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**“Wild Atlantic Way: proposals for
sustainable coastal tourism
development”**

TRABAJO FINAL DE GRADO

Autora:

Julia Herreros Victoria

Tutora:

Eva Maria Mestre i Mestre

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ABSTRACT

This Project is a study about the route named Wild Atlantic Way, the World's longest coastal route, which runs along 2,500km on the West coast of the Republic of Ireland. It starts in County Donegal and ends in County, and runs along all the counties in the West side of the country: County Sligo, County Mayo, County Galway, County Clare and County Kerry.

The main idea of this work is to develop a marketing plan to market and promote this coastal route for the Spanish market. In particular, the idea is to focus on a particular profile; cyclists, and see how this can increase Spanish tourism in Ireland and at the same time offer the Spanish tourist the opportunity to know and enjoy an offer for sustainable tourism development.

Another idea pursued with this is the suggestion of some ideas to improve the development of the actual route, and the expansion of the Wild Atlantic Way route. This coastal route is a young project from "*National Tourism Development Authority*" known as "*Fáilte Ireland*", and there are some points that can be improved.

Key words: Ireland, Atlantic Way, sustainable tourism, active tourism, cycle tourism

RESUMEN

Este proyecto es un estudio sobre la ruta conocida como Wild Atlantic Way, la mayor ruta costera del mundo, la cual abarca 2.500 km de la costa oeste de la República de Irlanda. Dicha ruta comienza en el condado de Donegal para finalizar en el condado de Cork, atravesando los condados del oeste: Sligo, Mayo, Galway Clare y Kerry.

La idea principal de este trabajo es proponer un plan de marketing para exponer y promover esta ruta costera en el mercado español, centrándonos en un perfil determinado y ver de qué manera se puede aumentar el turismo español en Irlanda y al mismo tiempo ofrecer al turista español la oportunidad de disfrutar y conocer una oferta relacionada con el turismo sostenible y su desarrollo.

Otra idea es sugerir algunas propuestas de mejora, para el desarrollo y el crecimiento de la ruta costera "Wild Atlantic Way". Esta ruta es un proyecto relativamente joven creado por la Autoridad Nacional de desarrollo turístico, también conocida como "*Fáilte Ireland*", por lo cual presenta algunas carencias, que se pueden mejorar.

Palabras clave: Irlanda, ruta atlántica, turismo sostenible, turismo activo, ciclo turismo

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INTRODUCTION

The Wild Atlantic Way is the world's longest coastal route. It is situated in the Republic of Ireland. The complete route runs all along the west Irish coast -from Co. Donegal to Co. Cork- along 2,500km of the Atlantic coast.

In this work, we propose a cycle route along the Irish coast. Different stages are proposed to complete the kilometres between County Cork and County Kerry. However, the plan is open, and the tourist can design his/her own journey; they can decide to complete the entire route or just one or several stages of it and at the same time discover wonderful places and the different charms of this country, and challenge themselves bicycling in one of the most outstanding landscapes in Ireland. The tourist can also carry out lots of sport and cultural activities along the coast line.

The Wild Atlantic Way is a young project from "*National Tourism Development Authority*", known as "*Fáilte Ireland*"; and we present a study of the actual situation of the route and study ways to promote this type of tourism, that is, sustainable and adventure tourism in Ireland for the Spanish market. In our opinion, the Spanish market is a good niche to promote tourism in Ireland. In particular, the sector interested in adventure tourism is growing in Spain, and it is obvious that Ireland can offer an excellent cycle route, which also contributes to the development of sustainable tourism and richness in coastal areas, visiting unique places and gorgeous landscapes.

1. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present study are listed below:

Main objective:

The main objective of this study is to develop a marketing plan to publicize the Wild Atlantic Way (Ireland) for the Spanish tourism market, and, in particular, for Spanish cycling tourists.

Secondary objectives:

The secondary objectives of this work are four, as listed below:

- Study the alternatives for sustainable development in coastal areas.
- Study the particularities of the Wild Atlantic Way (Ireland): acceptance of the route by the public, effects on the rural economy, etc.
- Study the expansion of sustainable tourism and possible synergies in other parts of the world.
- Create a cycle route along the Wild Atlantic Way, in Ireland, starting in County Cork and finishing in County Kerry, on the West coast of Ireland. This route is customised for Spanish tourists, and expandable to other origins.

2. METHODOLOGY

This project is a study about the Wild Atlantic Way route in the Republic of Ireland. To complete it, I first realized a bibliographic study about the actual promotion of the route, to observe how it is developing and then be able to propose some suggestions to improve this magnificent route.

For the realization of this study I took advantage of the fact that I lived two years in Ireland, in particular, in Westport (County Mayo) and then I moved to Clonakilty (County Cork). For this reason, I visited in situ a significant part of the route. Also, this gave me the opportunity to visit some visitors' centres. Apart from that, talking with the locals, I learned lots of curiosities, anecdotes and experiences about the Wild Atlantic Way route.

Secondly, I completed the information I had by telephone interviews and email exchanges with the heads and managers of the route, both in Spain with "*Turismo de Irlanda*" and Ireland with "*Fáilte Ireland*".

Finally, after much work in this study, I carried out a SWOT analysis of the route, which helped me understand the opportunities and threats of the route. I have also included in the work some proposals for improvement of some weaknesses of the route. One of those proposals includes the commercialization of this wild route for the Spanish market, as a way of enlarging the existing offer and offering new destination, always focusing on cycle tourism and active tourism and always promoting the sustainable tourism.

3. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

After years of tourism development, agreement has been reached in the importance for sustainable policies for tourism development. According to the *UNWTO*¹, sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practises are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a sustainable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability. Sustainable tourism should:

- Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining necessary ecological processes and helping to conserve the natural heritage and biodiversity.
- Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.

¹ UNWTO: World Tourism Organization

- Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities and contributing to poverty alleviation.

Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires the constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and / or corrective measures whenever necessary.

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourism satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainable issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them (UNWTO, 2004).

People have the idea that tourism is a clean way of maximizing an industry but the real point is that with tourism, there is real environmental damage because the action is often developed in attractive but fragile environments. For that reason there are some local policies that are focused on the tourists' necessities, but disregarding the environmental effects of the developing actions and because of this tourism has huge repercussions on the environment.

It is known that tourism developers sometimes do not respect the environment. In the present time, it seems necessary that tourism entrepreneurs and planners look for sustainability, aiming at finding new opportunities to expand the promotion of tourism. According to MacCallum:

"Environmental tourism is a valuable and genuine opportunity to expand tourism into areas where jobs are scarce and economies are struggling. However, whilst the objectives of environmental tourism are often well intended, there are consequences that arise from the practice: when people travel to places that have historically been disparately inhabited, to presence of increased and new populations inevitably impacts upon the environment and the culture of the location". (MacCallum, N. 2011: 74).

Thus, sustainable tourism tries to achieve goals between tourism and sustainability to respect the environment, so it is not only a responsibility of the developer, but also of the tourist, who needs to start being involved in the developing actions.

"In an effort to more effectively achieve the goals of environmental tourism, a focus on responsible and sustainable tourism has been added to the concept. To this end, more regulations for developers have been implemented; education is encouraged for travellers and growth management is employed. Where these measures are undertaken successfully, local communities can have control over the conversation of their surroundings and culture, while continuing to reap the benefits of environmental tourism."(MacCallum, N. 2011: 74).

According to all this, and in aims of sustainability and growth, a quality tourism product has to be compatible with environmental values and secure the preservation of cultural heritage. For this, all products need to prove that they have balanced spatial planning, and future prospects. All this considered the cultures, languages and traditions of regions and nations must be seen as a competitive advantage for the emerging tourism destinations.

4. COASTAL TOURISM

The origins of tourism in coastal areas date back to Roman times. From the mid-18th century ahead, coastal tourism was usually relevant due to the therapeutic properties of sea and sun. Wealthy people or people with good social status, travelled to the coast to use the water from the sea and the health resorts with medical purposes. Sun, sea and sand have continued to provide the principal elements for coastal tourism until today, especially in the second half of the 20th century, which was relieved by the development of mass tourism.

Coastal tourism is based on a unique combination at the interface of land and sea. It offers different amenities such as water, beaches, beauty landscape, splendid terrestrial and marine biodiversity, diversified cultural and historic heritage, healthy food and good infrastructure. It includes a variety of activities which take place in coastal zones and coastal waters and which involve the development of tourism capacities (resorts, hotels, second homes, restaurants, and so on) and support infrastructure (harbours, marinas, fishing and diving shops, etc.)

"Coastal tourism is strongly dependent upon natural and cultural resources. It encloses activities that can only be carried out in specific areas and particular conditions. Environmental conditions such as unpredictable climate conditions, winds, algae blooms and the associated risk of forest fires, tsunami, storms and floods, etc. can affect the development of tourism in coastal areas"(UNEP, 2009: 14).

As we can read in the UNEP voucher, about the coastal uses: "Coastal recreation activities occupy an exceptional place in coastal tourism" (UNEP, 2009: 14). Following this, there are two types of recreational uses in the coastal areas:

- **Consumptive:** it comprises activities as fishing, shell collection, shell fishing, etc.
- **Non-consumptive:** it contains activities like bird watching, swimming, diving, surfing, windsurfing, etc.

Countries with long coastlines can be considered as privileged since they have a space for the development of tourism, which permits a social and economic growth at the local and regional scale. A clear distinction is made between tourism growth and tourism development(UNEP, 2009: 14).

- **"Tourism growth** is measured in number of arrivals and overnight stays. These actions do not necessarily generate an adequate economic prosperity.
- **Tourism development** refers to the increase in local income and employment, as well as environmental benefits, which include the presence of a development plan in relation with the carrying capacity of the receiving environment."

Nowadays, the visitors demand a large variety of activities and new experiences; they are not searching only for sun and beach. Moreover, at the same time, the locals are more interested in to protecting their own identity, their history and obviously, the environment and the cultural heritage from the negative impacts that tourism can produce in their towns, or cities, because although not enough, the tourism sector has a huge impact in the environment.

The coastal tourism sector is getting increasingly competitive in Europe. Tourists are expecting more and more quality services for the lowest possible price. In addition to this, tourists also expect new, and a greater sophisticated variety of leisure activities such as sports, health and spas, golf, sailing, tourism for older people, meetings, conferences...

4.1. EXAMPLES OF COASTAL TOURISM ROUTES IN GREAT BRITAIN

SCOTLAND. THE NORTH COAST 500

In Scotland there exists a route which is named "*North Coast 500*", titled by the media as "Scotland's own route 66". This route runs along 500 miles throughout the Scottish Highlands. The round trip runs to and from Inverness, like a loop, upwards through the North West Highlands and down via the east hardy north coast.



Map 1. North Coast 500

This project was created by *North Highland Initiative - Success is in our nature*, which was established in 2005 to promote the tourism in the North Highlands, in Scotland, creating a powerful regional identity for the area through project management and marketing.

According to *North Highland Initiative*, the aim of the project is "to make the North Highlands better known to increase visitors", as well as to lengthen the duration of the visits which they already receive, and increase the amount of money visitors spend, in order to support a stronger economy in the North Highlands. (<http://www.northcoast500.com>).

As we can see in the official website of this route, The North Coast 500 will exhibit and promote the authentic experiences and activities of the Highlands in relation with the Scottish culture and space. All these experiences include food and drink, accommodation, culture, landscapes, heritage and outdoor and adventure-based activities. Also, all these can help establishing a relationship between the locals and the visitors.

