refuge rather than a guaranteed booking. Carry enough equipment to be self-sufficient if it is full, especially on summer weekends.

Hostel-style options are strongest around Westport, Murrisk and Ballycastle. These are useful for drying gear, washing clothes and keeping costs down, but availability is still limited compared with larger European hiking routes.

## Luggage transfer and supported itineraries

Self-guided companies such as Hillwalk Tours, Footfalls and Macs Adventure make the Western Way much easier to organise. They typically pre-book accommodation, move baggage between overnight stops and arrange transfers where the route does not naturally finish at a village with beds.

This is particularly valuable for:

- the Drummin overnight, where nearby accommodation is sparse;
- the Newport to Sheskin stage, where there is no village at the end;
- walkers who want a bed every night rather than relying on Letterkeen Bothy or camping;
- anyone walking in July or August, when small B&B capacity can disappear quickly.

Independent walkers can arrange similar logistics themselves, but transfers should be agreed before arrival, not left until the end of a long wet stage. Accommodation owners in walker-focused places may be able to advise on local taxi options, but this should be checked before travelling.

## Camping and Wild Camping

The Western Way can be camped, but it is not a straightforward campsite-to-campsite route. Most walkers use B&Bs, hotels, hostels and guesthouses in places such as Leenane, Westport and Newport, then treat camping as a self-sufficient option for the more remote sections. Expect wet ground, exposed bog, limited facilities and long gaps between services, especially from Newport towards Sheskin and Ballycastle.

### The legal position in Ireland

Ireland has no general right to roam. Much of the Western Way crosses private farmland, bog roads and access land used by kind permission of landowners, so wild camping without permission is technically not allowed. In practice, discreet one-night camping is often tolerated in remote areas when it is done responsibly, but it should not be treated as a right.

Use the following approach:

- Ask the landowner where possible, especially near farms, houses, sheep fields and enclosed land.
- Camp late, leave early and stay only one night.
- Pitch well away from buildings, roads, livestock, gates and working farmland.
- Leave no trace: remove all litter, food waste and toilet paper.
- Do not light fires. Blanket bog and forestry are sensitive, and much of the route is on private or protected land.

### Does the Western Way suit camping?

Camping is possible, but this is not the easiest way to walk the Western Way. Around half the route uses quiet local roads, which are poor camping terrain, and many off-road sections are wet bog, peat or forestry track rather than dry grassy pitches. The route is also broken by towns where indoor accommodation is more practical than carrying a full camping load.

Camping makes most sense if you are comfortable with:

- carrying a tent, mat, stove, food and water treatment;
- pitching on wet or uneven ground;
- navigating away from facilities in poor visibility;
- long food carries between towns, particularly Newport → Sheskin → Ballycastle;
- changing plans if Sport Ireland closure notices affect boardwalk, river or bog sections after heavy rain.

A mixed approach works well: use accommodation in the main towns and camp only where it solves a genuine logistics problem on the longer, more remote stages.

### Campsites and camping facilities near the route

Dedicated camping infrastructure is limited. Do not assume every stage-end village has a campsite.

Location	Camping option	Practical notes
Westport	Westport House Caravan & Camping Park, Westport Estate	The most useful conventional campsite on the route. It is about a 15-minute walk from Westport town centre and has grass pitches, showers, WiFi, laundry and food/drink facilities on site. The site opens seasonally; camping pitches are generally available June–September, with the wider park season running from mid-March to the end of September. Confirm current dates and prices before booking.
Leenane / Maam area	Informal lawn camping may be available at some hostel or B&B-style accommodation by prior arrangement	This should be arranged in advance. Do not arrive expecting a pitch without contacting the accommodation first.
Newport	No reliable trail campsite to depend on in the town itself	Plan an indoor overnight, camp at Westport before the short Westport–Newport stage, or continue north only if a lawful wild-camp or Wild Nephin camping plan has been arranged.
Sheskin / northern Mayo stages	No standard serviced campsite on the route	This is a remote, self-sufficient section. If camping, carry food, stove fuel, water treatment and a robust wet-weather setup.

## Wild Nephin and Nephin Beg camping

The most useful camping infrastructure on the Western Way is in the Wild Nephin / Nephin Beg area, where two open Adirondack-style shelters sit on or close to the route. They are not bookable private accommodation: treat them as basic wilderness shelters and carry a tent in case they are full.

Shelter	Position and facilities	Important restrictions
Lough Avoher Shelter	Near the Bangor Trail / Western Way junction area, close to Wild Nephin National Park. It is around two hours from Letterkeen trailhead. Sleeps about five, with a picnic table, water butt and flat ground nearby for tents.	First come, first served. No toilet facilities. Fires are strictly forbidden in this ecologically sensitive area.
Altnabrocky / Altna Brocky Shelter	Directly on the Western Way, around five hours beyond Lough Avoher into the Nephin Beg range. It has views towards Lough Cong and the Nephin Beg / Slieve Carr area, flat ground for tents, a nearby stream and an outdoor compost toilet. Approximate coordinates: 54° 02' N, 9° 36' W.	First come, first served. No water butt and no fire pit. Treat stream water before drinking.

Wild Nephin National Park has designated camping locations within the park boundaries, including Tarsaghaun Cottage, Altnabrocky Shelter, Lough Avoher Shelter and North of Bothy. All campers must register online before arrival at [campingwildnephin.com](http://campingwildnephin.com). Registration is free and is used for emergency contact and park management.

Key Wild Nephin rules for hikers:

- Camping is only at designated locations within the park.
- Camping is prohibited during Condition Orange or Red Fire Danger Notices.
- Campfires are only permitted at designated fire pits; do not light fires elsewhere.
- Remote sites have little or no infrastructure, so carry everything needed.

- Human waste must be dealt with at least 30 m from water and 50 m from paths.
- Leave No Trace principles are strictly expected.

## **Connemara National Park considerations**

The Western Way passes through Connemara country but the main route should not be treated as an invitation to camp wherever convenient. If a detour or side-trip involves camping inside Connemara National Park, follow the park rules:

- wild camping only;
- camp at least 400 m from any road capable of carrying a vehicle;
- camp at least 400 m from any building;
- no campfires;
- groups of 10 or more require a permit, applied for at least seven days in advance;
- move the tent after every second night so vegetation can recover;
- respect the camping exclusion zone near the visitor centre.

These rules apply to camping within the park, not to private land elsewhere on the Western Way, where landowner permission remains the key issue.

## **Best sections for a self-sufficient camp**

The most realistic wild-camping terrain is away from settlements, farms and roads, particularly:

- the open bog and moorland between Sheeffry Bridge and Westport, where discreet pitching may be possible with care and permission where relevant;
- the Newport → Sheskin stage, where the route enters its most remote bog and forestry country near Wild Nephin;
- the designated shelter areas at Lough Avoher and Altnabrocky, provided Wild Nephin registration and current restrictions have been followed.

These areas are also among the wettest and most exposed parts of the walk. A good sleeping mat, waterproof groundsheet, secure pitching system and dry-bag organisation matter more here than on a drier campsite route. Avoid soft peat hollows and look for firmer mineral or rocky ground, the edge of forestry tracks where appropriate, or established flat ground beside the designated shelters.

## **Water, waste and fires**

Water is usually available from bog streams and at the Wild Nephin shelters, but it should be filtered or purified. Upland bog water can look clean, but agricultural run-off is possible near farms and lowland sections.

Toilet practice needs particular care on this route because much of the ground is wet and slow to recover. Use toilets in towns and accommodation whenever possible. In remote areas, go well away from watercourses, paths and camping spots, bury waste where ground conditions allow, and pack out toilet paper and hygiene products.

Plan on using a stove rather than a fire. Fires are inappropriate across the Western Way: they are forbidden at Lough Avoher, restricted within Wild Nephin, unsafe on dry bog, and unacceptable on private farmland and forestry ground.

### **Practical cautions before camping**

- Check Sport Ireland closure notices before setting out, especially after heavy rain.
- Register before camping in Wild Nephin National Park.
- Do not rely on first-come shelters as guaranteed accommodation.
- Carry enough food for the Newport → Sheskin → Ballycastle section if camping through the north.
- Dogs are not permitted on off-road and forestry sections of the Western Way, which makes camping with a dog impractical on much of the route.
- If rules, access or ownership are unclear, ask locally or choose indoor accommodation rather than risking damage to fragile access arrangements.

## Food, Water and Resupply

Food planning on the Western Way is straightforward in the towns and much more serious between them. Oughterard, Leenane, Westport and Newport are the useful resupply points; Maam has limited provisions; Drummin and Sheskin should be treated as accommodation stops rather than places to buy food. The biggest gap is the northern Mayo section: Newport is the last reliable shop before Ballycastle, with around 60 km of walking over the final two days.

Natural water is common across the route, especially in the Maumturks, Sheeffry Hills and Nephin Beg bogland, but it should not be treated as safe without purification. This is sheep-grazing country, with bog, peat and farmland influencing many streams. Carry a filter or purification tablets, and be particularly cautious with peaty or slow-moving water.

### Resupply by section

Section	Food availability	Water availability	Notes
Oughterard → Maam	Oughterard has good services, including Tesco Express, deli food, pharmacy, butcher and other village facilities. No shops or cafés between Oughterard and Maam. Maam has Keane's Bar at Maam Bridge, with drinks, hot beverages, toasted sandwiches and some provisions from the adjacent hardware shop.	Fill up in Oughterard. Streams occur along bog and moorland sections, but filter or purify natural water.	Stock up properly before leaving Oughterard. Maam is useful, but not a full resupply town.
Maam → Leenane	No services over Mám Éan / Maumeen pass or through the Inagh Valley. Leenane has several food options, including Hamilton's Bar & Grocery, Gaynor's Bar, cafés and seasonal food outlets.	Carry at least 1.5–2 litres from Maam. Upland streams may be available, but filtration is essential because of grazing.	This is an exposed mountain crossing with no food stops. Leenane is the key mid-route resupply before the Mayo section.
Leenane → Drummin	No shops, cafés or pubs between Leenane and Drummin. Aasleagh and Sheeffry Bridge should not be treated as service points. Drummin has no public food services; evening food depends on booked accommodation.	Carry 1.5–2 litres from Leenane. Streams and rivers may allow filtered refills.	Arrange dinner and a packed lunch with accommodation where possible. Do not leave Leenane short of food.
Drummin → Westport	No reliable services until Westport. A small café at the Croagh Patrick base at Murrisk may operate seasonally, but it should not be relied on for core supplies. Westport has the best resupply on the route, with supermarkets, convenience stores, cafés, pubs and restaurants.	Fill at accommodation in Drummin. Natural water may be available, but treated water is not reliable until Westport.	Westport is the main place to restock, eat properly and prepare for the more remote northern stages.

