



# Musical Landscapes

Produced by Lonely Planet for



Tourism Ireland





Traditional Irish dancers

# Musical Landscapes

From the busker-packed streets of Galway, this rip-roaring ride takes you around Clare and the Aran Islands to discover fine traditional-music pubs, venues and festivals.

- 1 Galway City**  
Designated music venues in thrall to the heartfelt outpourings of the singer-songwriter.
- 2 Ennis**  
Medieval town simply bursting with fine pubs featuring traditional Irish music.
- 3 Miltown Malbay**  
Home to one of Ireland's great trad music events in July.
- 4 Ennistymon**  
Charming country village with roaring cascades and music at every turn.
- 5 Kilfenora**  
Tiny village with a strong music tradition.
- 6 Lisdoonvarna**  
Nonstop song and dance during the international matchmaking festival.
- 7 Doolin**  
The epicentre of traditional Irish music.
- 8 Inishmór**  
Aran Island with lively pubs and restaurants.
- 9 Inisheer**  
End-of-the-earth landscape and traditional drumming festival.



## Trip at a Glance

Duration

**5 Days**

139km/86 miles

Best Time to Go

**Summer**

For outdoor céilidh (traditional dancing) and music festivals.

Essential Photo

**Kilfenora**


Nightly set-dancing at the crossroads, in Vaughan's of Kilfenora.

Best for Song

**Ennis**

Ennis, on summer nights, where local musicians ply their wares.



 Fiddler in Galway City, County Galway

## 1 Galway City

Galway has a young student population and a largely creative community that give a palpable energy to the place. Colourful medieval streets packed with heritage shops, sidewalk cafes and pubs ensure there's never a dull moment. Galway's pub selection is second to none and some swing to tunes every night of the week. Crane Bar, an atmospheric old pub west of the Corrib, is the best spot in Galway to catch an informal *céilidh* (traditional dancing) most nights. Or for something more contemporary, Róisín Dubh is the place to hear emerging international rock and singer-songwriters.

### Trip Highlight

## 2 Ennis

Ennis (Inis), a medieval town in origin, simply bursts with pubs featuring trad music. Brogan's,

on the corner of Cooke's Lane, sees a fine bunch of musicians rattling even the stone floors almost every night in summer, and the plain-tile-fronted John O'Dea is a hideout for local musicians serious about their trad sessions. Cois na hAbhna, a pilgrimage point for traditional music and culture, has frequent performances and a full range of classes in dance and music, an archive, and a library of Irish traditional music, song, dance and folklore. Traditional music aficionados might like to time a visit with Fleadh Nua, a lively festival held in late May.

## 3 Miltown Malbay

Miltown Malbay was a resort favoured by well-to-do Victorians, though the beach itself is 2km south at Spanish Point. To the north of the Point, there are beautiful walks amid the low cliffs, coves and isolated beaches.



## County Clare's Best Music Festival

Half the population of Miltown Malbay seems to be part of the annual Willie Clancy Irish Summer School, a tribute to a native son and one of Ireland's greatest pipers. The eight-day festival begins on the first Saturday in July, when impromptu sessions occur day and night, the pubs are packed and Guinness is consumed by the barrel – up to 10,000 enthusiasts from around the globe turn up for the event. Specialist workshops and classes underpin the event; don't be surprised to attend a recital with 40 noted fiddlers.





Traditional Irish music session

A classically friendly place in the chatty Irish way, Milltown Malbay hosts the annual Willie Clancy Irish Music Festival, one of Ireland's great trad music events. Lynch's Bar (aka Friel's) is one of a couple of genuine old-style places with occasional trad sessions.

#### 4 **Trip Highlight** **Ennistymon**

Ennistymon (Inis Díomáin) is a timeless country village where people go about their business (which involves a lot of cheerful chatting) barely noticing the characterful buildings lining Main St. And behind this facade there's a surprise: the roaring Cascades, the stepped falls of the River Inagh. Not to be missed, Eugene's is an intimate, cosy pub and has a trademark collection of visiting cards covering its walls, alongside photographs of famous writers and musicians. The inspiring collection of whiskey will have you smoothly debating the relative merit of various drops. Another great old pub is

Cooley's House, host to music most nights in summer and trad nights on Wednesdays and Fridays in winter.

#### 5 **Kilfenora**

Underappreciated Kilfenora (Cill Fhionnúrach) lies on the southern fringe of the Burren. It's a small place, with a diminutive 12th-century cathedral. Kilfenora is best known for its high crosses. The town has a strong music tradition that rivals that of Doolin but without the crowds. The Kilfenora Céili Band is a celebrated community that's been playing for 100 years, its traditional music featuring fiddles, banjos, squeezeboxes and more. Vaughan's Pub has a big reputation – there's music in the bar every night during the summer and the adjacent barn is the scene of terrific dance sessions on Thursday and Sunday nights.

#### 6 **Lisdoonvarna**

Lisdoonvarna (Lios Dún Bhearna), often just called 'Lisdoon', is well known for its mineral springs. For centuries people have been

visiting the local spa to swallow its waters. Down by the river at Roadside Tavern, third-generation owner Peter Curtin knows every story worth telling. There are trad sessions daily in summer. Look for a trail beside the pub that runs 400m down to two wells by the river. One is high in sulphur, the other iron. Next door, Burren Smokehouse is where you can learn about the ancient Irish art of oak-smoking salmon.

#### 7 **Doolin**

Doolin gets plenty of press as a centre of Irish traditional music, owing to a trio of pubs that have sessions through the year. McGann's has all the classic touches of a full-on Irish music pub; the action often spills out onto the street. Right on the water, O'Connor's, a sprawling favourite, has a rollicking atmosphere. It easily gets the most crowded and has the highest tourist quotient. MacDiarmada's, also known as McDermott's, a simple red-and-white old pub, can be the rowdy favourite of locals. When the





fiddles get going, it can seem like a scene out of a John Ford movie.

## 8 Inishmór

The Aran Islands sing their own siren song to thousands of travellers each year who find their desolate beauty beguiling. The largest and most accessible of the islands, Inishmór, is home to ancient fort Dún Aengus, one of the oldest archaeological remains in Ireland, as well as some lively pubs and restaurants, particularly in the only town, Kilronan. Irish remains the local tongue, but most locals speak English with visitors. Joe Watty's Bar is the best pub in Kilronan, with trad sessions nightly in summer and

on weekends year-round. Informal music sessions, turf fires and a broad terrace with harbour views make Tí Joe Mac's a local favourite, while the American Bar has live music every night in summer.

### Trip Highlight

## 9 Inisheer

On Inisheer (Inis Oírr), the smallest of the Aran Islands, the breathtakingly beautiful end-of-the-earth landscape adds to the island's distinctly mystical aura. Steeped in mythology, traditional rituals are still very much respected here. Locals continue to carry out a pilgrimage with potential healing powers known as the

Turas to the Well of Enda, which leads to an ever-bubbling spring in a remote rocky expanse in the southwest. For five days in late June the island reverberates to the thunder of traditional drums during Craiceann Inis Oírr International Bodhrán Summer School. Bodhrán master classes, workshops and pub sessions are held as well as Irish dancing. Rory Conneely's atmospheric inn Tigh Ruaí hosts live music sessions and, here since 1897, Tigh Ned is a welcoming, unpretentious place with harbour views and an irregular schedule of lively traditional music.



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