In the official web of this route, the company recommends an offer of some tip itineraries to give the visitors an idea to help them plan their trip. These itineraries are all planned for a total of five days, the minimum amount of days that North Highlands Initiative recommends allocating for the journey. In all the cases, the visitor can

extend this amount of days in relation with the expectations of the travel, and their availability. These routes are only sketches, and aimed at giving ideas, not at providing a particular plan to the visitors.

The luxury itinerary: This itinerary is planned for five days travelling along the Scottish highlands, for those tourists who look for fine and good things and experiences along the NC500. The best option for this itinerary is to hire a car to be more comfortable during the travel and enjoy the landscapes. Those tourists will accommodate in hotels or in high quality accommodation places, which can be found all along the routes.

Active adventurer itinerary: This itinerary is also planned for five days. It runs along the NC500, and permits visiting the cultural side of the Highlands like historical castles and lakes. Also, there is the possibility that the visitor realizes some activities with an amazing environment and lovely walks to discover the nature along the Highlands.

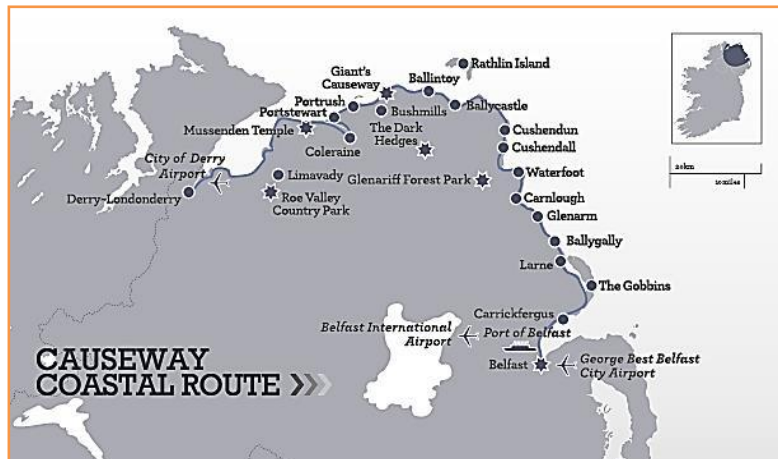
The golf enthusiast itinerary: This is the perfect itinerary for any golfing fan. As it is well known, there are lots of golf courses in this area. In particular, along the route, many can be found: Invergordon Golf Course, Royal Dornoch Golf Club, Real Golf Club, etc., where the tourist can join and play some games. The tourists can bring their own stuff for play or simply rent it on the course house. Moreover, the visitor can enjoy the spectacular landscape and the lovely views and the spirit of the highlands and know the culture and the traditions in this area of Scotland.

The motorcyclist itinerary: This itinerary has been thought for six days in which the tourist can enjoy the loop route from Inverness along the Scottish highlands to Inverness again. The first step before start this journey is to prepare the motorcycle for a long travel. The common option is to use saddlebags and luggage adapted for the motorcycle, where the tourist will bring the indispensable stuff for the travel. The motorcyclists often say: "four wheels will get you there but two will make the journey memorable". For this itinerary is necessary to check the weather and is recommended to realize this trip during the best months in summer to provide a safe ride.

The happy camper itinerary: This itinerary is planned for those tourists who want to explore how it is to live on the wild side of the Highlands. The visitors can hire a caravan or bring their own vehicles. The itinerary starts in Inverness and runs along the highlands, and the loop finish again in Inverness. With the caravan the tourist have more freedom for visit any place without think in the accommodation, because they can sleep in one of all the big variety of caravan and camping parks along the NC500 route. It is recommended to check first where to park the caravan, because there are some parking lots where caravans are not available.

The cyclist itinerary: This itinerary is planned for people who enjoy practicing sports. If the tourist is ready to cycle along 500 miles, this is the best option. This itinerary is planned for complete a trip along the coast route for nine days minimum, but this is optional, every tourist can organize and plan their own distribution of days and miles. The cyclist can enjoy the sport and at the same time, enjoy the amazing places and views they are visiting all along the NC500 route.

GREAT BRITAIN. CAUSEWAY COASTAL ROUTE



Map 2. Map of Causeway Coastal Route

According with the Causeway Coastal route web this coastal route follows the road between Derry and Belfast. This route runs forward 190km (130 miles) along the Northern coast of Ireland flanked by the wild North Atlantic Ocean and a landscape of dramatic cliffs.

Following the route, visitors can explore the variety of landscapes and enjoy the views and the curious places including the Glens of Antrim, these are nine rugged cliffs which stretch north for 80 miles. The nine Glens are: Glenarm, Glencloy, Glengariff, Glenballyemon, Glенаan, Glencorp, Glendun, Glenshesk, and Glentaisie.

In the middle of the route, the visitor will find the Giant's Causeway (the famous place that gives its name to the route). This lovely place is a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1986. The site includes the Giants Causeway and the coastline along to Benbane Head. The tourist can enjoy a unique landscape and geological exhibition of hexagonal basalt columns.

There is an explanation about the curious form of this basalt columns and the visitor can find more information in the visitors' centre (<http://giantscausewaytickets.com>): about 60 million years ago, a particular volcanic activity has a big impact on what now it is called the Giant's Causeway. At that moment, lava at 1100 degrees Celsius destroyed the vegetation and hardened to form the first in a series of layers of basalt. When the eruptions which formed the Lower Basalts got less frequent, a longer dormant period arrived. The climate, which was warm and wet, wore down the top of the basalt; and this is when plants grew back and helped from a deep red soil.

In this particular place, the tourist can observe the laterite², in the cliffs below the chimneys and in the area around the causeway site. After this formations, a river slide through the area discovering out a valley.

Then, in the valley hollow more lava poured over the landscape and the basalt cooled in a giant pool where the chemical properties of the lava and the way in which it cooled formed the famous columns that tourists can stand on today.

The tourist can visit the world-famous basalt columns with a tour guide or pick up an audio guide for understand and learn all the history and the stories and legends about the place. In the visitor centre there is an exhibition area and different facilities like parking, toilets area, coffee shop, and different shops for buy souvenirs.

The recommended time for exploring all these beautiful places along the North Coast of Ireland is between four days and a week. But if the visitor wants to enjoy a complete experience maybe will need more days for visit every place and known the culture and the people who inhabit in these areas.

5. ALL ABOUT THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

5.1. HISTORY

Stretching from County Donegal in the north to County Cork in the south, the Wild Atlantic Way runs for 2,500km (1,553 miles) along the west coast of Ireland, making the longest coastal and wildest route in the world. According to *Fáilte Ireland*, "the overall aim of the Wild Atlantic Way, is to create an overarching tourism brand for the west coast of Ireland in overseas tourist markets" (Fáilte Ireland, 2014).The tourism is a potential industry and Ireland need to wake up and develop this industry too, to find the best benefit to the country. It is an interesting and ambitious project, aimed at improving the number of tourists as well as making sure there is total respect for the environment. The Wild Atlantic Way project, as offered to the tourist:

- Creates a single west coast of Ireland tourism brand and signature tourism experience that will motivate visitors to travel to Ireland.
- Aids to increase visitor numbers, remain time, spend and satisfaction in destinations along the route and the areas close to the west coast of Ireland.
- Re-packages the west of Ireland as a destination to overseas and domestic visitors.
- Improves on-road interpretation and infrastructure along the route.
- Improves the direct visitors to the less visited areas.
- Helps businesses, agencies, local groups and other stakeholders along the route to work together under an agreement tourism proposition.

² Laterite: red rock rich in iron and aluminium.

The Wild Atlantic Way Signature Tourism Experience enclosed six stages, which were developed chronologically(<http://www.wildatlanticway.com>). These stages are:

1. Develop Brand proposition and identity, and key market segments.
2. Identify the route.
3. Way-finding strategy including directional signage.
4. Deliver “Discovery Points”.
5. Sell Wild Atlantic Way experiences to overseas or local visitors.
6. Marketing and communications.

5.2. GEOGRAPHY

Ireland is an island located in the extreme north west of European continent. The exact situation is between the 51° and 55° north latitude and 5° and 10° west longitude. The Republic of Ireland occupies 70,282 square km of the total area of the island, which is 84,421square km.

The signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921 saw the end of the War of Independence and the establishment of an Irish state for the first time in the history. The island was divided with a total of thirty-two counties. On one hand, the twenty-six independent county area which form part of Ireland, and in the other hand, the Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, and include six of the nine counties of the province of Ulster.

On 22 June 1921, the Northern Ireland parliament came into being with James Craig as the first prime minister. His Ulster Unionist Party was to rule the new state until 1972, with the minority Catholic population stripped of any real power by a parliament that favoured the Unionist though economic subsidy, bias in housing allocations and gerrymandering. To all intents and purposes, Northern Ireland was an apartheid state. The first challenge to Unionist hegemony came with the long-dormant IRA³'s border campaign in the 1950's.

In January 1969, a civil rights movement called People's Democracy organized a march from Belfast to Derry. As the marchers neared their destination they were attacked by a protestant movement. The police first stood to one side and then compounded the problem with a sweep through the predominantly Catholic Bog side district. Further marches and protests, and far from keeping the two sides apart, the police were clearly part of the problem. In August, British troops went to Derry and then Belfast to maintain law and order. The British army was initially welcome in some Catholic quarters, but soon it too came to be seen as a tool of the Protestant majority. Overreaction by the army actually fuelled recruitment into IRA. IRA numbers especially increased after Bloody Sunday (30 January 1972) when British troops killed 13 civilians in Derry.

³IRA: Irish Republican Army

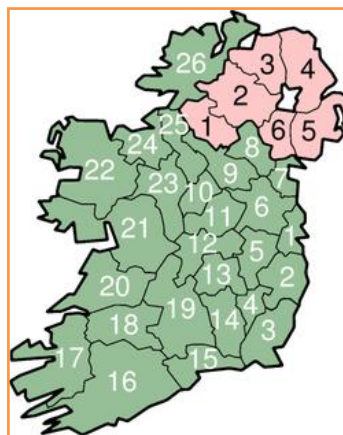
Northern Parliament was abolished in 1972, while continuing to target people in Northern Ireland; the IRA moved its campaign of bombing to mainland Britain. Passions reached fever pitch in 1981 when republican prisoners in the North went on a hunger strike, demanding the right to be recognized as political prisoners. Ten of them fasted to death; the best known was Bobby Sands.

A series of negotiated statements between the Unionist, Nationalists and the Irish and British governments eventually resulted in the historic Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

Ireland is a country relatively small, but during 2014 the population of Ireland was estimated to be 4,412,695 people. In 2014 the natural increase was positive. In 2015 the population was 4,841,943 people.

IRELAND OUTLINE

Ireland is divided into four provinces: Connacht, Leinster, Munster, Ulster, and thirty-two counties. In the map below, it is possible to see the different counties boundaries and their location. In green can be seen the 26 counties inside the Irish area, and in pink can be seen the 6 counties located in British area (Northern Ireland).