Section	Food availability	Water availability	Notes
Westport → Newport	Westport has full services. Newport has a supermarket with deli, groceries, off-licence and ATM, plus pubs serving food.	This is the shortest stage, so 1 litre is normally enough in mild conditions. Fill again in Newport.	Use Newport as the final dependable resupply before the long Newport → Sheskin → Ballycastle gap.
Newport → Sheskin	No reliable on-route food services. Bangor Erris has shops and pubs/restaurants, but it is not directly on the standard Western Way and requires a road detour. Sheskin has no shop, pub or café.	Carry at least 2 litres from Newport. Rivers and streams cross the bogland, but all natural water should be filtered or purified.	This is the longest and most remote stage. Carry a full day's food, plus emergency snacks. Confirm packed-lunch options with accommodation before arrival.
Sheskin → Ballycastle	No services until Ballycastle. Ballycastle is a small finish village with limited food options, including Healy's Bar and June's Café, but opening hours should be checked before travelling.	Start with enough water from Sheskin accommodation. Natural sources may be present, but use a filter.	Do not assume there will be an open shop at the finish, especially late in the day or outside summer.

## Best places to buy food

**Oughterard** is the best place to prepare for the opening stage. It has a proper village shop base, including Tesco Express on Main Street, deli food, fresh groceries and other everyday services. Buy lunch for Day 1 here rather than relying on Maam.

**Maam / Maam Bridge** is a limited stop. Keane's Bar is useful for a drink, hot food and basic provisions, but Maam should not be treated as a supermarket resupply. It may not open early enough for breakfast, so arrange morning food before arriving or through accommodation.

**Leenane / Leenaun** is the main food point between Maam and Westport. Hamilton's Bar & Grocery and Gaynor's Bar provide general provisions, while cafés and food outlets add options for meals during the day. It is still a small village, so buy what is needed for the full Leenane → Drummin stage and check opening hours if arriving late.

**Westport** is the strongest resupply on the Western Way. It has supermarkets, convenience stores, cafés, pubs and restaurants, making it the best place to replace trail food, buy fresh meals, restock snacks and sort out any missing supplies before the northern Mayo section.

**Newport** is the last reliable shop before Ballycastle. Its supermarket and deli make it the key final resupply for Days 6 and 7. Anyone walking the standard itinerary should leave Newport with enough food for Newport → Sheskin and Sheskin → Ballycastle, unless packed lunches have been firmly arranged with accommodation.

**Ballycastle** has limited finish-line food rather than dependable resupply. Healy's Bar serves evening meals, and June's Café may be useful for breakfast, lunch and baked goods, but small-village and seasonal hours apply. Check before arrival, particularly if finishing late.

## Water strategy

Tap water at B&Bs, hostels and town accommodation is the simplest and safest source. Fill bottles before leaving each overnight stop, especially before Maam → Leenane, Leenane → Drummin, Newport → Sheskin and Sheskin → Ballycastle.

Natural water is abundant, but filtration is strongly recommended throughout the route. The Western Way crosses upland grazing, bog and rough pasture, so even clear-looking streams can be affected by sheep, deer or agricultural run-off. Fast-running upland streams with no visible livestock upstream are the preferable natural sources, but they should still be treated. Peaty or cloudy bog water can reduce the effectiveness of UV purifiers, so a squeeze filter or purification tablets are more practical for this route.

As a planning baseline:

- **Shorter, serviced stages:** 1 litre is usually enough between Westport and Newport in mild weather.
- **Normal full walking days:** carry 1.5–2 litres from the start and refill only from treated or filtered sources.
- **Remote days:** carry at least 2 litres from Newport to Sheskin, plus a reliable filter or tablets.
- **Warm weather or slow bog conditions:** increase water capacity, as progress can be slower than the map distance suggests.

## Packed lunches and rural opening hours

Packed lunches are often the most reliable solution on the Western Way. Many B&Bs and guesthouses can provide them if requested in advance, and this is especially useful for Leenane → Drummin, Newport → Sheskin and Sheskin → Ballycastle. Ask when booking accommodation, not on the morning of departure.

Small shops, pubs and cafés in rural Galway and Mayo may keep reduced Sunday hours, close outside the main spring–autumn walking season, or stop serving food earlier than expected. Seasonal cafés in Leenane, Murrisk and Ballycastle should be treated as a bonus rather than essential resupply. Westport and Newport are the most reliable year-round service points.

## Navigation and Waymarking

The Western Way is an official waymarked trail, but it should not be treated as a route that can be followed on markers alone. The standard waymark is a **yellow arrow on a black background**, used on Irish National Waymarked Trails. On roads and established tracks this is usually enough to keep progress simple, but the spacing is wider than on busier Irish trails and markers can be faded, hidden by vegetation, turned at junctions or knocked over by cattle.

Sport Ireland notes that there may be waymarking issues on parts of the Mayo section. Carrying offline mapping and paper backup is therefore sensible, not optional, especially north of Newport.

### How difficult is the route to follow?

The navigation difficulty changes noticeably along the route:

Section	Navigation character	Practical advice
<b>Oughterard to Leenane / Leenaun</b>	Generally more straightforward, using old drove roads, bog roads, forestry tracks and established lines across open ground.	Basic map-reading is still needed, particularly in poor visibility around the Mám Éan / Maumeen crossing.
<b>Leenane to Westport</b>	Mixed roads, tracks and open sections, including the approach past Aasleagh, Sheeffry Bridge, Drummin and the eastern slopes of Croagh Patrick.	Check the map at road junctions and where the trail leaves tarmac; missing a turn can add a long road detour.
<b>Westport to Newport</b>	Shorter and easier to manage, with more road and track navigation.	Still pre-load the next section before leaving Westport or Newport.
<b>Newport to Sheskin to Ballycastle</b>	The hardest navigation on the walk: remote blanket bog, forestry and open country around the Nephin Beg / Wild Nephin area, with fewer landmarks and unreliable signal.	Do not rely on waymarks alone. Use a compass, 1:50,000 mapping and an offline GPS track. This section is not suitable for walkers with no practical navigation experience.

Around half of the Mayo section is on local roads, so a significant amount of navigation is by tarmac lanes, road junctions and waymark posts rather than continuous footpath. This makes some stretches easier to follow, but it also means wrong turns at minor junctions are a real risk if a post is missing or rotated.

### Maps to carry

For the full Oughterard to Ballycastle route, the relevant **Ordnance Survey Ireland Discovery Series 1:50,000** sheets are:

Area	OSi Discovery sheets
Galway section	<b>37, 38, 44, 45</b>
Mayo section	<b>23, 31, 37, 38</b>

The free official PDF section maps are worth downloading before travel. Sport Ireland provides downloadable section maps for both the Galway and Mayo portions, and Mayo.ie provides a full-route PDF guide. These are a useful baseline alongside OSi mapping, especially for checking the intended line where the route moves between road, forestry and bog.

EastWest Mapping also publishes a dedicated waterproof map, **The Western Way: Oughterard to Westport**, at 1:40,000 scale. It is useful for the Galway and south Mayo part of the route, but it does **not** cover the full walk to Ballycastle.

## Digital navigation and GPX

A GPX track or offline app is strongly recommended. The most useful approach is to carry both:

- **Offline route mapping on a phone or GPS device** for quick checks at junctions and in poor visibility.
- **Paper map and compass** as a backup if the phone fails, the battery dies or signal is absent.

HiiKER has the Western Way loaded with offline-capable maps, route alerts and Garmin compatibility via its "Send to Garmin" feature. Basic navigation is available free, while GPX export and OS map overlays are part of HiiKER Pro.

Community GPX tracks are also available through platforms such as Wikiloc and MountainViews.ie. These should be checked against the official PDF section maps before relying on them, because community tracks may reflect diversions, older alignments or individual route choices.

## Mobile signal and battery management

Mobile signal is unreliable across much of the route and is especially poor on the remote northern stages between **Newport, Sheskin and Ballycastle**. The Sheskin area and the bogland between Newport and Ballycastle should be treated as places where mobile data may not be available.

Before leaving towns such as Leenane, Westport or Newport:

- download all app maps for the next stage;
- save PDF maps locally, not just as web links;
- load the GPX file to a phone or GPS device;
- carry a power bank;
- keep the phone protected from rain and cold.

Do not plan to download maps, check diversions or recover a lost route using mobile data once already in the Nephin Beg / Wild Nephin section.

## Places to take extra care

Navigation needs particular attention in these situations:

- **Mám Éan / Maumeen pass** — not technically difficult, but mist can reduce visibility on the mountain crossing.
- **Lackavrea area** — take care with the line through forest and boardwalk sections, and check current notices before setting out.
- **Aasleagh / Ashleagh River area** — river-side sections can be affected by heavy rain and closure notices.
- **Road junctions throughout Mayo** — do not assume the obvious road is the correct one; check the next waymark, map or GPS.
- **Newport to Sheskin** — the long 32 km stage crosses remote bog and forestry where the path can fade into wet grass or peat.
- **Sheskin to Ballycastle** — continue to treat navigation seriously even though the finish is closer; poor weather can still make the line hard to read.

Sport Ireland's Galway and Mayo trail pages carry live closure notices. These should be checked before walking, as boardwalk and river sections can close after heavy rainfall and diversions may not be obvious on the ground.

### **Is it suitable for hikers with limited navigation experience?**

The Western Way is manageable for fit walkers who can read a 1:50,000 map, follow a bearing when needed and use a GPS track sensibly. The Galway section is the more forgiving half of the walk, though wet ground and low cloud still matter.

The northern Mayo stages are different. Newport to Sheskin and Sheskin to Ballycastle require self-reliant navigation in remote, boggy country with patchy waymarking and unreliable phone signal. Walkers with very limited navigation experience should either build skills beforehand, walk with someone competent, or use a self-guided operator that provides route notes and GPS files. Even with operator notes, a map, compass and offline backup remain essential.

## Terrain, Conditions and Difficulty in Practice

The Western Way is graded Moderate, but its difficulty is easy to underestimate if judged only by height gain. The high point at Mám Éan / Maumeen is only about 259 m and there is no scrambling, exposed ridge walking or technical climbing. In practice, the work comes from long wet kilometres, soft peat, road walking, variable waymarking and the remoteness of the northern Mayo stages.

### Surface mix: expect a constant change underfoot

This is not a single-surface trail. The route switches repeatedly between local roads, bog roads, forestry tracks, open moorland, mountain paths and timber boardwalk.

Surface	What it means in practice
Quiet tarmac roads and bog roads	A large part of the Way is on hard surfaces. This makes navigation simpler in places, but it is tiring on feet, knees and hips over consecutive days. Cushioned footwear matters.
Open bog and wet grass	Slow, uneven and often waterlogged. The path can fade into the ground, especially in Mayo. Expect wet feet even in otherwise dry weather.
Forestry tracks	Usually firmer gravel or compacted stone, but can feel monotonous and hard underfoot on long stretches.
Mountain paths	Most notable around Mám Éan, where the path is steeper, rockier and more eroded than elsewhere on the route.
Timber bog boardwalk	Useful across wet ground, but hard and slightly springy under boot. The Lackavrea boardwalk section is physically tiring despite being technically straightforward.

Sport Ireland's figures show how much road walking is involved: the Galway section has around 30 km on local roads out of about 59 km, while the Mayo section has around 60 km on local roads out of about 130 km, including an 8 km stretch on the N59. For the HikeList Oughterard-to-Ballycastle route, the practical takeaway is simple: roughly half the walk is on tarmac or road-like surfaces, and the other half can be very wet.

### Bog, peat and wet ground

The Western Way's bog is not just mud on a path. Much of it is soft, uneven ground where the surface moves underfoot and where water is held in the peat long after rain has stopped. On open moorland the tread can become a waterlogged line through grass, or disappear into wider boggy ground.