Map 3. Ireland's Counties

Republic of Ireland:		Northern Ireland:	
1. Dublin	14. Kilkenny	1. Fermanagh	4. Antrim
2. Wicklow	15. Waterford	2. Tyrone	5. Down
3. Wexford	16. Cork	3. Londonderry	6. Armagh
4. Carlow	17. Kerry		
5. Kildare	18. Limerick		
6. Meath	19. Tipperary		
7. Louth	20. Clare		
8. Monaghan	21. Galway		
9. Cavan	22. Mayo		
10. Longford	23. Roscommon		
11. Westmeath	24. Sligo		
12. Offaly	25. Leitrim		
13. Laois	26. Donegal		

CLIMATE

The climate in Ireland is temperate. The island is influenced by the Atlantic Ocean climate. As a result of this influence, the extreme temperatures that exist in other countries situated at similar latitude are not found in Ireland. One reason for that is because the mountains and the hills situated near the coast, keep the rest of the country away from the strong winds coming from the Atlantic Ocean.

Moreover, the weather in Ireland can be unpredictable. Local people say that can be the four seasons in the same day and everyone in Ireland talks about the weather.

SEASONS:

In spring (February - April), the highest temperatures are between 7 to 12 °C. April is considered a special pleasant month. Usually the north of Ireland is more cold and wet than the rest of the island.

In summer (May - July), the average highest temperatures range from 17 to 20 °C. The warmest months have long days, July and August get about 18 hours of daylight and it gets dark after 11 p.m. and the night are not very darks.

In autumn (August - October), the highest temperatures are around 15 - 17 °C. September is considered a temperate month. The days become shorter but the temperatures are acceptable.

In winter (November - January), the temperature drops below freezing, and the rain is common. The coldest months are January and February. Winter is very hard, and the days have not a lot of daylight.

5.2.1. DISCOVERY POINTS

A discovery point is a viewing point at which the visitor can stop off along the route and learn and discover more about that place by means of on-site information and interpretation. There are signals with information about the place and some explanations about the area or the place that tourist are visiting. Usually there are a visitor centre in every discovery point to explain and inform the tourist about the place and the different walking routes in the area. This visitor centres are not always opened, there are some that only open during the summer season.

For the study of the project, the Wild Atlantic Way route is divided into six different discovery points: Northern Headlands, Surf Coast, Bay Coast, Cliff Coast, Southern Peninsula, and Heaven Coast. (<http://www.wildatlanticway.com>).

This project will explain below the different discovery points from the north to the south, following the different counties along the Wild Atlantic Way coast route. However, the tourist can complete the route in a different way or only visit some counties or parts from the route; it is up to the visitor.

5.2.1.1. NORTHERN HEADLANDS

This is the Northerner discovery point in the Wild Atlantic Way route. In county Donegal, the visitor will find three discovery points: Malin Head, Fanad head and SliabhLiag.

Malin Head is the northern point in Ireland, situated in the north of the Trawbreaga Bay. The tourist can view the Five Fingers Strand, which is home to some of Europe's largest sand dunes. For more history, the visitor can follow the coast road and visit the old radio station, built in 1910, and The Tower, a derelict signal station located on Banba's Crown, the most northerly point in Ireland.

It is the perfect place to relax and the wonderful panorama includes Inistrahull and Tory islands, as well as the Scottish hills if there is a clear day. Malin Head offer also activities like walking along the cliffs, cycling, fishing, swimming and bird watching.

Fanad Head lies on the north coast of Donegal between Lough Swilly and Mulroy Bay. There are one of the world's most beautiful lighthouses and the famous Flight of the Earls, which took place there in 1607.

The visitor can travel along Knockalla Coast Road with its seriously magnificent views. Along the way, the tourist can enjoy with the views of the Inishowen Peninsula and Ballymastocker Bay. Fanad Head has more to offer than good looks and landscape, this place is also a paradise for water sports enthusiasts, walkers and golfers.

SliabhLiag is a lovely place where the tourist can explore some of the highest and finest coastal cliffs in Europe. To take advance of this experience, the recommendation for the tourist is to leave the car in the car parking enable and then walk a few kilometres to the cliffs. It is the best way to enjoy and admire the landscape. In the top of SliabhLiag there are amazing views of the Atlantic Ocean, Donegal Bay and the Sligo Mountains. "SliabhLiag was also the site of a Christian pilgrimage for more than 1,000 years, although it is believed to have been a sacred place long before the Christians arrived. Given the mountain's rich history, there is a whole lot to learn at its award-winning visitor centre."(Fáilte Ireland, 2014).

5.2.1.2. SURF COAST

In County Sligo, we will discover: Mullaghmore Head. This is a small fishing village, where the tourists can discover the real Irish life and the Irish culture. The sandy beach there stretches as far as a spot of swimming or windsurfing. The tourist can also venture out into the Atlantic Ocean for an excursion to Inishmurray Island or a sea angling trip. Tourists can enjoy surfing as a spectator sport, remaining on the beach while watching top international surfers doing their rides in some of Europe's best waves. Many come for Prowlers and practice the tow-in technique involving jet skis. These skilled big wave surfers are exciting to watch, but the waves tend to the best in the winter months, so tourist can enjoy this type of active tourism during winter season. (Fáilte Ireland, 2014)

5.2.1.3. BAY COAST

In County Mayo, the tourists will see Downpatrick Head and Keem Strand. Downpatrick Head is a majestic heritage site found about 5km north of Ballycastle village. Jutting out into the Atlantic Ocean and rising almost 40m above the waves.

According to the *150 secrets of the Wild Atlantic Way*, Downpatrick Head is home to the ruins of a church, holy well and stone cross, which together mark the site of an earlier church founded by St. Patrick. Ireland's Patron Saint is also honoured with a statue that was built in the early 1980's.

Downpatrick Head was once a popular destination for pilgrims, who came here each year on the last Sunday of July, known as "*Garland Sunday*". Today that tradition lives on⁴.

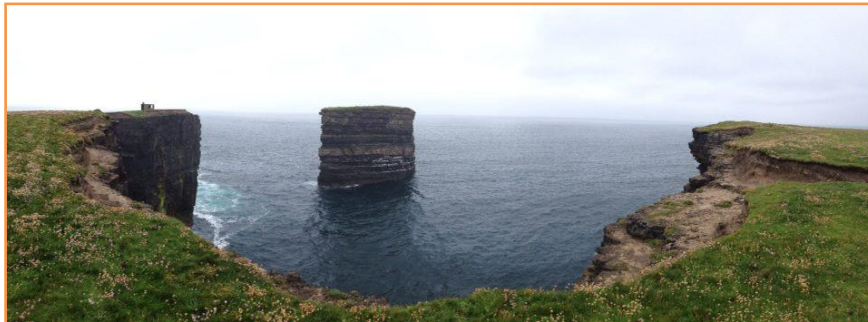


Fig. 1. Down Patrick Head

There is also in county Mayo the Holy Mountain named Croagh Patrick, located five miles away from the lovely town of Westport. From the top of the mountain, tourists can enjoy the majestic views of Clew Bay and the surrounding south Mayo countryside. In the top of the Holy Mountain, there is a church and every year, there is a mass in honour to St. Patrick, this happens every last Sunday of July too and is known as "*Reek Sunday*". Thousands of devotees climb the mountain for this date. In the base of the mountain there is the visitor's centre, named "*Teach Na Miasa*" and it was opened in March 2000. There are available guides to the St. Patrick statue (situated at the beginning of the path on the way to the top), with advance notice and only during the week season (summer).

Keem Strand is a protected rural beach surrounded by cliffs on Achill, Ireland's largest island. Located at the head of a valley between the cliffs of Benmore and Croaghnaun Mountain, to reach the idyllic spot just follow the Atlantic drive to Keel and continue westward via a cliff-top road with spectacular views of the Atlantic Ocean.

The beach, which is lifeguarded during the bathing season (summer), is very popular with swimmers and is the site of Blueway snorkel trail. Tourists can visit some of the several activity providers in the area that offer equipment hire and instruction, and enjoy the practice of snorkelling. (Fáilte Ireland, 2014)

⁴ All the pictures of the area have been taken by the author of the present work.

5.2.1.4. CLIFF COAST

The following place in the Wild Atlantic Way route is County Galway, and in this part the visitor can discover the next points: Killary Harbour and Derrigimlagh. At the same time, it is possible to observe that Galway has a huge Spanish influence in the harbour and buildings, due to the large amount of trade between northern Spain and Ireland in the XV and XVI centuries. This influence can be very interesting to foment Ireland on the Spanish market. A lot of Spanish tourists will recognize this influence and they will feel important and part of the history.

According to *150 secrets of the Wild Atlantic Way*, Killary Harbour located in the heart of Connemara is a fjord that forms a natural border between Galway and Mayo. The tourist can find some of the most dramatic scenery in Ireland. From the northern shore of the harbour rises Mweelrea, the highest mountain in Connacht, 814m.high. Here, to the south, the visitor can see the Maumturk Mountains and the Twelve Bens.

There are two small communities in the vicinity: Rosroe on the southern side and Leenane to the east. Nearby this area, tourists can also explore the so-called Green Road, a route that travels eastward along the side of the fjord towards Leenane. This road stretches for 9km and was built in the 19th century as a famine relief project. The tourist can also practice the culinary tourism, because this area is known for aquaculture, with a salmon farm operating at Rosroe and mussel rafts.

Derrigimlagh is a gorgeous place where tourists can enjoy hiring a bike in Connemara's largest town, Clifden, and set out on one of the area's cycle routes through the town land of Derrigimlagh on quiet country roads. The visitor will be surrounded by nature and will discover wonderful sites in this quiet country. During the journey, the visitor can stop and view two sites of international historical significance.

First, the visitor will pass the scattered remnants of the world's first permanent transatlantic radio station. It was built by Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi and transmitted the first transatlantic radio signal in 1907. At its peak, the station employed several hundred people who helped transmit news across the Atlantic Ocean. It burned to the ground during the Irish War of Independence, but the visitors can still view the vast site where many foundations of the buildings and worker's houses remain.

Nearby, the visitor will also come across a white memorial in the shape of an aeroplane wing, which pays tribute to John Alcock and Arthur Whitten Brown. In 1919, Alcock and Brown were the first pilots to fly non-stop across the Atlantic, before they crash-landed in Derrigimlagh Bog. (Fáilte Ireland, 2014)

From Galway and Doolin, there is a daily ferry for visit Aran Islands. Aran Islands are composed by three different islands: InisMór, InisMeáin and InisOírr. The most popular between the visitors is InisMór, the biggest island. There tourists can discover DúnAonghasa -a semi-circular stone fort, located in the south side of InisMor- and Cliffs of Aran with the spectacular coastal views. Tourists can rent a bike and cycle around the island or rent a bus tour with a guide who explains the history and some curiosities about the Celtic churches and the places with a historical importance. (<http://www.aranislands.ie>).

Some years an important venue named '*Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series*' takes place in June in Aran Islands, particularly in InisMór, where the best divers in the world take the 27 metres plunge into the wild and cols Atlantic. InisMór is home to the Serpent's Lair, a natural formation and it is special because it is near a perfect rectangle, it is an inexplicable shape.



Fig. 2. Serpent's Lair Cliff Diving, Inis Mór, Aran Islands

In County Clare, tourists find the distinguished Cliffs of Moher and Loop Head. County Clare is an adventurer's paradise for those active tourists, with surfing, caving, cycling, climbing and different activities involve in the nature.

According to *150 secrets of the Wild Atlantic Way*, the Cliffs of Moher are one of Ireland's most visited natural attractions. Stretching for 8km along the Atlantic coast of County Clare, the cliffs reach 214m at their highest point at Knockardakin.

Midway along the cliffs, the visitor will find the environmental friendly visitor centre, always respecting the sustainable tourism. There, tourists can also discover O'Brien's Tower, a 19th century viewing tower, and access 800m of protected cliff side pathways with viewing areas. From the Main Platform, the tourist can see the south cliffs towards Hag's Head, a natural rocky promontory that resembles a seated woman.

From the North Platform, the tourist can spot An Branán Mór sea stack, home of guillemots and razorbills, as well as the Aran Islands and, if the conditions are right, the famous surfing wave known as Aileen's. Continue on about 5km from here and the visitor will arrive in the village of Doolin. If the tourist has interest can see the puffins that reside on Goat Island instead, head for the South Platform. (Fáilte Ireland, 2014)

According to *150 secrets of the Wild Atlantic Way*, at the western tip of County Clare, where the calm waters of the Shannon Estuary turn into the powerful waves of the Atlantic Ocean, tourists will find Loop Head Peninsula. Travel along the Loop Head Drive to the western end to the peninsula to see its famous lighthouse, which sits on land dotted with colourful wild flowers.

The tourist can climb to the top of the lighthouse and take in splendid views that stretch from County Kerry to the Cliffs of Moher. At the end of the peninsula there is a historic relic from the Second World War: large white letters spelling É-I-R-E, which let pilots know they were in Ireland, and therefore in neutral airspace.

The Loop Head area is a wildlife haven too, with thousands of seabirds making their nests on the rock ledges and an estimated 160 bottlenose dolphins living in the mouth of the Shannon River. If the tourists like to see these majestic animals up close, they can take a boat trip from Carrigaholt, or follow the road from Kilrush to Aylevarroo Point to see them playing just offshore. (Fáilte Ireland, 2014).

5.2.1.5. SOUTHERN PENINSULA

The next step is County Kerry, here tourists will discover: Blaskets View and Bray Head. According to the *150 secrets of the Wild Atlantic Way*, the Blasket Islands are situated off the Dingle Peninsula and is a small archipelago renowned for its storytellers. In the early 20th century, JM Synge became the first of many writers to arrive here in search of Ireland's traditional culture, which remained strong in this isolated and far-flung community. Here, people lived simply and frugally off the land and sea. Their stories were transcribed and became the first written works to be published from the oral Irish culture.

After many years of hardship and emigration, the last inhabitants left in 1953, and today, tourists can wander among their ruined cottages on the main island, An Blascaod Mór (Great Blasket). From there tourists can also spy dolphins and whales. Back to the mainland a visit to Blasket Centre will provide insight into the islanders' lives and the rich literary heritage of the region. (Fáilte Ireland, 2014)

Tourists will also discover Bray Head. As we can read in *150 secrets of the Wild Atlantic Way*, viewed from Bray Head, Skellig Michael and Small Skellig are two islands rising from the Atlantic Ocean some 13 km southwest of Valentia Island in County Kerry.

Skellig Michael is renowned among archaeologists as a site of well-preserved monastic base of the early Christian period, and it is now designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The monastic site is reached by climbing more than 500 steps on a 1,000 year old stairway. Stone beehive huts where the monks lived and prayed cling to cliff edges alongside oratories, a cemetery, stone crosses, holy wells and the Church of St. Michael. These remains demonstrate the Spartan conditions in which the monks lived until they left the island in the 13th century. Tourists can visit the Skellig Experience Centre for more information. (Fáilte Ireland, 2014)

The tourist can also discover typical Irish towns like Dingle situated inside the circular route called "Ring of Kerry", which is exceptional and where tourists can discover the essence of the real Ireland. Visitors can realize lots of activities along the Kerry tourist trail as: golf, water-sports, cycling, walking, running, riding and fishing. The Ring of Kerry has some of Europe's finest beaches that provide all the facilities for a traditional seaside holiday. Above all, the Ring of Kerry provides an amazing insight into the ancient heritage of Ireland.

To visit the different attraction on the Ring of Kerry, the visitor can drive with their own car or another option is to take the bus tours that realize a daily route during the season, leaving from Deros Tours in Killarney at 10.30h, and returns at approximately 17.00h. This tour includes the towns of Glenbeigh, Waterville and Sneem and returning via Killarney National Park and lakes. (<http://www.ringofkerrytourism.com>)

5.2.1.6. HEAVEN COAST

The last place to visit in the Wild Atlantic Way coastal route is the Heaven Coast, located along the County Cork, known as "Rebel County" because they had place some of the most important fights during the Irish War of Independence. Black and Tans⁵ destroyed some buildings and burned others in the downtown of Cork, creating big confrontations between English and Irish people.

Along this county, there is a lot of history and plenty places for visit. We recommend to the visitor, the next places: Dursey Island, Mizen Head and Old head of Kinsale.



Fig. 3. Dursey Island's cable car

According to the *150 secrets of the Wild Atlantic Way*, Dursey Island is the most westerly of Cork's inhabited islands. It is situated at the western tip of the Beara Peninsula. Dursey Island is 6.5 km long and 1.5 km wide. The island is separated from the mainland by a narrow stretch of water called the Dursey Sound and is connected to the mainland by Ireland's only cable car, which runs about 250 m above the sea.

The island consisted of three villages: Ballynacallagh, Kilmichael and Tilickafinna. The tourist can visit the ruins of the ancient church of Kilmichael, and the visitor can also enjoy the wildlife, as a variety of birds can be seen here, including rare species from Siberia and America. Dolphins and whales can also frequently be spotted in the waters surrounding the island.

Mizen head is located just 8km from Goleen in County Cork; Mizen Head is a fascinating place. As Ireland's most south-westerly point, it is home to a signal station that was built to save lives off the rocky shoreline. It was completed in 1910 and later became the home of Ireland's very first radio station in 1931.

⁵ Black and Tans, officially called "Royal Irish Constabulary Reserve Force", formed by British people which role was fight the IRA. They became infamous for their attacks on civilians and civilian property.

Inside the keeper's house, the visitor will find a dynamic visitor centre that contains a navigator aids simulation, displays the geology of the region, tells the story of Marconi in Crookhaven and discusses the lighthouse keepers' life and hobbies.

Once the tourist completes the tour of the visitor centre, can go outside and follow the path down the famous 99 steps and over the arched bridge. This route will take the tourist to the signal station, which is open to the public. Along the way, there is stunning scenery to be admired, with the possibility of spotting seals, kittiwakes, gannets and choughs, not to mention minke whales, fin and humpback whales.

The Old head of Kinsale is located on the southwest coast in County Cork. It is a remarkably dramatic piece of Ireland, protruding more than 3 km into the Atlantic Ocean. It is famous for its world-class, 18-hole golf course along the tops of the cliffs, but all 18 holes boast stunning views of the ocean.

In Ireland, the practice of golf is very common, so this is a good advance to promote active tourism and incite the visitors to play this game. All along the Wild Atlantic Way there is a wide variety of golf courses, but the one in Kinsale is particularly good.



Fig. 4. Kinsale's harbour

Long before it became a golfer's paradise, Old Head was known for its lighthouse, established in the 17th century by Robert Reading. This is also the nearest land point to the site where the RMS Lusitania sank in 1915, after being hit by a German torpedo in the First World War. There is a memorial structure, established to remind those nearly 1,200 people who perished in the accident.

While Kinsale is a stunning place to admire on land, it is seen from the sea. The tourist can take views of this port town and learn more about its history with a trip aboard "*The Spirit of Kinsale*", which brings passengers across the harbour, past Charles Fort and right to the edge of the Atlantic Ocean.(Fáilte Ireland, 2014).

These are all the discovery points that tourist can find along the Wild Atlantic Way coastal route with facilities as parking, picnic, interpretative signage, etc. Moreover there are more places to discover but in some cases they have not this facility for the visitors. Along the route, there are 15 visitors centre identified as being "Signature Discovery Points":

- Malin Head, Co Donegal
- Fanad Head, Co Donegal
- SlibaghLiag, Co Donegal
- Mullaghmore Head, Co Sligo
- Downpatrick Head, Co Mayo
- Keem Strand, Co Mayo
- Killary Harbour, Co Galway
- Derrigimilagh, Co Galway
- Cliffs of Moher, Co Clare
- Loop Head, Co Clare
- Blaskets View, Co Kerry
- Skelling View, Co Kerry
- Dursey Island, Co Cork
- Mizen Head, Co Cork
- Old Head of Kinsale, Co Cork

5.2.2. NATIONAL PARKS:

There are five of the six Irish National Parks near the Wild Atlantic Way. According to the *150 secrets of the Wild Atlantic Way*, this is an opportunity to interact with and observe the wildlife, plant life and rare natural habitats at the same time that tourists are realizing the coast route.

- I. Glenveagh National Park: The first National Park that the tourist can visit along the route (north to south), is Glenveagh National Park in County Donegal, is only 10 km away from the coastal route. This National Park is 16,000ha of lakes, glens and woods in the heart of the Derryveagh Mountains. The tourists can explore stunning rich bog and woodland, and observe some animals such red deer, wild hare, golden eagles and peregrine falcons. Also, there is a visitor's centre with guides for provide information and tickets for the park buses, and introduce the tourists to the National Park.
- II. Ballycroy National Park: Located in County Mayo, which offers vast and varied uninhabited terrain spanning 11,000ha. Visitors can traverse Owenduff blanket bog, one of the last intact active blanket bog systems in Ireland and Western Europe, and admire the landscape of the imposing Nephin Beg mountain Range. The park also provides habitats for protected species such as Greenland white-fronted geese, golden plover, red grouse and otter, and is part of the Owenduff / Nephin Complex Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area. The Ballycroy National Park has a visitor centre located in Ballycroy village, a small village that we can found inside the Wild Atlantic Way route. There the visitor can enjoy an experience about the exhibition of the landscape, habitats and species found in the park, as well as information about surroundings areas.
- III. Connemara National Park: It is located in County Galway. This place covers near 3,000ha of impressive bog, heath, grass and woodland, as well as striking mountain scenery. This place encloses a lovely landscape on one of the many scenic walking and nature trails that start on the visitor's centre. Admire the amazing from the 400m Diamond Hill, including the distant islands of Inishbofin, Inishturk and Inishshark, and the turreted Kylemore Abbey. There are a big diversity of wildlife species, including ponies, regal red deer and an enormous variety of bird life. The tourist can visit the visitor's centre with some additional facilities like car park, picnic areas, nature trails, children's playground and toilets.

- IV. Burren National Park: Located in County Clare, which encompasses a remarkable 1,500ha of limestone pavement, calcareous Grassland, hazel scrub, woodland, petrifying springs and cliffs. The tourist can find a unique environment with an unusual lack of soil cover, yet an abundance of exposed limestone pavement and nutrient-rich floral species. The highest point inside this National Park is Knockanes (207m), which continues as a curving terraced ridge right down to Mullaghmór. The tourists can find additional facilities including car park and busses services from the visitor's centre -Clare Heritage Centre- located in the town Corofin.
- V. Killarney National Park: The fifth and last, Killarney National Park is located in County Kerry. There are areas of mountain landscape, including McGillicuddy's Reeks (1000m), the highest mountain in the country. Roam it is 10,236ha, stroll the shores of Killarney's lakes and explore a combination of pictorial woodlands, waterfalls and unspoiled nature. Inside the Killarney National Park, the tourist can admire the Killarney house and Gardens farther than the park's exceptional habitats, all the plants life and nature and some important animals like the native red deer, unique to Ireland since the last ice age. (Fáilte Ireland, 2014).