After heavy rain, fast run-off from the Connemara mountains makes low ground and peat sections particularly slow. Ankle-deep sinking is realistic in places. Descents can be as demanding as climbs because wet grass hides rocks, holes and awkward tussocks.

Gaiters are useful, especially on the northern Mayo stages. Trekking poles help with balance on boggy descents, soft ground and the rougher sections around Mám Éan and Nephin Beg.

## Road walking: not difficult, but physically wearing

The Western Way contains enough road walking that it changes the choice of footwear and pacing. Roads may feel easy at the start of a day, but long tarmac sections become punishing after several days, particularly when combined with bog that has already tired the lower legs.

The Mayo section includes an 8 km stretch on the N59. This is a narrow, winding and moderately busy main road, with no verge on some sections. Walkers should treat this as a concentration section rather than a relaxed lane walk: stay visible, keep tight to the side and avoid relying on headphones.

Waterproof boots with ankle support are the safest default for the route, but they also need proper cushioning for the road kilometres. Lightweight trail shoes are a poor match for the combination of saturated peat, hidden holes, wet grass and hard tarmac unless a walker is highly experienced with wet Irish bog routes.

## The main harder sections

Stage	Terrain difficulty in practice
Oughterard to Maam	One of the gentler openings, with old drove roads near the western side of Lough Corrib, quiet tarmac, tracks, oak woodland and bogland. Gradients are generally manageable, but wet ground begins early.
Maam to Leenane via Mám Éan	The most mountain-like day. The climb to Mám Éan through the Maumturk Mountains is steep in places, rocky and eroded, with faint sections. The descent can be boggy and unclear. Later terrain includes road walking, forestry tracks and the Lackavrea boardwalk area.
Leenane to Drummin	Mixed forestry tracks, bog roads and lower ground around Aasleagh, the Sheeffry area and the Erriff River corridor. Generally not technical, but wet underfoot conditions remain a factor.
Drummin to Westport	The route skirts the lower eastern flanks of Croagh Patrick rather than climbing the summit. Expect boggy moorland on the lower slopes, followed by road walking into Westport.
Westport to Newport	A shorter and more road-based stage. Easier for navigation and resupply, but still hard underfoot if feet are already sore.
Newport to Sheskin	The long 32 km stage into the Nephin Beg / Wild Nephin area is one of the most serious parts of the walk. Blanket bog, forest tracks, open moorland and very limited infrastructure make this a self-reliant day. Poor visibility increases the difficulty significantly.
Sheskin to Ballycastle	A long 28 km final stage through Sheskin Forest, open bog and exposed moorland towards the north Mayo coast. The terrain is not technical, but fatigue, exposure and wet ground make it demanding.

## Mám Éan: the main mountain crossing

Mám Éan / Maumeen is the high point of the Way and the wildest mountain crossing on the route. It is not a technical climb, but it is steeper and rougher than the road and bog-road sections either side of it. The path can be eroded, rocky and faint, and the descent requires care in wet conditions.

In mist, this section needs active navigation rather than simply following the ground. Carry the official maps/GPX and do not rely solely on seeing the next waymark.

## Nephin Beg and northern Mayo: the most remote walking

The Newport to Sheskin and Sheskin to Ballycastle stages are where the Western Way feels most isolated. The route enters the Nephin Beg / Wild Nephin area, crossing blanket bog, forest and open country with little infrastructure. The walking is not technically complex, but it is remote, wet and mentally more demanding than the earlier road-linked stages.

This is the section where the Moderate grade can feel closer to Moderate-to-Strenuous. Path markers are more widely spaced in places, the line can fade into bog, and there are no frequent settlements or easy shelter options. In poor visibility, these stages require confident map-and-GPX navigation.

### Waymarking and navigation

The route is waymarked with a yellow arrow on a black background, but waymarking is variable. In farmland and open country, posts can be damaged or knocked over by livestock. The northern Mayo sections have the patchiest waymarking and should not be treated as a simple waymarked trail where the next marker is always obvious.

Carry:

- the relevant official PDF section maps from Sport Ireland;
- a GPX route on a charged phone or GPS device;
- a paper map or offline backup;
- enough battery capacity for long days, especially Newport to Sheskin and Sheskin to Ballycastle.

Short closures can occur after heavy rainfall. The Lackavrea boardwalk has a 2 km unsafe closure notice, and the Bellacorick to Bunnyconnellan section also has a closure notice; both should be checked on Sport Ireland's current trail pages before setting out.

### Livestock, gates and field infrastructure

The Western Way passes through active farmland as well as forestry and open moorland. Expect cattle and sheep in the route corridor, with gates and stiles on off-road sections. Close gates carefully and avoid disturbing livestock.

Dogs are not permitted on off-road and forestry sections of the route. This is a practical access rule, not just a courtesy issue, and walkers should not plan to complete the full route with a dog.

### Seasonal conditions

Season	Terrain implications
Spring	Bog may be slightly firmer after colder weather, but it remains wet and run-off can be high. Expect soft ground and changeable conditions.
Summer	Usually the most reliable underfoot period. Boardwalk and tracks are more likely to be dry, but midges can be active in forest and bog sections from May to September.
Autumn	Often a good walking window for experienced hikers: ground can still be reasonably firm and midge pressure is lower. Rain and shorter daylight become more important later in the season.

Season	Terrain implications
Winter	Not the normal season for this route. Bog becomes heavily saturated, open sections are more exposed to wind, daylight is short and some accommodation may close.

## What actually makes the route hard

The Western Way is not hard because of high mountains. It is hard because it asks for repeated long days on awkward surfaces: soft bog that drains energy, road walking that batters feet, rough moorland where the line is not always clear, and remote northern stages where there is little margin for poor weather or navigation mistakes.

Walkers who are comfortable with wet ground, long tarmac stretches and self-reliant navigation should find the route a solid moderate long-distance hike. Walkers expecting a dry, engineered footpath will find it much tougher than the height profile suggests.

# Weather and Best Time to Walk

The Western Way is an Atlantic west-of-Ireland walk: wet ground, fast-changing weather and wind are central planning factors, not occasional inconveniences. The route is not high by mountain standards — the high point is Mám Éan / Maumeen at about 259 m — but the off-road sections cross bog, wet grass, forestry and exposed open country where poor visibility and saturated ground can slow progress sharply.

## Best months

For most walkers, the best windows are **late May to early June** and **September**.

Period	Verdict	Why it matters on the Western Way
<b>Late May–early June</b>	<b>Best overall</b>	Among the driest periods on average, long daylight, most accommodation open, and before the worst of the midge season. Bog can still be wet, especially after a wet spring.
<b>September</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	Mild temperatures, midges fading, and around 12 hours of daylight. Good for the long Mayo stages if accommodation is booked and forecasts are watched closely.
<b>April</b>	<b>Good, with caveats</b>	Cool, often clearer than winter, pre-midge and increasingly long days. Early April accommodation can be patchy, and bog may still be holding winter water.
<b>July–August</b>	<b>Usable but not easiest</b>	Warmest months and long days, but still wet, busiest for accommodation, and peak midge season. Book well ahead.
<b>October</b>	<b>Marginal</b>	Rain increases, some accommodation begins closing, and late-autumn Atlantic gales become more likely, especially in north Mayo.
<b>November–February</b>	<b>Not recommended for most walkers</b>	Short daylight, saturated bog, winter storms, limited rural services and difficult navigation on exposed ground.

## Rain, bog and underfoot conditions

Connemara and Mayo are among Ireland's wetter walking areas. Annual rainfall is high across the route, with Oughterard receiving about **1,293 mm**, central Connemara locations around **1,469–1,588 mm**, and Ballycastle in north Mayo about **1,479 mm**. Rain can arrive as short showers or sustained frontal weather, and the mountains around the Maumturks and Nephin Beg can be in cloud even when lower coastal areas are clearer.

The practical effect is simple: expect wet feet and slow going. The trail includes quiet roads and bog roads, but the off-road stretches can be soft, peaty and waterlogged even in summer. Boardwalk helps in places, but boardwalk and riverside sections can also be vulnerable after heavy rain.

Particular weather-sensitive sections include:

- **Mám Éan / Maumeen pass** between Maam and Leenane: low cloud, rain and wind can make navigation harder despite the modest altitude.

- **Aasleagh to Sheeffry Bridge:** the Aasleagh River section has been subject to closure after exceptional rain.
- **Newport-Sheskin-Ballycastle** through the Wild Nephin / Nephin Beg country: the most remote and exposed part of the route, with open blanket bog and limited shelter.

Always check **Sport Ireland's Western Way closure notices** before starting, and again during the walk if heavy rain or storms are forecast. Short closures can affect boardwalk and river sections after bad weather.

## Temperature and wind

Temperatures are generally moderate, but wind chill is a serious factor on exposed ground. A mild 14°C day can feel cold on Mám Éan or the north Mayo bogs in a strong Atlantic wind.

Season	Typical daytime temperatures	Planning notes
<b>January-February</b>	6-10°C	Cold, wet, short days; poor choice for a thru-hike.
<b>April-May</b>	11-14°C	Cool walking conditions; carry warm layers for breaks and exposed passes.
<b>June-August</b>	15-18°C	Warmest period, but waterproofs remain essential.
<b>September-October</b>	14-16°C	Mild, but autumn wind and rain increase through October.
<b>November-December</b>	8-10°C	Cold, dark and often very wet.

Strong Atlantic winds are routine on the western seaboard, with exposed sections often feeling harsher than the map height suggests. Gale-force conditions are most likely in late autumn and winter. The wind can be helpful in summer because it suppresses midges, but it also makes exposed moorland walking more tiring.

## Daylight and stage planning

Daylight is a major constraint because several stages are long, especially the final two days in Mayo: **Newport to Sheskin is about 32 km**, and **Sheskin to Ballycastle about 28 km**. These are not stages to begin late in poor visibility.

Month	Approximate daylight in west Ireland	Effect on the route
<b>March</b>	12 hours	Viable for experienced walkers, but bog may still be very wet.
<b>April</b>	14 hours	Good margin for longer days.
<b>May</b>	16 hours	Excellent for steady pacing and navigation pauses.
<b>June</b>	17 hours	Maximum daylight.
<b>July</b>	16 hours	Plenty of light, but peak season pressures.

Month	Approximate daylight in west Ireland	Effect on the route
August	14 hours	Still comfortable, though midges are at their worst.
September	12 hours	Usually enough for the main stages if starts are disciplined.
October	10.5 hours	Less margin on the remote Mayo stages.
November	8.5 hours	Too short for most walkers to cover the longest stages safely.
December	7.5 hours	Winter thru-hiking is not realistic for most walkers.
January	8.5 hours	Short daylight and saturated ground.
February	10 hours	Still winter-like underfoot; services limited.

## Fog, visibility and navigation

Hill fog and low cloud are common in wet Atlantic weather. The two areas where this matters most are **Mám Éan / Maumeen** and the **Wild Nephin / Nephin Beg** stages. The route is waymarked, but waymarking can be patchy in remote northern sections, so do not rely on visibility or markers alone.

Carry the relevant OSi mapping, the official PDF section maps and a GPX track. In fog, allow extra time for navigation checks, especially where the route leaves road or forestry track for boggy open ground.

## Midges

Midges are a genuine summer issue on the Western Way because Connemara and Mayo have the wet, boggy ground they favour.

- **Main season:** early June to early September.
- **Peak:** July and August.
- **Worst conditions:** warm, still, damp weather; dawn, dusk, sheltered valleys and campsites.
- **Less troublesome:** windy days and open walking, where Atlantic airflow keeps them down.

For summer walks, carry midge repellent. A head net is sensible if wild camping or spending time at still, sheltered evening stops. By mid-September midge activity is usually much reduced, though not necessarily absent.

## Accommodation and seasonal availability

Accommodation is concentrated in towns and villages such as Oughterard, Leenane, Westport and Newport, with much thinner options on the remote sections. Season affects this directly:

- **Easter to October:** the main practical walking season, with the best chance of open B&Bs, guesthouses, hostels and food services.
- **July and August:** busiest period; book well ahead, especially in Westport and the smaller overnight stops.
- **Early April and late October:** some rural accommodation and restaurants may not be operating every day. This should be checked before travelling.

- **November to February:** many rural services are closed or limited, making a continuous walk difficult without pre-arranged accommodation and transfers.

### **Is the Western Way realistic in winter?**

For most walkers, **no**. The issue is not technical snow climbing — the route is low-level and non-technical — but the combination of saturated bog, strong Atlantic wind, short daylight, limited services and exposed navigation. The long Newport–Sheskin and Sheskin–Ballycastle stages are especially unsuitable in winter daylight unless a highly experienced walker has arranged shorter alternatives, accommodation and transport in advance.

Winter attempts require high-quality waterproofs, warm layers, reliable navigation, early starts and a conservative attitude to forecasts and closure notices. For a first full traverse, choose late spring or September instead.

## Safety Notes

The Western Way is not a technical mountain route, but it is a long, wet and sometimes isolated walk. The main risks are poor visibility, boggy ground, road walking, changing Atlantic weather and slow access to help on the northern stages.

### Emergency help

In Ireland, call **999 or 112** in an emergency. From remote ground, ask the operator for **Mountain Rescue**.

- **Galway Mountain Rescue Team** covers County Galway uplands, including the Maumturk Mountains corridor around Mám Éan.
- **Mayo Mountain Rescue** covers County Mayo mountains and remote terrain, including the northern half of the route.

If signal is intermittent, keep the phone switched on after calling. Mountain Rescue may be able to call back or locate a later signal window.

### Mobile signal and remoteness

Mobile signal is patchy on the Western Way. Expect dead zones in valleys, bog sections and forested or remote ground. The weakest coverage is likely on the **Newport → Sheskin → Ballycastle** stretch, where the route crosses around 60 km of very quiet country with few settlements.

Do not rely on live mapping or being able to call for help from every point on the trail. Before setting off each day:

- download offline maps and GPX files;
- carry paper OSi mapping as backup, with the relevant sheets including **23, 31, 37 and 38**;
- leave your planned stage and expected finish time with someone;
- check in whenever signal is available, especially if walking solo.

Wild Nephin National Park advises that mobile signal may be unavailable deep in the wilderness interior. Registering details before remote walks in the Wild Nephin area is good practice, particularly for the long northern stages.

### Weather exposure

Atlantic weather can change within hours. Wind, heavy rain, low cloud and mist are all realistic in spring, summer and autumn. In Connemara and north Mayo, rain can be driven horizontally by strong winds, so waterproofs need to be genuinely waterproof rather than shower-resistant.

The **Mám Éan / Maumeen pass** is only about 259 m, but it is the wildest mountain crossing on the route. Mist can arrive quickly from the Atlantic and make the path harder to follow. Carry a map and compass and know how to use them; GPS is useful, but should not be the only navigation method.

Open bog on Days 6 and 7 is also exposed. Strong westerly winds can make these stages slow and tiring, so an early start is sensible when poor afternoon weather is forecast. Check **Met Éireann** before each stage and do not judge conditions by the morning sky alone.

Cold is more likely to be a problem than heat, even in summer, once wind and wet clothing combine. Carry a warm layer, hat and gloves for the open sections. In hot, still weather, the road sections and open bog offer limited shade, so carry enough water and sun protection.

## **Bog, boardwalk and wet ground**

The Western Way is frequently wet underfoot. Bog, peat, wet grass and rock can remain soft and slippery even after dry weather. After heavy rain, Connemara run-off can make streams faster and bog sections more awkward.

Take particular care on:

- the approach to and descent from **Mám Éan / Maumeen**;
- the blanket bog and remote ground around **Wild Nephin, Bellacorick and Sheskin**;
- timber bog boardwalk sections, which can be slippery when wet;
- any low-lying river or bog section after prolonged rain.

Sport Ireland closure notices should be checked before walking. Boardwalk and river sections can close after damage or heavy rainfall, including areas such as the **Lackavrea boardwalk** and the **Aasleagh River** section. Current status should be checked before travelling.

## **Road walking**

A significant part of the Western Way follows local roads. The official Galway section includes about 30 km of road walking, including a stretch on the **R336**, while the Mayo section includes about 60 km on local roads and around 8 km on the **N59**, described as narrow, winding and moderately busy.

For road sections:

- wear bright or hi-vis clothing;
- face oncoming traffic where safe;
- walk in single file on narrow bends;
- avoid headphones;
- start early where possible, especially during the July–August tourist season.

## **Livestock and dogs**

The route crosses active farming land. Give livestock plenty of space, especially cattle with calves in spring and sheep during lambing season. Do not approach, feed or corner animals. If cattle become unsettled, move calmly towards the field edge and avoid sudden movements.

Dogs are **not permitted on the off-road and forestry sections** of the Western Way, including off-road parts of both the Galway and Mayo sections. This rule should be treated as a route-planning constraint, not a minor inconvenience.

## Water safety and drinking water

Natural water in upland streams may look clean, but it can be affected by livestock and bog run-off. Treat water if in doubt, using a filter or purification tablets.

Do not assume regular tap-water access on the remote northern stages. Carry adequate water from **Newport** for Day 6 and plan carefully for the **Sheskin → Ballycastle** stage. In warm weather, road walking and exposed bog increase water needs.

## Solo hiking

The Western Way can be walked solo, but the northern stages need extra caution. A twisted ankle or navigation error between **Newport, Sheskin and Ballycastle** is more serious than the same problem near Oughterard, Leenane or Westport because there is less traffic, less habitation and weaker mobile signal.

Solo walkers should:

- leave a clear route plan with someone each morning;
- agree a latest check-in time;
- carry a whistle, first-aid kit and survival bag;
- avoid pressing on into remote bog if the forecast is deteriorating;
- be willing to shorten or delay a stage if closures, weather or fatigue make progress unsafe.

## Daily safety checklist

Before setting off each day, check:

- **Sport Ireland closure notices** for the Galway and Mayo sections of the Western Way;
- **Met Éireann** for the local forecast;
- offline maps, GPX and paper map backup;
- phone charge and power bank;
- waterproofs, warm layer, food and water;
- whistle, basic first-aid kit and survival bag on remote stages;
- that someone knows the day's route and expected finish time.

## Gear Recommendations

The Western Way is not a technical trail, but it is a wet one. Gear choices should prioritise waterproofing, foot protection and reliable navigation over lightweight minimalism. The route mixes long road and bog-road sections with open moorland, forestry tracks, mountain paths and several kilometres of timber bog boardwalk, so kit needs to work on both hard tarmac and soft peat.

### Footwear: boots, not trail shoes

Waterproof ankle-high hiking boots are the most important item on this route. Trail shoes are a poor choice for the Western Way: bog patches persist even after dry weather, wet grass soaks footwear quickly, and water can go over the ankle in peatier sections.

Choose boots with:

- **A full waterproof membrane** such as GORE-TEX or similar, or well-maintained leather that can be re-waxed.
- **A sturdy sole with good grip** for wet rock, grass, mud and timber boardwalk.
- **Enough volume for thick walking socks** — many walkers need half a size to a full size larger than everyday footwear.
- **Proper break-in time before the walk.** Do not start the Western Way in new boots; blisters become difficult to manage over successive wet days.

Gaiters are strongly recommended. Short ankle gaiters are enough for many walkers, but longer gaiters are useful in high bog grass and on the wetter off-road sections. They help keep peat, water and wet vegetation out of boots and reduce how quickly trouser legs soak through.

Carry two or three pairs of good wicking hiking socks for the full seven-day walk. Merino or synthetic socks are better than cotton; damp cotton increases blister risk and dries slowly.

### Waterproofs and clothing layers

Full waterproofs are essential in every season. Atlantic weather can change quickly, and the more exposed sections around Mám Éan and the northern Mayo bogs leave little shelter once rain arrives.

Pack:

- **Waterproof, windproof jacket** with a breathable membrane.
- **Waterproof overtrousers or membrane trousers;** full or long side-zips make them easier to pull on over boots.
- **Synthetic or merino base layers** — avoid cotton entirely.
- **Quick-drying hiking trousers;** avoid denim.
- **Warm mid-layer,** such as fleece or a lightweight insulated jacket.
- **Warm hat and gloves,** even in summer.
- **Long-sleeved layer** for wind, cooler evenings and summer insect protection.

A sleeveless fleece or softshell gilet is practical for steady walking because it adds warmth without restricting arm movement. In summer, insulation can be lighter, but waterproofs should still be treated as core kit rather than emergency kit.

## Navigation equipment

The Western Way is waymarked with yellow arrows on a black background, but navigation should not rely on waymarks alone. Waymarking is generally easier to follow in Galway than on the remote northern Mayo stages, especially between Newport, Sheskin and Ballycastle.

Carry:

- **OSi Discovery Series maps 23, 31, 37, 38, 44 and 45** for full-route coverage.
- **Compass**, plus the ability to use it in poor visibility.
- **Downloaded offline GPX track** before leaving each overnight stop.
- **Official Sport Ireland PDF section maps**, saved offline.
- **Waterproof phone case or dry bag** for electronics.
- **Power bank**, especially if using phone mapping.

Phone signal can be limited or absent on the Wild Nephin / Nephin Beg sections, so digital mapping must be available offline. Apps such as Hiiker, OSi Explore and Outdooractive are useful, but a paper map remains the dependable backup. Less confident navigators should consider carrying a dedicated handheld GPS device for the remote Mayo stages.

Check Sport Ireland's current closure notices before starting, as boardwalk and river-adjacent sections can close after heavy rain.

## Water and food carry

Carry at least **1–1.5 litres of water at all times**, and more on warm days or when walking the longer northern stages. The sections from **Newport to Sheskin** and **Sheskin to Ballycastle** have no shops or villages en route, so food and water planning matters.

Inn-to-inn walkers should leave each overnight stop with lunch and enough snacks for a full day. Good trail food for this route includes bars, nuts, dried fruit and other energy-dense items that do not mind being carried in wet weather.

Natural water sources exist on the open moorland sections, but upland water can be peat-tinted. Campers and self-supported walkers should carry a filter such as a Sawyer Squeeze or LifeStraw, or purification tablets.

## Trekking poles

Trekking poles are recommended. They are useful for balance on soft bog, wet grass and uneven moorland, and they reduce fatigue on long road and bog-road sections. They also help on the descent from Mám Éan and when maintaining rhythm over longer tarmac stretches.