5.3. INFRASTRUCTURES

Starting from the creation of the Wild Atlantic Way route, there was a significant investment in infrastructures. There are visitor's centres located all along the West Irish coast in the villages or town where the tourist can find the discovery points. Inside the visitor's centres there are a representation of the place with all the explanations and curiosities about the place or the surroundings.

INVESTMENT:

In the year 2014, the Government had allocated €8 million and along €2 million previously committed from Fáilte Ireland's Tourism Capital Investment Programme. It increase a total investment of €10 million in the route, from Inishowen Peninsula in Co Donegal to Kinsale in Co Cork to promote this new route and create significant interest in tourists from other countries.

According to the Minister Ring in an interview to Fáilte Ireland in the newspaper *Southern Star*: "The Wild Atlantic Way has a huge potential to bring more visitors to Ireland and create at the same time more jobs to rural communities along the western coast." (Ring, 2015)

SIGNALLING:

The development of the Wild Atlantic Way is an evolving long term development project starting with the route and the Signature Discovery Points with further interpretation and touring loops with various enhancements coming on stream over the next few years. The plan is that the route will increase visits from domestics and foreigners tourists. At the same time, touring routes help to attract more visitors, get them to stay for longer, make repeat visits and expend money in the rural areas.



Fig. 5. Sign in Beara Peninsula, County Cork



Fig. 6. Sign in Timoleague, County Cork

These touring routes are increasing the regional economic development for rural areas and can deliver additional jobs and grow the local economy.

The initiative of Wild Atlantic Way is dependent on attractive and consistent branding and between the years 2014 and 2015, Fáilte Ireland is working together with the National Roads Authority and the 10 local Authorities along the entire route to reach an agreement about all the necessary signage. A total of 3,850 signs will have been erected along the 2,500km route.

TOURIST BRAND:

According to National Tourism Development Authority (Fáilte Ireland), the Wild Atlantic Way has been developed as a Destination Brand that sits under the overarching Ireland brand. Along with the other Destination Brands that form a key element of Ireland's tourism offering, the Wild Atlantic Way brand delivers on the Tourism Brand Ireland proposition of "Joyful Immersion".

Simply put, a brand is a promise to a visitor and having a consistent, credible brand for the Wild Atlantic Way is vital because it differentiates the offering from competing destinations.

It also serves as guide to developing experiences that will bring the brand to life for visitors. It is vitally important that the brand is used in a consistent manner to stand up the proposition of the Wild Atlantic Way and brings it to life for the visitor. (Fáilte Ireland, 2015).



Fig. 7. Wild Atlantic Way logo

5.3.1. AIRPORTS, BUS AND TRAIN SERVICES

To realize the Wild Atlantic Way route, there are diverse options to start the journey and go to Ireland. The most used is the plane, but anyway there are more options as bus, train or ferry. To complete the route by bike, our recommendation is to flight directly to Cork and then take the bus to Kinsale. However, if this is not possible, the other option is to fly to Dublin and take the bus to Cork city.

PLANE

The first option is travel by plane. There are direct flights to Dublin and Cork -the most important airports in Ireland- from Spain, in the following airports: Alicante, Madrid (Barajas), Barcelona, Bilbao, Fuerteventura, Gerona, Gran Canaria, Ibiza, Lanzarote, Malaga, Menorca, Murcia (San Javier), Reus, Santander, Santiago de Compostela, Seville, Tenerife, Valencia. The companies who realize these direct flights are: Aer Lingus, Iberia, Ryanair and Easy Jet.

The principal problem with the flights is that in some cases, the direct flights are seasonal. In some times of the year, there are cancelations or the companies interrupt these flights.

For travel with the bicycle, the tourist should remove the wheels and the handlebar, and put it all together inside in a box. Then the flight company will realize the check in, and that box will travel as an extra suitcase. In most cases, tourists must pay extra money.

BUS

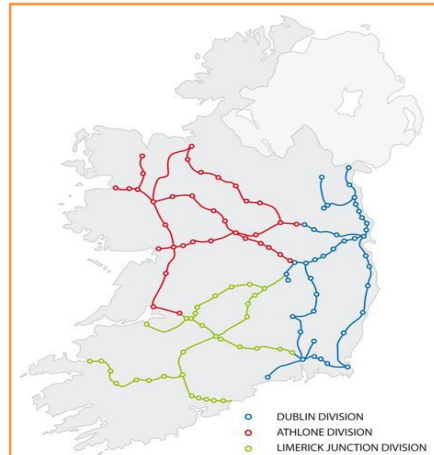
Another option is the bus. Actually, the company Bus Éireann realizes a three day tour along the Wild Atlantic Way. The tourist can buy a voucher to complete the tour. For the cycle tourist who wants to realize our proposed route, there is the possibility to travel with the bicycle in the bus. Thus, the tourist only needs to book a place with the company for the selected period of time. There is another bus company, called Air coach which realizes the travels directly from or to Dublin without stop in the small cities.

TRAIN

Access by train is also a possibility in Ireland, there is the company Irish Rail (Iarnród Éireann), which connects all the counties. The tourist can book a place for the bike in these trains too, so this way, it is easy to travel to realize our proposal route.

There are three different types of train in which tourists may be interested: Intercity trains, which link a variety towns and cities with fast and high quality services, Dart trains, which provide high frequency services into the heart of Dublin, and Rosslare Europort is the hub of passengers and freight services between the Southern Irish Sea and Continental route. This last train is not accessible to tourists.

About the infrastructure, there are 2,400 km of track along Ireland, 147 open stations, 372 platforms, 5,100 bridges and 14 tunnels. As we can see in the web: "The maintenance of the track, structures and buildings of Iarnród Éireann is the responsibility of the Chief Civil Engineer" (www.irishrail.ie).



Map 4. Train tracks

FERRY

This is another option if the traveller wants to travel with his/her own car. The ferry is available from Dublin and Rosslare to Great Britain (Holyhead and Pembroke) and France (Cherbourg and Roscoff). There are daily services from Dublin and some days from Rosslare depending on the destination and the date of travel.



Map 5. Ferry connections

5.4. ACTIVITIES

The Wild Atlantic Way is not only a route to visit the new places; on the contrary, the visitor can also realize some different activities. There is a huge variety of activities for people of different ages and different hobbies. To sum up, there is a personalised Wild Atlantic Way for every visitor. Here are some of the possibilities:

➤ Cultural tourism

Ireland is a country with a unique language (Gaelic), music and dance festivals, traditional crafts, legends and Folklore. The visitor can enjoy different cultural activities along the Wild Atlantic Way. There are festivals which run on the summer and located in every village, there the visitor can admire the Irish village festivals and join it too.

Also very popular is the music in the pubs, and there is one day established for each pub when musicians go to play traditional music.

On weekends, tourists can go to the markets in the villages, where it is possible to buy traditional cheese, crafts, and a variety of curious objects.

➤ **Gastronomy tourism:**

The tourist can discover a great variety of food festivals all along the Wild Atlantic Way route. Along the West coast of Ireland we can find the best products as cheeses, craft brews and chocolates with primary ingredients sourced from farmers and foragers who are established in traditions from the West. In recent years, microbreweries have really flourished in Ireland with real care and creativity gone into creating full-bodied beers and considered ciders. The majority of food festivals take place between September and October. The most significant food festivals are:

- **Dingle Food Festival:** Every year in the month of October and with one week duration, the tourists can enjoy farmers' markets setting up in the streets. In these markets the tourists can interact with the locals and enjoy delicious organic products.
- **Galway International Oyster and Seafood Festival:** Every year there are in Galway a festival dedicated to seafood. In the month of September, the city of Galway welcomes worshippers of "ostrea edulis" (a special type of oyster) for gourmet food, fine wines and plenty of celebration.
- **Kinsale Gourmet Festival:** Each October Kinsale is a veritable foodie's paradise. An array of respected culinary establishments and artisan food producers has earned Kinsale its well-deserved title of gourmet capital of Ireland. There is a tour where the visitor can taste the delights of Kinsale's Good Food Circle of 11 restaurants.
- **A taste of West Cork:** At a taste of West Cork in the town of Skibbereen is celebrated during ten day in September. The tourist can meet the producers of some of Europe's best cheeses and at the same time, taste some delicious locally-grown products in the street market.
- **Burren Winterage Festival:** This festival takes place during the October month and the tourist can dig in at the community feast, hear about sustainable farming and then, visit the farms where the visitor can taste the products.

➤ **Active tourism**

In Ireland we find a great sea for surfing activities, game angling and cliff diving (Aran Island), also, there are possibilities for coastal walks (as the way I present here), bicycle routes, horse riding, or golf, as we have seen before. Depending on where the visitor is, there are some or other activities to carry out, but in general, in the north part of the Wild Atlantic Way, the sea activities are more common, however in the south side of the route walks and golf is more popular.

Apart from this, Gaelic Sports are an alternative to discover the Irish culture: Gaelic football, hurling or camogie⁶. These matches start in March and the season finish in mid-summer.

Sometimes the visitor can enjoy the sports as spectator, in Aran Islands there are venues to see cliff diving or see the international surfers catching waves in the County Sligo and County Donegal beaches. This is a good plan to travel with children and involve them in natural surroundings.

6. TOURISM IN IRELAND. PRIORITY SEGMENTS

The advance with the Wild Atlantic Way project about other destinations is that all along the route, the visitors can discover and enjoy wonderful landscapes and discover at the same time another culture with their own language (Gaelic), the typical Irish dances, the food...

As we can see in the brochure *Managing Sales Channels for international growth* (2014), the two priority segments are: culturally curious and great escapers, across four markets: Great Britain, North America, Germany and France.

CULTURALLY CURIOUS:

According to *Managing Sales Channels from Fáilte Ireland*, the prototype of this type of tourists is a person older than 45 years, who generally is travelling as a couple or alone. They are active visitors, looking for expand their experience and explore new places to discover new landscapes, the history and the culture.

They like to contact with the locals and feel like an Irish, getting under the skin of a place and like to get off the beaten track. As we can see in the brochure *Managing Sales Channels from Fáilte Ireland* they can join in the 'craic'⁷ at sessions or festivals, go island hopping and visit ancient sites or sit by the turf⁸ fires in traditional pubs, where they can eat the finest seafood and hear the Irish language, songs and stories. In summary, they want to feel more than a simple tourist.

The motivations of this type of visitors are: authenticity, discovery, history. They want real perceptions, original encounters and out of ordinary experiences.

The behaviour of this type of tourist is: lodge in a hotel, self-catering accommodation or B&B, -in this places everybody wants to know you, your name, where are you from, etc. -close to scenery and good walks -people normally will recommend you what to visit next - This tourist normally prefer to take short breaks more than long breaks, they stay 5 days more or less. (Fáilte Ireland, 2014).

⁶ Camogie is the same sport as hurling, but it can only be played by girls.

⁷ What's the craic? It is a very useful Irish expression in the south of the country.

⁸ Turf is a light carbon, spummy and earthy appearance. People use it as fuel.