Collapsible poles are best, as they can be stowed on road sections or when passing through tighter path sections.

## Packs and keeping gear dry

For inn-to-inn walkers using baggage transfer, a **25–35 litre daypack** is usually ideal. It should comfortably hold waterproofs, warm layers, water, lunch, snacks, navigation kit, first aid, phone, power bank and emergency shelter.

Most luggage-transfer services cap transferred bags at around **15–20 kg**, so check the operator's current limit before booking.

For self-supported walkers or campers, a **55–70 litre rucksack** is more appropriate. Use dry bags or compression sacks inside the pack; a rain cover helps, but internal dry storage is more reliable in prolonged rain.

## Camping and self-supported kit

Camping is relevant on the Western Way because accommodation is limited on the more remote northern Mayo stages. A self-supported walker needs to carry full overnight kit and extra food, which makes the boggy ground noticeably harder.

Recommended camping kit includes:

- **Lightweight tent**, preferably freestanding or semi-freestanding where pegging in boggy ground may be awkward.
- **Sleeping bag rated to at least 0°C in summer**, with a warmer rating for spring and autumn.
- **Insulated sleeping mat.**
- **Stove, fuel and lighter/matches.**
- **Water filter or purification tablets.**
- **Rodent-resistant food storage** for wild camp spots.
- **Headtorch with spare batteries.**
- **Extra dry base layer and socks** reserved for camp.

Wild camping should follow Leave No Trace principles. Coillte forestry land and National Park areas may have restrictions, and Wild Nephin National Park has guidance on low-impact camping. This should be checked before travelling.

## Insect and sun protection

Midges can be a real problem from **June to August**, especially near bogs, still valleys and sheltered camp spots in Connemara and around Wild Nephin. Summer walkers should carry:

- DEET-based repellent or Smidge.
- Midge head net for campsites and boggy rest stops.
- Long sleeves for mornings and evenings.

DEET can damage some plastics, including watch straps and sunglasses frames, so apply it carefully.

Spring walkers usually do not need midge kit, and autumn walkers rarely do. Sun protection is still worth packing in summer: the open bog and road sections have little shade, so carry sunscreen, sunglasses and a cap or sun hat.

## Small essentials that matter on this route

- **Blister kit:** Compeed or similar blister plasters, tape and a way to dry feet at stops.
- **Small first aid kit:** antiseptic wipes, bandage, painkillers and personal medication.
- **Emergency bivvy bag:** recommended even for inn-to-inn walkers on the remote Wild Nephin stages.
- **Headtorch:** essential for campers and useful if a long stage runs late.
- **10,000 mAh power bank:** sensible for phone navigation and poor-signal battery drain.
- **Dry bags:** one for electronics and maps, one for spare clothing.

## Seasonal adjustments

Season	Gear emphasis
Spring	Waterproofs, gaiters and a lightweight insulated layer. Paths can remain very wet; midges are generally not an issue.
Summer	Full waterproofs still required, but insulation can be lighter. Add midge repellent, head net, sunscreen and a sun hat.
Autumn	Waterproofs and warmer layers become more important. Midges are largely gone, but evenings cool quickly.
Winter	Not recommended without significant winter hillwalking experience. Short days, cold rain, saturated ground and navigation demands require extra insulation, reliable waterproofs, gaiters and strong map skills.

## Inn-to-inn, camping and fast-hiking setups

Style	Practical setup
Inn-to-inn with baggage transfer	Waterproof boots, gaiters, 25–35 litre daypack, full waterproofs, warm layer, lunch, snacks, 1–1.5 litres of water minimum, maps/GPX, first aid, power bank and emergency bivvy. Main luggage goes ahead.
Self-supported or camping	Waterproof boots, gaiters, 55–70 litre rucksack, full camping kit, stove and fuel, food for remote stages, water treatment, stronger dry-bag system and extra warm layers. Expect the added weight to feel harder on bog and road.
Fast or section hiking	Do not compromise on boots, waterproofs or navigation. A lighter daypack is fine for shorter sections, but carry enough water, food and emergency kit for delays, especially on Newport–Sheskin and Sheskin–Ballycastle.

## Budget and Costs

Costs on the Western Way vary mainly with accommodation choice and how much support is arranged for the remoter northern stages. All prices below are in euros (€) and should be checked before booking, especially for July and August.

### Typical 7-day budget, per person

These figures assume a 7-day walk with seven nights of accommodation. They exclude flights or longer travel to Ireland.

Style	Accommodation	Food	Transport to/from trail	Maps/extras	Luggage transfer	Likely total
Budget: camping/hostels, mostly self-catering	€175–€245	€175–€245	€30–€60	€20–€40	—	<b>€400–€600</b>
Mid-range: B&Bs, pub dinners, public transport plus some taxis	€420–€560	€245–€350	€60–€100	€30–€50	—	<b>€755–€1,060</b>
Comfortable: ensuite rooms, luggage transfer, taxi from finish	€560–€840	€315–€455	€100–€200	€30–€50	€200–€350	<b>€1,200–€1,900</b>
Self-guided package	Included in package	add €140–€210 for evening meals	add €60–€200	Included	Included	<b>about €1,300–€1,600 shared; €1,900–€2,300 solo</b>

### Accommodation costs

Accommodation is the biggest cost and the hardest part to leave until late. Westport has the best choice, while Maam, Drummin and Sheskin need much more planning.

Place / option	Typical cost	Planning notes
Galway city pre-walk base	guesthouse/3-star about €100–€140; hostel dorms about €30–€40	Useful before reaching Oughterard, but not necessary if travelling straight to the start.
Westport	B&Bs from about €74; 3-star from about €98; 4-star from about €128; hostel dorms from about €27	Largest town on the route and the easiest place to find a room.
Newport	B&Bs typically €70–€110	Smaller than Westport but normally workable with advance booking.

Place / option	Typical cost	Planning notes
Leenane / Leenaun	guesthouses about €80–€120	Limited choice; book early in busy periods.
Maam / Maam Bridge	guesthouse about €80–€100	Very limited accommodation; do not rely on turning up.
Drummin and Sheskin	minimal or no standard booking-platform choice	May require a pre-arranged B&B, transfer, or camping plan. This should be checked before travelling.
Westport House Camping & Caravan Park	pitch fees about €20–€30	Useful for a lower-cost night in Westport.
Hostel option near Croagh Patrick / Murrisk	dorm beds from about €27	May suit walkers wanting a cheaper alternative around the Westport stage.
Wild camping	free	No formal trail permit is required, but camping on open bog or mountain ground should be discreet, low-impact and strictly Leave No Trace.

Summer demand can push up prices or remove the cheaper rooms first. Booking well ahead matters more on this route than on busier trails with more villages at the end of every stage.

## Food and resupply costs

A walker using B&B breakfasts, buying lunch and eating in pubs most evenings should budget **€35–€55 per day**. A budget walker self-catering most meals can often manage on **€20–€30 per day**, provided food is carried through the sparse sections.

Typical prices:

Item	Typical cost
Pub main course in rural Mayo / Connemara	€15–€20
Set meal / early bird, 2 courses	€19–€25
Café or sandwich lunch	€8–€12
Shop-bought lunch	€5–€8
Pint of stout or beer in a rural pub	€5–€6

Resupply is uneven. Oughterard is a good place to buy starting supplies. Leenane is important but limited. Westport has full services, including supermarkets, pubs, cafés and restaurants. Newport is the last reliable resupply before the remote northern end, so carry extra food for the Newport–Sheskin–Ballycastle section. Maam, Drummin, Sheskin and Bellacorick should be treated as having minimal or no dependable food services.

## Transport costs

Public transport is easiest at the Galway/Oughterard end and more awkward at Ballycastle. Budget for at least one pre-arranged transfer or taxi at the finish unless the current Local Link Mayo timetable works for the exact walking dates.

Journey	Typical cost	Notes
Galway city to Oughterard by Bus Éireann Route 419	about €4–€10 single	Journey about 30–35 minutes. Check current timetable and fare before travelling.
Dublin or Dublin Airport to Galway by coach/bus	about €15–€22 single	Then connect onwards to Oughterard.
Taxi Galway to Oughterard	about €35–€45	Useful for late arrivals or groups.
Ballycastle to Ballina by bus	about €5–€10	Limited frequency; check Local Link Mayo before committing to a finish-day plan.
Ballina to Westport by train	about €7–€10	Useful if returning towards Westport after finishing.
Taxi Ballycastle to Ballina	about €40–€55	Sensible fallback if buses do not line up.
Taxi Ballycastle to Westport	about €100– €130	Expensive, but may be practical for groups or tight schedules.

Ballycastle has no train station and limited bus services. The finish is one of the main places where a cheap itinerary can become expensive if transport has not been arranged in advance.

## Luggage transfer and self-guided packages

Independent luggage transfer is available on the Western Way through operators such as The Pathway Porter, but pricing is normally quote-based rather than a fixed public tariff. As a planning figure, allow **about €200–€350 total** for a 7-day independent bag-transfer arrangement, depending on the number of bags, pickup points and transfer pattern.

Self-guided packages cost more upfront but remove several of the awkward logistics, especially accommodation in limited-service areas and daily bag movement.

Operator / package style	Typical cost	Usually includes	Usually excludes
Footfalls Walking Holidays, 8-day Connemara & Western Way self-guided package	from about €1,040 pp sharing; single supplement about €540; solo traveller supplement about €95	7 nights B&B, maps, GPX/e-route notes, daily luggage transfer, emergency support	Travel to/from the route, packed lunches, evening meals, personal gear
Hillwalk Tours, Connemara & West of Ireland self-guided itineraries	about €1,129 pp sharing for 7 days/6 nights; about €1,199 pp sharing for 8 days/7 nights; single supplements about €310–€350	B&B/hotel accommodation with breakfast, luggage transfer, GPS app/printed maps, support	Flights, most meals beyond breakfast, travel insurance, personal gear

For a package, add **€140–€210** for seven evening meals and **€60–€200** for start/end transport, depending on whether buses or taxis are used. Solo walkers should pay close attention to single supplements, which can move a self-guided trip into the comfortable-cost bracket quickly.

## Maps, permits and small extras

There is **no trail permit or registration fee** for the Western Way. Sport Ireland provides official trail information and downloadable maps/GPX, but a paper backup is still sensible because waymarking can be patchy on remote northern stages.

Allow:

- **€30–€40** for a full set of OSi 1:50,000 paper maps if buying sheets individually.
- **€9–€12** for the EastWest Mapping Western Way 1:40,000 map/guide.
- **Free to about €5/month** for digital mapping app access, depending on the app and subscription level.

Also keep a contingency for laundry, blister supplies, spare socks, extra snacks and one unexpected taxi. On this route, the most common budget surprises are last-minute accommodation in small villages, finish transport from Ballycastle, and buying extra food before the long Newport–Sheskin–Ballycastle stretch.

## Luggage Transfer, Guided Tours and Support Services

Support on the Western Way is easiest to arrange on the Oughterard–Westport section. The northern stages from Newport through Wild Nephin, Bellacorick and Sheskin to Ballycastle are much more remote, with sparse accommodation and limited public transport, so full-route walkers should not assume a packaged holiday will cover the whole 179 km trail.

### Self-guided walking holidays

Self-guided packages are the simplest option if you want accommodation and baggage logistics arranged in advance. They suit walkers who are comfortable navigating independently but do not want to carry a full pack or spend time stitching together B&Bs, taxis and luggage transfers.

Most Western Way packages focus on the Connemara and southern Mayo section between Oughterard and Westport, rather than the full route to Ballycastle.

Operator	Western Way coverage	Typical inclusions	Notes
Hillwalk Tours	Oughterard to Westport, about 100 km / 63 miles	En-suite B&B accommodation, daily luggage transfer, route notes, GPS tracks via the HiiKER app, 24/7 support line	7-day / 6-night self-guided itinerary, March to October. Prices from about €1,129 per person in a shared room; single supplement applies. Current prices and route details should be checked when booking.
Footfalls Walking Holidays	Connemara & Western Way, Oughterard to Westport region	B&B accommodation, daily luggage transfer, walking maps, route notes, GPX tracks, transport information, 24/7 emergency phone support	5-, 7- and 8-day options, with 7-day tours running April 1 to October 15. Prices start from about €860–€1,040 depending on itinerary; check current prices before booking.
Walking Holiday Ireland	Irish long-distance walking packages, including luggage-transfer arrangements	Accommodation booking and luggage transfer between stages	Luggage-transfer packages are advertised from about €610. Typical bag delivery is by mid-afternoon, with a usual bag limit of 15 kg per bag and up to two bags per person. Check Western Way coverage and current terms before booking.

Hillwalk Tours and Footfalls both build in taxi transfers on some days where accommodation sits away from the line of the trail. This matters on the Western Way because places such as Drummin have limited or no practical overnight options directly on the route.

At the time of planning, Hillwalk Tours uses a route variation near Oughterard because the Oughterard–Maam section has had a live trail closure. Anyone using an operator package should still check the day-by-day route supplied with the booking and check Sport Ireland closure notices before walking.

### Standalone luggage transfer

Independent walkers who have booked their own accommodation can use a luggage courier rather than taking a full walking-holiday package.

The Pathway Porter covers the Western Way and offers custom luggage transfer between accommodation stops. Bags are normally collected each morning by 9:30am and delivered to the next accommodation by around 3:30pm. Pricing is by quote rather than a fixed public tariff; contact The Pathway Porter directly for current costs and availability.

This works best where every night is in pre-booked accommodation that can receive bags. It is less useful for walkers wild camping on the remote northern stages, or for anyone whose itinerary includes informal pick-up points rather than recognised accommodation.

Before booking standalone luggage transfer, confirm:

- the exact overnight stops, including any off-route accommodation;
- whether the courier will serve the Newport–Sheskin–Ballycastle section;
- bag limits and collection times;
- what happens if a trail closure forces a route change;
- whether accommodation owners are happy to receive luggage before check-in.

## Taxi transfers and off-route accommodation

Taxi planning is a major part of the Western Way, especially for full-route walkers. Several stage endpoints are not reliable accommodation bases, and public transport is sparse away from the larger towns.

The key problem points are:

- **Drummin** — used as a stage endpoint between Leenane and Westport, but walkers often need a transfer to accommodation elsewhere.
- **Sheskin** — the practical endpoint before the final long stage to Ballycastle, with very limited services.
- **Ballycastle** — the finish is on the north Mayo coast, with no rail connection and limited onward bus options.

For the northern stages, pre-arrange taxi collection rather than hoping to find transport on the day. Local taxis from Newport and Ballina serve the wider area, but availability should be booked in advance, particularly in July and August or if arriving late in the day.

Independent walkers should also plan transport at both ends of the trail:

- **To Oughterard:** Bus Éireann services run from Galway; Galway is served by train from Dublin.
- **From Ballycastle:** onward travel is by limited Bus Éireann / Local Link services via Ballina, or by pre-booked taxi. Current timetables should be checked before travelling.

## Fully guided options

Fully guided group holidays are available in the wider west of Ireland and Wild Atlantic Way region, but they do not usually follow the full Western Way from Oughterard to Ballycastle.

Footfalls Walking Holidays offers guided group tours in the west of Ireland, with 8-day trips typically priced around €1,679–€1,789 and group sizes capped at 14. These cover comparable Connemara and

Mayo landscapes with a professional guide, but are broader regional walking holidays rather than a full Western Way traverse.

Country Walkers also offers guided walking in Ireland's west, with easy-to-moderate daily walking and a local guide. Again, this is better viewed as a guided west-of-Ireland walking holiday than a supported end-to-end Western Way hike.

For walkers who specifically want to follow the waymarked Western Way, a self-guided package on the Oughterard–Westport section is usually the closer match. The remaining northern section needs separate planning.

## **What to book ahead**

Book early if walking in July or August. Oughterard, Leenane and Westport have a wider choice of accommodation, but popular dates still fill quickly. The northern end of the route has far fewer options, so Newport, the Bellacorick/Sheskin area and Ballycastle should be planned months ahead.

As a practical rule:

- book operator packages for peak season at least 3–6 months in advance;
- reserve accommodation before arranging luggage transfer;
- arrange Drummin and Sheskin taxi transfers before starting the trail;
- check whether luggage transfer covers the full itinerary, not just Oughterard to Westport;
- carry enough food for the Newport–Sheskin–Ballycastle stretch, where shops and services are limited;
- check Sport Ireland closure notices before departure, especially after heavy rain.

Support services can make the southern half of the Western Way straightforward. The full 179 km route still requires independent logistics, particularly north of Newport, where accommodation, transport and resupply are the limiting factors.

## Shorter Hikes and Best Sections

The Western Way works well as a section hike, but transport and accommodation become awkward away from Oughterard, Leenaun, Westport and Newport. Before booking any short itinerary, check Sport Ireland's current closure notices: short-term closures after heavy rain and infrastructure issues have affected places such as the Lackavrea Forest footbridge, the Aasleagh River/Ashleagh Lodge section and parts of the Bellacorick area.

Best for	Section	Approx. distance	Why choose it	Transport practicality
Best day walk	Maam Bridge to Mám Éan / Maumeen pass, returning or continuing with a shuttle	Around 9.3 km as a common out-and-back variant	The most concentrated mountain, pilgrimage and Connemara scenery on the route	Best by car or pre-arranged taxi/shuttle
Best weekend	Oughterard to Leenaun via Maam	About 39 km over 2 days	Lough Corrib, bog roads, Mám Éan, Inagh Valley and Killary Harbour	Good start access from Galway to Oughterard; limited onward transport from Leenaun
Best 3–4 day section	Oughterard to Westport	About 82 km over 4 trail stages	The most varied and accessible long section	Strong bookends: Galway/Oughterard at the start, Westport rail/bus at the finish
Best scenery	Maam Bridge to Leenaun	About 18 km	Mám Éan, Twelve Bens views, Inagh Valley and the approach to Killary Harbour	Requires a shuttle, taxi or careful lift planning
Best for beginners	Westport to Newport	About 12 km	Gentle Greenway walking, easy navigation and services at both ends	The easiest section for public transport
Best for villages/accommodation	Oughterard to Leenaun	About 39 km over 2–3 days	Compact village-to-village walking with the most reliable overnight stops	Book accommodation early, especially around Maam
Best for a remote/camping-style trip	Newport to Sheskin to Ballycastle	About 60 km over 2 long days	Wild Nephin, blanket bog, forest and the most isolated feel of the Way	Poor public transport and no easy bail-outs; experienced hikers only

## Best day walk: Maam Bridge to Mám Éan / Maumeen pass

**Start/end:** Maam Bridge, returning the same way, or continuing towards the Inagh Valley with a pre-arranged shuttle.

**Approx. distance:** around 9.3 km for a common out-and-back route to the pass.

**Character:** moderate mountain walking, rough underfoot, with steep slopes, loose rock and wet ground.

This is the best single-day sample of the Western Way because it reaches the route's high point at **Mám Éan / Maumeen pass** without committing to a full stage. The pass is an early-Christian pilgrimage site with St Patrick's chapel, a holy well, a Mass Rock and a St Patrick statue. On a clear day, the views open across the Inagh Valley, the Twelve Bens and the Maumturk Mountains.

Most walkers approach from **Maam Bridge**, where parking is available near the bridge by Keane's pub. Another practical approach is from the Maumeen car park, reached from the L5136 off the N59 near Recess; from there it is roughly 1.5 km to the chapel. Good waterproof boots are important even in settled weather, as the ground is rough, rocky and often wet.

**Transport notes:** this is easiest with a car. A linear walk towards the Inagh Valley or Leenaun needs a car shuttle or pre-booked taxi. Public transport is too limited to rely on casually for this day walk.

## Best weekend section: Oughterard to Leenaun via Maam

**Start:** Oughterard.

**Finish:** Leenaun / Leenane.

**Approx. distance:** about 39 km over 2 days, using the Oughterard–Maam and Maam–Leenaun stages.

This is the strongest two-day version of the Western Way. Day 1 gives a gentler start from Oughterard along the Lough Corrib side of the route, with oak woodland, open bogland and old drove roads before Maam. Day 2 is the scenic payoff: the climb over Mám Éan, the descent towards the Inagh Valley and the approach towards Killary Harbour.

Maam is a small overnight stop with Keane's pub and limited B&B options nearby, so accommodation should be arranged before committing to the weekend. Leenaun has more services, including the Leenane Hotel, Portfinn Lodge, guesthouses and pubs.

**Transport notes:** Oughterard is reached from Galway by Bus Éireann route 419; check the current timetable before travelling. Transport out of Leenaun is much more limited. Local Link Galway runs a very limited door-to-door service that must be booked by phone in advance, but most section hikers should plan a taxi, private transfer or car shuttle. If current closures affect the Oughterard end, starting at Maam Cross may be more practical; this should be checked with Sport Ireland before booking.

## Best 3–4 day section: Oughterard to Westport

**Start:** Oughterard.

**Finish:** Westport.

**Approx. distance:** about 82 km over the first four HikeList stages.

For hikers who want a substantial Western Way trip without the full week, Oughterard to Westport is the best balance of scenery, services and transport. It includes the Lough Corrib opening, the Mám Éan

crossing, the Inagh Valley, Killary Harbour, Leenaun, Aasleagh, Sheeffry Bridge, Drummin, the eastern slopes of Croagh Patrick and the finish into Westport.

This section still needs proper planning. The middle stages around **Sheeffry Bridge** and **Drummin** are quieter and accommodation is limited, so availability should be checked well ahead. Underfoot conditions can also be wet and slow, even though the route is not technically difficult.

**Transport notes:** the start works well via Galway and Bus Éireann to Oughterard. Westport is one of the best finish points on the whole route, with an Irish Rail station on the Dublin Heuston line, regular bus services and a good choice of accommodation and food.

### **Best section for scenery: Maam Bridge to Leenaun**

**Start:** Maam Bridge.

**Finish:** Leenaun / Leenane.

**Approx. distance:** about 18 km.

This is the most rewarding scenic stage for walkers who only have one full day. It crosses Mám Éan, gives big views across the Maumturks and Twelve Bens, then descends towards the Inagh Valley before the final approach to Killary Harbour and Leenaun.