GREAT ESCAPERS:

With this type of visitor is all to being together. They prefer to spend time with the partner or family equally. They do not have really interest to interact with the locals, they only want to be surrounded by nature and feel remove away from the monotony of every day. They want visit the new places to disconnect from the routine, enjoying new places with outdoors activities. This is a travel where the tourist will connect with each other and a unique landscape, before returning home fresh and revitalised.

The motivation of this type of tourist is in relation with the nature. They have a big connection with the nature and history. Wherever they go along the Wild Atlantic Way, they will find moments of magic, moments to treasure and experiences that they will want to return again and again. They wishing to balance life and focus on what is important. They want to return home revived.

7. TARGET MARKETS

Defined by the Wild Atlantic Way programme, we can see that the two priority markets are North America and Germany, but there are also a big activity happening in Great Britain and France too.

North America (USA & Canada)

This is the second largest source market with 924,000 visitors to Ireland in 2013. The average length of stay was 8 nights. This tourist generated 747 million Euros in revenue. There were visitors from North America all year. Not seasonal tourism.

The 99% of this visitors travel by air, the 46% hire a car; the 31% arrange their own travel and the 70% book it via a tour operator.

Germany

This is the third largest source market with 466,000 visitors to Ireland in 2013 generating 283.1 million of Euros in revenue. They stay in the country for 8.3 nights. There were visitors from Germany all along the year without seasonal periods.

The 75% of them travel by air, the 52% use a car (32% hire one meanwhile they was in Ireland, and 23% bring their own car to Ireland) 25% travel by sea using the ferry, via France or Great Britain, 80% book some element of the travel via online.

8. MARKETING: SPANISH TOURISTS TRAVELLING TO IRELAND

The Wild Atlantic Way project is a strong offering to go out and improve the market and sell. We have a special interest to create a consistent and coherent visitor experience to promote the Wild Atlantic Way in the Spanish Market.

According to the information from *Tourism Ireland*, in the year 2014 the amount of visitors from Spain to Ireland was 290.900 people. In the next table, it is possible to see the percentage of how many Spanish people visited the different regions of Ireland in 2014(www.tourismireland.com).

Where do holidaymakers visit on the island of Ireland?

Regions visited	%
Dublin	91%
Midlands East	5%
South Eastern	2%
South West	19%
Midwest	8%
Western	26%
Northwest	2%
Northern Ireland	11%

Fig. 8. Most visited places in Ireland in 2014.

Also of interest for the study, for a better profiling of the present tourist in Ireland, we need to identify the age ranges which are most commonly found in Ireland travellers, that is, how old are these people who already come to Ireland (www.tourismireland.com). This can be seen in Figure 9.

What age are holidaymakers?

Age	%
Under 16	3%
16-24	29%
25-34	41%
35-44	13%
45-54	10%
55+	3%

Fig. 9. Percentage of Ages of Spanish tourists in Ireland, 2014.

In our study, it is crucial that we identify what type of tourist will come to Ireland and will realize the coastal route along the Irish West coast. As we can see in *Tourism Ireland* information party composition, the Spanish visitors travel normally with friends (other adult party) or alone. For that, in this work, one proposal is increase the travels with the couple or with the family. Children can take a big importance to increase the tourism in Ireland, not only the Spanish tourism. (www.tourismireland.com)

Who do holidaymakers travel with?

Party Composition	%
Alone	29%
Couple	24%
With family	12%
Other Adult Party	34%

Fig. 10. Party composition of Spanish people in Ireland, 2014

Where do holidaymakers visit on the island of Ireland?

Regions visited	%
Dublin	91%
Midlands East	5%
South Eastern	2%
South West	19%
Midwest	8%
Western	26%
Northwest	2%
Northern Ireland	11%

Fig. 11. Regions visited by Spanish people in Ireland, 2014.

Another important point is to identify where Spanish tourists accommodate. As we can see in the box below, the majority of the tourists book a hotel, guesthouses or Bed and Breakfasts. However, a minimum number of tourists travel with caravan and stay in camping. After the study of the Wild Atlantic Way route, I think that it is necessary to increase the publicity and foment this type of accommodation, because with this accommodation the tourist will realize the coastal route or a bigger part of it than the tourist who book a hotel and visit only the surroundings.

Where do holidaymakers stay? (Distribution of bednights)

Accommodation	%
Hotels	31%
Guesthouses & B&B's	21%
Rented	6%
Caravan/Camping	0%
Friends & Relatives	19%
Other	22%

Fig. 12. Accommodation of Spanish people in Ireland, 2014..

When do holidaymakers arrive?

Month Of Arrival	%
January - March	14%
January	3%
February	2%
March	9%
April	9%
May	7%
June	11%
July	13%
August	19%
September	6%
October	10%
November	3%
December	8%
October - December	21%

Fig. 13. Time of year when Spanish people travel to Ireland, 2014. .

In the next box from *Tourism Ireland*, it is possible to observe that there are a small part of the Spanish tourists who travel between October and March, during the winter season (35%) and tourist who travel during summer, from June to September (49%). So, after that time, there is clear seasonality, but it is good to observe that people travel during winter to Ireland. If we foment the winter sport activities to the Spanish market, that number can increase in the next years.

Where do holidaymakers stay? (Distribution of bednights)

Accommodation	%
Hotels	31%
Guesthouses & B&B's	21%
Rented	6%
Caravan/Camping	0%
Friends & Relatives	19%
Other	22%

Fig. 14. Accommodation in Ireland for the Spanish people, 2014. .

If we look at the type of activities tourists enrol in, once they are in Ireland, we find that very few visitors take their time to do some hiking and even less cycling, which is a surprise, if we take into consideration Ireland's beauty and natural spaces. This shows us a good niche market, as can be seen in Figure 15.

What activities do our holidaymakers engage in?*

	%
Fishing	0%
Equestrian Pursuits	0%
Cycling	2%
Golf	5%
Hiking/Cross-Country Walking	8%
Other Water Based Activities	1%

Fig. 15. Activities of tourists in Ireland, 2014. .

8.1. SPANISH MARKET: CYCLISTS.

Surprisingly, there is no record of all the cyclists associations in Spain. From the RFEC⁹ (www.rfec.com), we can obtain a list with the individual federal licences (70,800 people) and the teams' federal licences (3,420 teams). However, there are a lot of cyclists without federal license, who only practise it as a hobby or do not wish to federate, and for that reason it is very complicated have control over the people who realize this sport. However, we can see the increasing number of bicycles sold in Spain in the last years in the graph elaborated by Statista (www.statista.com) in 2015

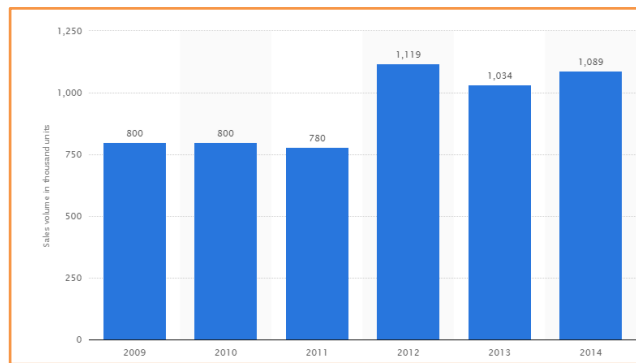


Fig. 16. Number of bicycles sold in Spain from 2009 to 2014 (in 1,000 units)

We want to focus on this type of tourism, because there is an increasing number of people who decide do a sport and have a healthy life. For cycling Spain is a good country due to weather but as opposed Spain is in the lead of European ranking about the cyclist death in the roads, the Spanish Government do not invest on the roads and on the cyclist safety.

⁹ RFEC: Real Federación Española de Ciclismo.

9. SWOT ANALYSIS

In the next point, we will complete a SWOT analysis of the entire route proposed, to observe in what position we situate the Wild Atlantic Way at the present time, as it is now, unrelated to the particularity of cyclist tourism and then create proposals to improve the route and adapt it to the cyclists, as is the idea of the entire work. We will also consider here the promotion of the Coastal Route as one of the opportunities that are presented in the analysis.

Strengths:

- New route: the route we are presented is not yet overloaded with tourists, as it is a new offer. Therefore, we are in face of a new market.
- The Republic of Ireland is a European Union country, so there are some benefits for travelling there: same euro money, same time (Schengen agreements), freedom of movement and residence for European people in the European Countries.
- Traditional hospitality of Irish population.
- Good and international quality "beach" tourism.
- Good website to promote the country and the tourism in Ireland (www.wildatlanticway.com)
- Growing knowledge of tourism potential locally and assessment of environmental sustainability.

Weaknesses:

- The language barrier. Not every tourist is able to speak or to communicate in English, and even less in Gaelic.
- All along the Wild Atlantic Way and in Ireland in general, infrastructures are bad, and the roads are not in good condition.
- The drive way is different in comparison with the rest of Europe. The only possible things to do are raise awareness and prevent tourists to pay attention. This point is too important for the visitors who rent a car.
- Total of tourist visits is very seasonal. The tourism is concentrate in the summer months.

Opportunities:

- Increase the interest in this country, Ireland.
- The Wild Atlantic Way is a new route, created since 2013 to the present. For that is a good opportunity to show and promote a route different from the other routes in the market. We need to focus in the mistakes of the other routes and avoid them in our own route.
- The Republic of Ireland is small enough for visit all the complete Wild Atlantic Way route or a big part of that.
- The offer is really good, because the route offers to the visitor an experience and a landscape totally unknown for the visitor, especially if the tourist is from overseas.

Threats:

- The weather is a big handicap. The weather is very changeable in Ireland.
- The schedules. Not in every country people have the same schedules, and in some villages or towns along the Wild Atlantic Way, they are very strict about the schedules. Some restaurants close the kitchen after 14h or after 22h, for Spanish people that are not good, because our schedules are totally different.
- People from overseas have the wrong idea about Ireland. They do not know that Ireland has a great food culture, and although the British destroy a big part of the heritage, the Irish still having great part of it.
- The flights companies: the flights stop during the low seasons (winter), in special in Cork airport. That is harmful for tourists who do not want to realize the Wild Atlantic Way route during the peak season.

10. PROPOSALS

Party composition

All along the Wild Atlantic Way, there are a lot of activities to do for different publics, but there is a big gap for travellers with children. There are not activities adapted for children, and also, as is quite common, for children near their teenage years. Also, for groups of friends who wish to enjoy their sport together, as cyclists. We think that if we focus more in families with children or groups than in people who travel alone, this will increase both, national and international tourism. For that option, we need to increase the activities both cultural and active. Along the Wild Atlantic Way, there are lots of visitor centres, so an idea is to adapt the explanations for the youngest crew and create activities in relation with the place the tourist are visiting.

Seasonality

In the Wild Atlantic Way route and in Ireland in general there is a problem, the seasonality. I propose to eliminate this problem, increasing and encouraging the winter tourism. It is focus on active tourism, because there are a lot of activities to realize during the winter. The surf is well-known in the coast, for that in winter international surfers like to travel to Ireland to practise with the wild waves from the Atlantic. We cannot focus only in the aquatic activities, there are lots of other activities to realize, the handicap is the weather and the days become shorter. But anyway we need to destroy the concentrate of tourism only during the peak season, it is better to share along the year.