The stage is not technically hard, but it is rougher than the distance suggests. Expect wet ground, mountain path, exposed weather and slower progress than on road or Greenway sections. Carry navigation as well as following the yellow-arrow waymarks.

**Transport notes:** this is best arranged as a linear day with a shuttle or taxi. Leaving a car at one end and arranging a lift back is usually more realistic than relying on public transport.

### **Best section for beginners: Westport to Newport**

**Start:** Westport.

**Finish:** Newport.

**Approx. distance:** about 12 km.

Westport to Newport is the easiest section of the Western Way and the best choice for less experienced walkers, families with older children or anyone wanting a low-commitment half-day. The route follows the **Great Western Greenway** on the old railway trackbed, giving gentle gradients, a well-surfaced shared path and straightforward navigation.

Westport has full services, including shops, cafés, pubs, accommodation and a train station. Newport has accommodation, pubs and a small supermarket, making it a comfortable short section rather than a remote hill day.

**Transport notes:** this is also the simplest public-transport section. Bus Éireann links Newport and Westport, with Local Link Mayo also serving the area. Timetables change, so check Bus Éireann and Local Link before setting out.

### **Best section for public transport: Westport to Newport**

For walkers without a car, **Westport to Newport** is the clear choice. Westport has the strongest transport links on the route, including Irish Rail services from Dublin Heuston and regular bus

connections. Newport is close enough to Westport for a short bus or taxi return, and the walking itself is simple to follow on the Greenway.

A second option is **Oughterard to Maam** as a one-day linear section from a Galway base, using Bus Éireann route 419 to Oughterard and a taxi or pre-arranged lift back from Maam. The return leg from Maam is the weak point, so it should not be left to chance.

## **Best section for villages and accommodation: Oughterard to Leenaun**

**Start:** Oughterard.

**Finish:** Leenaun / Leenane.

**Approx. distance:** about 39 km, usually walked in 2 days, or 3 shorter days if accommodation and transfers allow.

This is the most compact village-to-village section of the Way. Oughterard has supermarkets, cafés, pubs, guesthouses and hotels. Maam gives a small but useful intermediate stop, centred around Keane's pub and limited nearby B&Bs. Leenaun is a characterful village at the head of Killary Harbour with hotels, guesthouses and pubs.

Because Maam has limited beds, this section rewards early booking. It is also a good candidate for a self-guided package if accommodation and luggage logistics are more important than keeping costs down.

**Transport notes:** start access via Galway to Oughterard is straightforward compared with much of the route. Leaving from Leenaun is less straightforward and usually needs a taxi, booked Local Link service or private transfer.

## **Best remote or camping-style section: Newport to Sheskin to Ballycastle**

**Start:** Newport.

**Finish:** Ballycastle.

**Approx. distance:** about 60 km over 2 long stages.

This is the wildest short version of the Western Way, crossing the remote Mayo section towards the Nephin Beg range and the Wild Nephin National Park area. It is the right choice for experienced, self-sufficient walkers who want blanket bog, forestry, isolation and long stretches with few services.

It is not a good choice for beginners. There are long gaps with no resupply, limited escape options and patchier waymarking than on the southern sections. Anyone camping or carrying overnight kit should be prepared for wet bog, exposed weather and slow progress. Carry all food needed between Newport, Sheskin and Ballycastle, and do not rely on finding shops or transport mid-stage.

Part of the Bellacorick to Bunnyconnellan area has been subject to closure, so the current status must be checked with Sport Ireland before planning this section. Ballycastle is a small finish village near Downpatrick Head and Dún Briste, but onward transport is limited; Ballina is the nearest practical transport hub for many walkers, usually reached by Local Link Mayo or taxi. This should be checked before travelling.

## Highlights and Points of Interest

The Western Way's strongest points come from contrast: the gentler lakeside start at Lough Corrib, the Connemara mountain pass at Mám Éan, the fjord and village stop at Killary Harbour and Leenaun, then the more isolated Mayo bog and forest stages towards Ballycastle. These are the places most worth building time around, either for a slower day, an overnight stop, or a short detour from the line of the route.

### Lough Corrib and the Oughterard opening

Oughterard sits on the western shore of Lough Corrib, an important angling town and a practical start point before the route heads north towards Maam. This first section gives a relatively gentle introduction, following the lake's banks before the Way turns towards wetter, rougher mountain and bog country.

Lough Corrib is Ireland's second-largest lake and the largest lake entirely within the Republic. It is also known for its islands: local tradition gives the number as 365, while GPS surveys suggest a much higher figure, with many low islands submerged at higher water levels. For walkers, the main value is simple: this is one of the more forgiving and scenic openings on the trail, and a good place to start steadily rather than treating Day 1 as a warm-up to rush through.

### Mám Éan / Maumeen pass

Mám Éan, meaning "Pass of the Birds", is the high point of the Western Way at about 259 m. It crosses the Maumturk Mountains between the Maam Valley and the Inagh Valley and is the wildest mountain section of the route. It is a real pass crossing, but not a technical climb; the challenge is usually exposure, wet ground and navigation rather than height.

The pass is also one of the route's most important cultural sites. It has been used as a pilgrimage place since early-Christian times and remains active today. At the pass you'll find a small chapel, a statue of St Patrick, St Patrick's Bed in a cleft in the rock, a holy well and Stations of the Cross marked by stone crosses. The site also served as a Mass Rock during the 17th and 18th centuries, when Catholic worship was outlawed.

Three annual pilgrimages take place here: St Patrick's Day, Good Friday and the first Sunday in August. If walking on or near these dates, allow extra time and expect more people than usual on what is otherwise a quiet mountain crossing. The Mám Éan Geotrail adds useful context on the geology and human history of the pass.

### Inagh Valley and the Twelve Bens

After Mám Éan, the route descends into the Inagh Valley, one of the classic Connemara landscapes. The valley sits between the Maumturk Mountains to the east and the Twelve Bens, or Beanna Beola, to the west. In clear weather, both ranges can be visible from the valley floor, with Lough Inagh adding a strong sense of scale.

This is a section to take slowly if visibility is good. The walking is less about a single viewpoint and more about the unfolding line of water, bog and mountain. Connemara sheep are commonly seen on the

valley floor and hillsides; give livestock space and keep gates and boundaries as found.

## Aasleagh Falls and Killary Harbour

North of Leenaun, the route reaches Aasleagh Falls on the River Erriff, just inside County Mayo. The falls are wide and low rather than high and dramatic, but they are a worthwhile stop because of their position at the head of Killary Harbour. In summer, Atlantic salmon and sea trout run the falls.

Killary Harbour, or Caoláire Rua, is one of only three glacially carved fjords on the island of Ireland. It runs about 16 km from the Atlantic inland to its head and reaches a depth of around 45 m. The fjord is enclosed by the mountains of Mayo and Galway, including Ben Gorm, and gives one of the best combinations of sea, mountain and sheltered valley on the whole route.

## Leenaun / Leenane

Leenaun, also spelled Leenane, is the key village stop around Killary Harbour and one of the most useful places to slow down. It sits at the innermost point of the fjord and has accommodation, pubs and food, making it an important rest and resupply point between the Galway and Mayo sections.

The village also has a cultural footnote: it was the principal filming location for Jim Sheridan's 1990 film *The Field*, with pub scenes shot in Gaynor's Bar on the main street. For most walkers, though, the practical appeal is stronger than the film connection. Leenaun is a good place to dry kit, eat properly and prepare for the longer, quieter Mayo stages ahead.

## Croagh Patrick's eastern slopes

The Western Way does not climb Croagh Patrick, but it passes along the lower eastern slopes of the mountain on the approach to Westport. This is an important distinction for planning: the route gives the atmosphere and views of Ireland's famous pilgrimage mountain without adding the summit ascent.

Croagh Patrick, or Cruach Phádraig, rises to 764 m and is closely associated with St Patrick, who is said to have fasted on the summit for 40 days. Reek Sunday, on the last Sunday in July, brings tens of thousands of pilgrims to the mountain. The Way's line is lower and more practical for a through-walk, with the mountain's conical outline dominating the approach rather than becoming a separate climb.

## Westport and Clew Bay

Westport is the largest town on the Western Way and the main resupply point on the route. It is a planned 18th-century town, with the tree-lined Mall and the Carrowbeg River at its centre. For hikers, its value is straightforward: supermarkets, pharmacies, gear shops, hotels, B&Bs, hostels, restaurants and pubs are all concentrated here.

Westport is also a sensible place to add a rest night if the schedule allows. Westport House and its grounds sit beside the town, and Clew Bay is visible from the outskirts, with its drumlins and islands facing the open Atlantic. The following stage to Newport is comparatively short at about 12 km, so Westport also works well for reorganising food and kit before the much longer northern stages.

## Newport and the approach to Wild Nephin

Newport, or Baile Uí Fhiacháin, is a quieter market town on the Black Oak River and the last easy reset before the route becomes much more remote. It sits about 12 km beyond Westport on the standard itinerary and marks the transition from serviced towns into the longer Mayo bog and forest sections.

This is not a place to pass through carelessly. The next stage from Newport to Sheskin is about 32 km and is the longest day in the seven-day itinerary. Food, water strategy, battery power and navigation should all be sorted before leaving town.

## Nephin Beg range and Wild Nephin

North of Newport, the Western Way reaches its most isolated country around the Nephin Beg range and the blanket bogs bordering Wild Nephin National Park. The park covers 15,000 hectares of uninhabited north-west Mayo, with the Owenduff Bog at its heart — one of the last intact active blanket bog systems in Western Europe.

The route passes through the southern and eastern fringes of this landscape rather than climbing the main summits. Slieve Carr, at 721 m, is the highest point in the Nephin Beg range and is regarded as one of Ireland's most remote summits, but it is not on the Western Way. The experience here is about distance, emptiness and self-reliance: forest, open bog, few facilities and long stretches where waymarking can feel sparse.

Wild Nephin also has Gold Tier International Dark Sky Park status as part of Mayo International Dark Sky Park. For anyone wild camping where appropriate or staying around Sheskin, clear nights can be memorable, with the Milky Way visible to the naked eye. Do not let the appeal of the night sky distract from the day's main logistics: the Newport to Sheskin stage is long, exposed and wet underfoot, and navigation should not rely on waymarks alone.

## Ballycastle, Downpatrick Head and Dún Briste

The Western Way ends at Ballycastle on the north Mayo Atlantic coast. The village is close to Downpatrick Head, one of the strongest optional additions to the finish. It is not the official end point of the trail, but the headland is close enough to make a worthwhile post-walk detour if time, weather and energy allow.

Downpatrick Head is a Wild Atlantic Way signature point, best known for the sea stack of Dún Briste, meaning "Broken Fort". The stack stands about 45 m high, a short distance offshore, separated from the mainland by a major storm in 1393. It is roughly 63 m long and 23 m wide, and still carries the remains of a medieval homestead, cut off from land for more than 600 years; the ruined St Patrick's church, a holy well and a stone cross stand on the headland itself.

The headland also has blow holes that can throw sea spray high into the air, so it is a place for careful footing and sensible weather judgement rather than a casual end-of-walk stroll. Pilgrims visit on Garland Sunday, the last Sunday of July. If adding Downpatrick Head after reaching Ballycastle, allow it as a separate detour rather than assuming it is part of the official route.

# Common Mistakes and Planning Tips

The Western Way is not difficult because of height or technical ground; it catches walkers out through wet terrain, long service gaps, patchy waymarking and awkward logistics. Treat it as a remote west-of-Ireland walk rather than a village-to-village trail with constant back-up.

## 1. Not checking Sport Ireland closure notices before setting off

Do not rely on a route plan made months earlier. Short closures are a real issue on the Western Way, especially after heavy rainfall or where boardwalks and riverbank sections become unsafe.

Sport Ireland currently lists important closures affecting the route, including the Lackavrea boardwalk on the Galway section, the Ashleagh River section from Ashleagh Lodge to Houston's Bridge, and closures around Bellacorick to Bunnyconnellan. These can change with repairs, flood damage and seasonal maintenance.

**Fix:** check the Sport Ireland Outdoors pages for both the Galway and Mayo sections in the week before starting, then again immediately before walking any affected stage. Download the latest official PDF section maps and GPX files rather than relying on an old file saved on a phone.

## 2. Assuming the Way is mostly bog and mountain path

The Western Way has plenty of bog, moorland and forestry, but roughly half of the route is on local roads. Sport Ireland gives the Mayo section as 60 km, or 49%, on local roads, and the full route sits in the same broad range.

This matters for comfort. Long tarmac stretches can be hard on feet, knees and hips, especially in footwear chosen only for soft ground. The N59 section near the Erriff Valley is an 8 km stretch of narrow, winding main road with moderate traffic; Sport Ireland advises walking it early in the morning.

**Fix:** plan for both surfaces. Wear footwear that can handle wet bog but will not punish you over repeated road kilometres. Build in foot care, keep high-visibility clothing accessible for road sections, and do not expect every day to feel like a wilderness path.

## 3. Relying only on waymarks

The Western Way is waymarked with a yellow arrow on a black background, but the spacing is not as dense as on busier Irish routes. On remote Mayo stages, markers can be faded, knocked over, hidden by vegetation or confusing where sheep tracks branch away from the line.

Poor visibility makes this more serious on the Mám Éan / Maumeen crossing and across the Nephin Beg and Sheskin bog stages. A phone map with incomplete offline data is not a navigation plan.

**Fix:** carry a proper navigation set-up:

Navigation item	Why it matters on this route
Current Sport Ireland GPX files	Best first choice for the present route line and diversions
Sport Ireland PDF section maps	Useful for checking closures, stage detail and official routing

Navigation item	Why it matters on this route
OSi Discovery Series sheets 23, 31, 37, 38, 44 and 45	Paper back-up for poor signal, battery failure or bad weather
EastWest Mapping Western Way strip-map guide	A practical route-specific mapping option at 1:40,000 scale

Download files before leaving Oughterard and check that the full route is available offline.

#### 4. Booking accommodation too late

Accommodation is not evenly spread along the Western Way. Westport has the most choice, but several overnight points are small, rural or very limited.

Overnight point	Planning issue
Maam / Maam Bridge	Small village with very limited B&B stock
Leenaun / Leenane	Key stop with pub, hostel and small shop, but it can fill in summer
Drummin	Rural overnight; not a conventional village stop
Westport	Best range of hotels, hostels and B&Bs
Newport	Useful services, but still worth booking ahead
Sheskin	Extremely remote; almost no accommodation at Sheskin itself
Ballycastle	Small finish village with limited accommodation

The Newport to Sheskin stage is around 32 km, so failing to secure a realistic overnight plan here can create a major problem late in the walk.

**Fix:** book the northern Mayo nights first, especially Sheskin/Bangor Erris area arrangements and Ballycastle. In June, July and August, booking months ahead is sensible. If wild camping is part of the plan, still identify exactly where food, water, onward transport and bad-weather alternatives will come from.

#### 5. Misjudging food and water between Newport, Sheskin and Ballycastle

The long northern stages are not village-hopping days. Newport is the last reliable supermarket before Ballycastle. There is effectively no shop, café or pub on the trail between Newport and Ballycastle, and Bangor Erris is slightly off-route rather than a guaranteed on-trail stop.

Natural water is common in the wet western landscape, but streams and bog drains are not automatically safe to drink from, especially near farmland or grazed ground.

**Fix:** leave Newport with a full day's food and emergency calories for delay. Fill water before setting off and carry a filter or purification tablets for natural sources. Do not assume that Bellacorick, Sheskin or the forest sections will provide food, drink or shelter.

## 6. Underestimating how slow bog walking is

The Western Way's bog is not just damp grass. Much of the route crosses peat, wet moorland, bog roads, saturated grass and uneven ground that can stay wet long after rain. The Connemara sections and the Nephin Beg / Sheskin stages are particularly slow underfoot.

A 22 km day over bog can take far longer than a 22 km day on firm road or track. Hidden holes, submerged rocks and tussocks make progress tiring, and timber boardwalks can be very slippery when wet.

**Fix:** use realistic timings rather than road-walking pace. Trekking poles, waterproof boots and gaiters are genuinely useful here. Start early on long days, especially Newport to Sheskin and Sheskin to Ballycastle, and keep spare dry layers protected inside the pack.

## 7. Treating Mám Éan / Maumeen as the main difficulty

Mám Éan / Maumeen is the high point of the Western Way at around 259 m and is the wildest mountain crossing on the route, but it is not a technical climb. There is no scrambling or exposed ridge walking on the standard route.

The bigger cumulative challenge is the combination of bog, road walking, long stages, weather and remoteness.

**Fix:** prepare for endurance and self-reliance rather than altitude. The key question is not whether the pass is technically hard, but whether the day's route can be navigated safely in poor visibility and completed at a bog-walking pace.

## 8. Bringing a dog without checking restrictions

Dogs are not permitted on off-road sections of the Western Way. This includes forestry and Coillte sections, and Sport Ireland notes restrictions including no dogs along the Erriff River and between Sheeffry Bridge and Drummin.

This is not a minor inconvenience: once on a point-to-point route with limited transport, a dog restriction can leave no simple workaround.

**Fix:** do not bring a dog unless the full route has been checked against the current Sport Ireland dog policy and a realistic alternative has been planned for restricted sections.

## 9. Using an outdated GPX or old route description

The Western Way has had route changes, boardwalk additions and temporary diversions. Older GPX files and blog route lines may not match the current walking route or closures.

**Fix:** use the current Sport Ireland trail pages for GPX files and downloadable section maps. If also using the official Western Way website or a printed guide, check that it matches the latest Sport Ireland information before walking.

## 10. Forgetting Sunday, Monday and seasonal opening patterns

Services in Connemara and north Mayo are seasonal and limited outside the main walking months. Some pubs, cafés and B&Bs operate reduced hours, close on Sundays or Mondays, or shut entirely in

winter. Leenaun/Leenane is an important food and resupply stop, so reduced opening there can affect the next day's plan.

**Fix:** in April, May, late September or October, contact accommodation directly before travelling and check pub or shop opening times before each stage. Winter is not a practical season for most walkers on this route.

## **11. Finishing in Ballycastle without an onward transport plan**

Ballycastle is a small north Mayo village and has no railway station. Bus Éireann Route 445 serves Ballina–Ballycastle, and TFI Local Link services also operate in the area, but timetables are infrequent and can be day-dependent. This should be checked before travelling.

The nearest onward rail options require a bus or taxi connection, commonly via Ballina or Westport.

**Fix:** plan the exit before fixing the final walking day. Check Bus Éireann and Transport for Ireland timetables, consider staying overnight in Ballycastle, and pre-arrange a taxi if the public transport timings do not work.

## Final Advice

The Western Way is best suited to fit, self-reliant walkers who are comfortable with wet ground, long days and quiet country where services are spread out. It is not a polished, high-traffic trail like the Dingle Way or Beara Way. Its appeal is rougher: bog roads, forestry, open moorland, mountain passes, Irish-speaking Connemara heritage, and the emptier north Mayo landscape around Wild Nephin.

### The main thing to get right

Accommodation and resupply are the critical planning points. Services are concentrated in towns and villages, and the northern Mayo stages have very little margin for improvisation. The Newport to Sheskin and Sheskin to Ballycastle stages are especially important: they are long, remote and should be started with enough food, water and foul-weather gear for the full day.

Book accommodation well ahead, especially if walking in the main season or relying on B&Bs rather than camping. If logistics feel tight, self-guided operators such as Hillwalk Tours and Footfalls can arrange accommodation and baggage transfer, which removes much of the hardest planning from the route.

Navigation also needs proper attention. The Western Way is waymarked with yellow arrows on a black background, but waymarking can be patchy on the remoter northern stages. Carry OSi mapping, GPX and the official Sport Ireland PDF section maps rather than relying on signs alone. Check Sport Ireland closure notices before each stage, as boardwalk and river sections can close after heavy rain.

### Full thru-hike or section hike?

A full Oughterard to Ballycastle walk gives the complete progression: Lough Corrib and Connemara, Mám Éan, Killary Harbour, Croagh Patrick's lower slopes, then the wilder bog and forest country of north Mayo. It is the best choice for walkers who want the full character of the route and have time to manage the logistics properly.

For a shorter trip, the Galway and Connemara side is the easiest section to recommend. Oughterard to Leenaun gives a strong introduction, with Mám Éan, the Inagh Valley and Killary Harbour, without committing to the more isolated Mayo stages. Oughterard to Westport is a rewarding longer section if accommodation and transport line up.

The northern Mayo section is the more serious undertaking. It is quieter, wetter, more remote and harder to break into short public-transport-friendly pieces. Walkers tackling Newport to Sheskin and onward to Ballycastle should be happy with self-reliant navigation and pre-arranged transfers where needed.

### The most rewarding parts

The Mám Éan / Maumeen crossing is the standout moment for many walkers: the route's high point, an early-Christian pilgrimage site, and the wildest mountain passage on the Way without becoming technical. The descent towards the Inagh Valley and the approach to Killary Harbour make this one of the strongest sections of the whole route.

Leenaun is an important psychological and practical hinge point, sitting at the head of Killary Harbour before the route turns towards Mayo. Later, the Nephin Beg and Sheskin country provides the deepest

sense of isolation: broad Atlantic blanket bog, forest and open ground on the edge of Wild Nephin National Park. The finish at Ballycastle, close to Downpatrick Head and Dún Briste, gives the route a clear coastal end point on the north Mayo Atlantic shore.

## **Final warnings before booking**

Expect wet feet and slow ground. The route is frequently boggy, and several kilometres of boardwalk do not remove the need for waterproof footwear and patience. Around half of the Way uses local roads, including significant road walking on the first stage from Oughterard to Maam; this is normal for Irish waymarked ways, but it can surprise walkers expecting continuous footpath.

Dogs are not permitted on off-road and forestry sections. Public transport is sparse on the remote stages, so bus links and trailhead transfers should be checked before travelling. Ireland uses euros (€), and any prices for accommodation, taxis, baggage transfer or buses should be confirmed before booking.

For the right walker, the Western Way is one of Ireland's quieter and more atmospheric long-distance routes. Treat it as a serious wet-weather journey rather than a gentle village-to-village ramble, plan the accommodation first, carry reliable navigation, and the route will reward careful preparation.