Control the number of visitors

The route uses the national coastal road, so for the National Tourism Development Authority (Fáilte Ireland) studies, is very difficult to determine what number of road users are visitors to the Wild Atlantic Way route and what number are locals using the roads for their daily business. The new proposal is to try to control this number of visitors, checking in every visitors centre, and maybe with an intranet or some internet system, check that the visitor is making the route. Something similar to "El Camino de Santiago" where the tourist is taking vouchers and then at the end of the route it is given a document certifying the carrying out of the route for this proposal it is important the coordination between public and private sector.

Infrastructure

Increase the amount of money to improve the infrastructure of the roads. In general, in Ireland there is a bad roads situation. For this handicap, there are an amount of villages in County Cork (Courtmacsherry, Timoleague, Barryroad and Ring) that are out of the Wild Atlantic Way route, because the roads are not considered good enough.

Language

The language is a big barrier when a tourist travels to another country. We think that it would be a good idea if there were explanation in more languages than Irish (Gaelic) and English in all the informational signals. At the same time, is required a qualified staff to attend the customers' demands.

Marketing

Another proposal is in relation with the marketing of the route. The Wild Atlantic Way coastal route is a young project which started in 2014, and if the tourist is not looking it, is difficult to find, because there are a lot of offers from other countries. The proposal is to offer the route and show it like something special, amazing, unforgettable, etc. to catch the attention of the tourist. The way to promote the route is very important. It is necessary to plan a strategy of management efficient about public resources assigned to the tourist promotion to achieve more tourists with less investment. It is necessary to take profit from the new technologies, nowadays internet and social media is one of the best options. There are an app and a web for the Wild Atlantic Way, what that stuff needs a daily control and renovation, with good presentation, good links between other webs and the Wild Atlantic Way one, good pictures and the most important, actual information. We can promote the route on social network: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Google +, Tripadvisor, etc.

Culinary tourism

The Wild Atlantic Way has diversity in products and ingredients from the sea or organics from the farms. Another proposal is foment the culinary tourism like a special factor to increase the touristic offer. It is necessary to show and promotion the quality of the West Irish gastronomy versus other culinary destinations.

It is possible to create a brand to the gastronomy from Ireland. In Spain, there exists the tag: *appellation of origin* to explain that the product is from Spain and that involve a good quality. We can create a similar brand for all the products from Ireland, or from the West along the Wild Atlantic Way route.

12. DESIGN OF A BIKE ROUTE ALONG THE IRISH COAST (Co Cork and Co Kerry)

For the realization of our cycle route proposal the tourists, travelling in groups, in families, or even alone, will need a mountain bike, because the route will run between roads, fields and paths. The cyclist do not need the expensive bicycle, only need one bicycle which provide all the necessities during the travel: comfortable saddle and handlebar, place for the bags, etc. It is important to check the bicycle before the trip and during the route.

We recommend travelling just with the bicycle, without any support as car or van because this trip is created to enjoy the landscape and the environment and stop wherever the cycle tourists decide, without think about the amount of kilometres. For that reason the tourist will need to adapt the bicycle to the travel. The bicycle will have saddlebags and front bags, and there will be all the stuff that the tourist will need along the route.

It is imperative to complete a general review of the bicycle, ergo check that everything works properly. It is really important do not forget the helmet and wear a proper suit for the bicycle, ideally, wear the maillot for the bicycle. Because the tourist will be a lot of hours driving the bicycle and it is necessary to be prepared for that adventure. In the next picture we can observe what type of bicycle it is recommended for the realization of our trip.

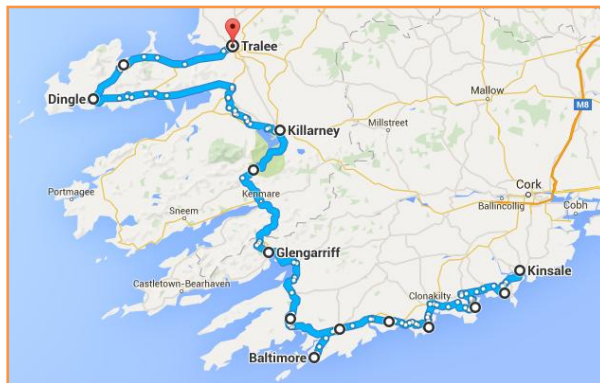


Fig. 17. Model of bicycle

According to Friedel and Andrew's blog, "It is necessary to consider some factors before start the travel like the budget, the package, the insurance, etc". (<http://travellingtwo.com>). Apart from this, the tourists need to consider how much money they need to travel because Ireland is an expensive country and a big amount of money is spent in food, accommodation and other extra factors such as the bike repair, for example. Also, a very expensive issue is the package of the bicycle. It is the most stressful part of the trip. It is necessary to take off the front wheel and the handlebar and place all together in a thin box ready to check in the airport.

It is advisable to look for bicycle insurance that will cover the bicycle while the cyclist is realizing the trip. There are different insurance companies with different policies to realize this step.

Heaven Coast Cycle Route:



Map 6. Heaven Coast Cycle Route.

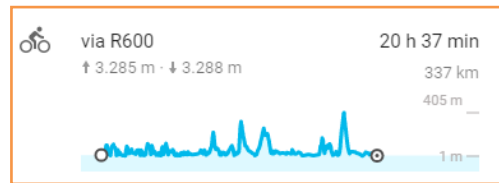
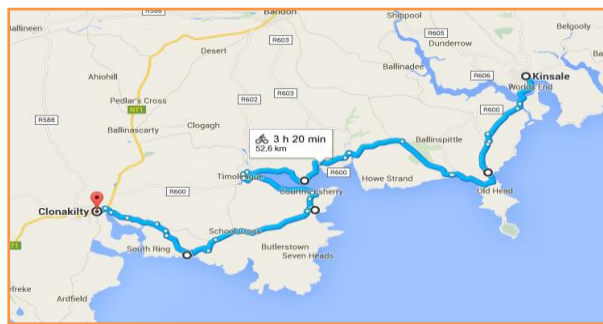


Fig. 18. Difficulty of elevation of the route.

As explained above, this route runs along the Western Coast of Ireland. It includes 337 kilometres distributed in seven different stages. Stages vary in their difficulty and length, but a cyclist with an average level of skill can complete them all. In the Map below can be seen the entire route, and in the figure, the level of difficulty of the route as a whole. Next, the different steps of the route will be explained in detail. For each stage, there will be a map and a figure showing the difficulty for the cyclist.

Stage1: from Kinsale to Clonakilty.



Map 7. Kinsale to Clonakilty



Fig. 19. Difficulty of elevation in Stage 1.

From Cork to Kinsale the tourist will take the bus. It is recommended to spend a day enjoying this town. There are different historical places to visit as Charles Fort with guide tour available, James Fort, Desmond Castle and the international museum of wine, Church of St. John the Baptist... The tourist can enjoy the views of the harbour and hire a tour in a boat. This harbour is very popular and during the good years it was full of catamarans and yachts from the wealthy people.

Kinsale has a good reputation for the restaurants, cafes and bars. Kinsale is considered the "Gourmet Capital of Ireland" and every year in October is celebrated the Kinsale Gourmet Festival.

In relation with the accommodation, Kinsale provide wide variety: country houses B&B, guesthouses, hotels, hostels, private estates, self-catering and town houses B&B. The recommendation is to allocate in a quiet place to rest properly because the cyclist needs to relax before to start the route, and as well they need a place where to leave the bikes with total security.

The first stage runs along 53 km (more or less) on the R600, R6040 and R601 roads. Along the route, the tourist can stop in different places and enjoy the landscape and the coast views.

Ballinspittle: This is a small village that the tourist needs to cross to access the Old Head of Kinsale, and discover Garrylucas beach and Garretstown beach; two sandy beaches where swim or practice surf or simply enjoy the landscape and the Ocean views. In these places public parking and toilets are provided. At the top of Old Head there are a golf course situated next to the cliffs. There is also a monument to the memory of the people who lost their lives in the LMS Luisitania.

Timoleague: In this typical Irish small village, the tourist can enjoy the Irish soar in the two local pubs (Charlie Madden's pub and Pad Joes pub). In this small village there are the ruins of 13th century abbey. This abbey was founded in the year 1240 A.D. by the Franciscan order. Every year in August, this curious village host the Timoleague Festival. During this event, the locals and the tourist dress up and go walking around the streets, there are some activities in the streets as well as concerts and performing. There is also a market where to buy local and handmade products.

Courtmacsherry: Is a small village situated next to the coastline, and at the end of the village the tourist can discover a lovely beach and follow the path into the wood until

the cliffs called seven heads. In March, in this village there are parades in commemoration of St. Patrick, where the local people get dress up and they organize a local party in the streets. In July, there are also in this village a festival called Courtmacsherry Harbour Festival, with different activities for children and adults in the streets. From this village the tourist can take the old Timoleague road R601 to Clonakilty, and enjoy all the small villages along these places, the most popular are located in Barryroe and Ring.

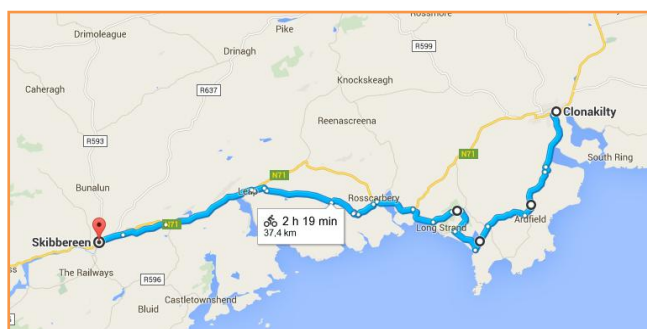
Ring: Here in this village there is a beach called Simon's Cove situated next to the big cliffs. The access is not very comfortable but the views and the landscape is amazing, not everybody known its situation and normally the locals do not explain its situation to the tourists. It is a small charming beach.

Inchydoney: Is the most popular beach in the area. There is a hotel near the sea with Spa Centre. In this place there is the possibility of rent a table and practise surf with or without a teacher. In winter, the 25th of December, there are a tradition, and locals and tourists can swim in the morning in an event organized by local hotels and business; they provide refreshments for the participants and their followers.

Clonakilty: This is a small town and the end of our first stage. There are plenty of hotels in the area with all the facilities for the cycle tourists. There is a cycle shop also. This is important to know just in case that there is a problem with the bicycle. This is a holiday town during the summer, so there are plenty of things to do. During the night there are the most popular pubs of the area (Debarra's pub, Scannel's pub, Courtyard pub, inter alia). Depending on the date of the travel, the tourist can enjoy different festivals: Music festival, bike festival, food festival... At the same time, the tourist can enjoy the cultural part of this place, with the different museums in the town: Michael Collins Centre (which has an historical importance because he was the man who reached an agreement with the English people during the hard IRA times), West Cork Model Railway Village...

Our recommendation for the cycle tourists in this area, are the next places situated in the town centre, where the tourist will rest and the bikes will be in a save place: Emmet Hotel, Clonakilty Hotel, O'Donnovan's Hotel, Quality Hotel and Leisure Centre Clonakilty.

Stage 2: from Clonakilty to Skibbereen.



Map 8. Clonakilty to Skibbereen



Fig. 20. Difficulty of elevation in Stage 2

In this stage the length is about 38 km via the road N71. This is a National road and the cyclist need to cycle with precaution even though the car drivers drive carefully. Along the route, the cyclist will stop in different interested points.

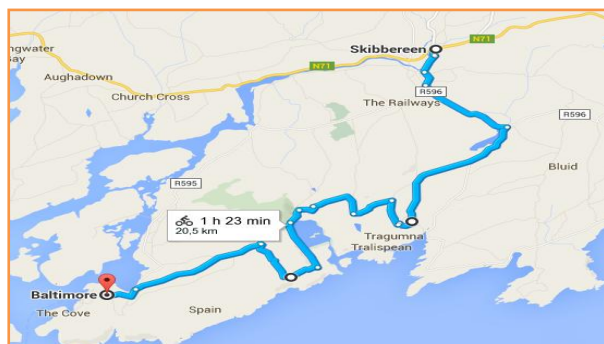
Stop in Galley Head, this place was built in 1875 and it is located outside Rosscarbery, where the tourist will enjoy the landscape and will see the light keeper's house. In this place the tourist can book a room with self-catering accommodation (there are only four rooms available) from 418€ per weekend. Galley Head light keeper's houses are located in the dramatic cliffs at about 53 metres from the sea. It is a perfect base to organize the whale and dolphins tours, during the correct seasons.

Stop in Castlefreke, located 10 km southwest from Clonakilty. Taking the road R598, the tourist will arrive to this place and enjoy the lake and the wood; the car parking is situated next to the Castlefreke Castle, in the main woodland. The woodlands are composed of an area of 114 hectares, more or less. Part of the woodland is adjacent to the Long Strand sand beach. The tourist can find in these beach scenic dunes that were formed in 1743 as a result of a tsunami. This area it is being preserved for biodiversity.

Continuing for the same road in the way to Baltimore, the tourist will find the beach called Owenahincha, very popular in the area, where is so common swim in there during the summer season.

A curious place to stop is Union Hall, where the cycle tourist will find Rineen Wood. This is a walk or in this case, a cycle loop route along the wood, where the curiosity is that there are in the trees fairy houses. This is a strange place because lots of locals and tourists leave amulets hung from the trees, so the place takes a special atmosphere. The fairy houses are small houses made with wood or plastic, and they are located commonly at the base of the trees, but there are small houses embedded in the trunk trees.

Stage 3: from Skibbereen to Baltimore.



Map 9. Skibbereen to Baltimore



Fig. 21. Difficulty of elevation in stage 3

This place called Skibberen has become in a touristic town. Each year, mostly during the summer, the number of tourists increases. For that, the town has lots of places for satisfying the needs of the tourists, like pubs, restaurants, hotels and different places of interest. There are a tourist office where the visitors can ask for the activities and information about the festival, which takes place in this town.

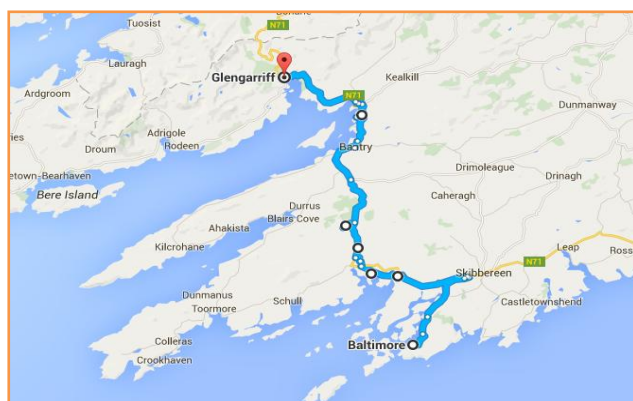
The festival is very popular and is called: "A taste of West Cork". It takes place in September, and in there tourists can enjoy organics products, a big variety of cheeses, and there are also different activities, like: demonstrations, cookery competitions, food tastings, special dinners and children's events.

In Skibberen, we recommend to the cycle travellers to visit Tragumna beach. This is a small sandy and scenic beach, which has received the International Blue Flag award for 2015.

For accommodation, there are a variety of hotels, B&B, and rental houses, but our recommendation for the cycle tourists are the followings places, which are located near the town centre: Bridge House, The West Cork Hotel.

From the N71, the cycle tourist will take the minor road R596 via Baltimore. The road runs next to the coast. Along the short journey, the landscape is amazing and the cyclist will discover a variety of small villages until the destination.

Stage 4: Baltimore to Glengarriff.



Map 10. Baltimore to Glengarriff

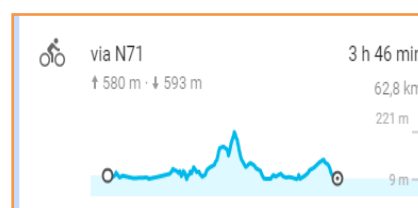


Fig. 22. Difficulty of elevation in stage 4

In this stage, our recommendation is to take the day off and enjoy this small fisher's village. Baltimore is the place where all the ferries depart to the islands of Cape Clear and Sherkin. In the harbour, the tourist can find the navigational Beacon, which is the place most associated to the village. "The Beacon is positioned high above the channel between the mainland and Sherkin Island, it is visible from near and far and visitors are rewarded with spectacular views towards Sherkin, Cape Clear, the harbour and the mouth of the Ilen River". (<http://www.discoveringireland.com>)

About the history of Baltimore, the tourist can enjoy and visit the Castle of Dún Na Séad (O'Driscoll Castle) known as the fort of the jewels. This Castle belongs to O'Driscoll clan, a powerful clan who control a vast area of the South West of Ireland.

The tourist will find the essence of the Irish live in this village, without big shopping centres but with the charm of the small restaurants and good quality accommodation in the area; Killena House, Lough Hyne B&B, Baltimore cottage B&B, Rathmore House Hostel, Top of the Hill Hostel, The Waterfront Hotel.

There are also plenty OF water-based activities in the lovely beaches and the fabulous coast in this side of the West Cork. The tourist can practice sailing, diving, angling, swimming, and the most popular, whale watching. There are businesses, which bring the tourist to Cape Clear to watch whales and dolphins during the proper seasons. The proper seasons are the next: for watch the whales, our recommendation is to realize these tours during October or November, the autumn season. For watch the dolphins, we recommend to realize these tours at the end of July and August, during the summer season.

The Cape Clear ferry service from Baltimore is called Cailin Oir Ferry. In Map 7, we can observe the different ferry routes.

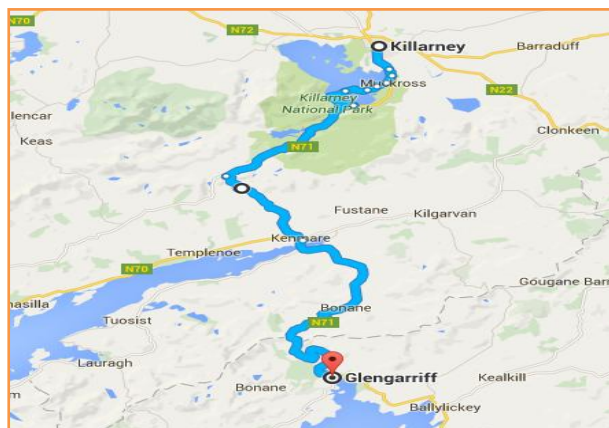


Map 11. West Cork Island Ferries

Lough Hyne is a wonderful place to visit. It is a unique inland seawater lake in Ireland. This is the first Ireland's Marine Nature Reserve. The level of the water changes depending on the tides. This place offers different water-based sports and diving. The Lough Hyde visitor centre is located in Skibbereen Heritage Centre.

Bantry House and gardens. It is another place to visit, in our way to Glengarriff. It is a place with a big history for the Irish people, because during the Irish Civil War in 1922, this place became a hospital for five years. For visit the house and the gardens, the ticket costs 11€ for an adult person and every day there are a guided tour at 2 pm.

Stage 5: from Glengarriff to Killarney.



Map 12. Glengarriff to Killarney

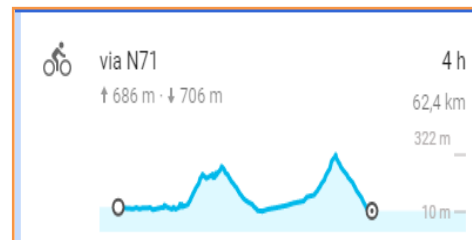


Fig. 23. Difficulty of elevation in stage 5

Glengarriff is a small town situated in Bantry Bay, where the mountain meets the sea. "This town is the gateway to the Beara Peninsula, connecting the towns of Bantry and Kenmare and has also acquired a fine reputation for the great variety of shops, galleries, accommodation, restaurants, pubs and services." (<http://www.glengarriff.ie>).

Garnish Island is situated near the Glengarriff harbour and the island has 15 ha. The Bryce family bought the Island from the British War Office. This family discovered that in the area there was a subtropical climate, and then they plant a wide range of southern and oriental hemisphere plants. Nowadays, there are a huge variety of

different plants from warm climates. There are in the island a coffee shop and toilets, services for the visitors. This island is open for the public only from April to October.

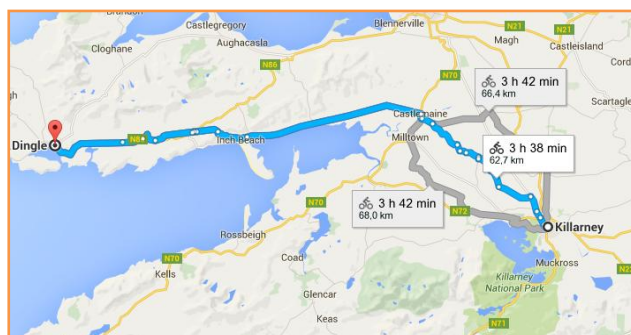
Then, the cycle tourist will continue the road N71 to Killarney. In Killarney, there is the National Park with 10,236 ha. Inside the National Park there are the rugged mountains and the famous Killarney Lake. Also, in 1981, the UNESCO¹⁰ awarded Killarney National Park as a Biosphere Reserve.

"The focal point of the National Park for visitors is Muckross House and Gardens, which is presented as a late 19th century mansion featuring all the necessary furnishings and artefacts of the period is a major visitor attraction is jointly managed by the Park Authorities and the Trustees of Muckross House.

Killarney National Park (<http://www.killarneynationalpark.ie>) contains many features of national and international importance such as the native oak woods and yew woods together with an abundance of evergreen trees and shrubs and a profusion of bryophytes and lichens which thrive in the mild Killarney climate. The native red deer are unique in Ireland with a presence in the country since the last Ice Age.

After this big journey, our recommendation is to take a day off and visit the National Park and the lovely town of Killarney. There are plenty shops and good quality restaurants in the town. Our recommendations for accommodation are the next places: Neptune's Town Hostel, Earls Court House, International Hotel Killarney, Killarney Royal Hotel.

Stage 6: from Killarney to Dingle.



Map 13. Killarney to Dingle



Fig. 24. Difficulty of elevation in stage 6

This stage it is one of the hardest. It runs along 63 km more or less. Start in the road R561 and then change in Castlemaine, to the national road N86, until Dingle.

¹⁰ UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

The views in this stage are fabulous. The first thing which call the attention of the cyclist is the Castlemaine harbour and then follow for the coast line until Inch Strand, a beach in Dingle Peninsula called the heaven for the surfers. This is a Blue Flag Beach and during the summer season, there are lifeguards for the security of the swimmers, surfers and people in general. In this beach there are surf schools and equipment and wetsuit hire, all during summer.

The next stop is Annascaul, a small village in the heart of the Dingle Peninsula. From here to the N86 there are new cycle paths added to the road, for the safety of the cyclists.

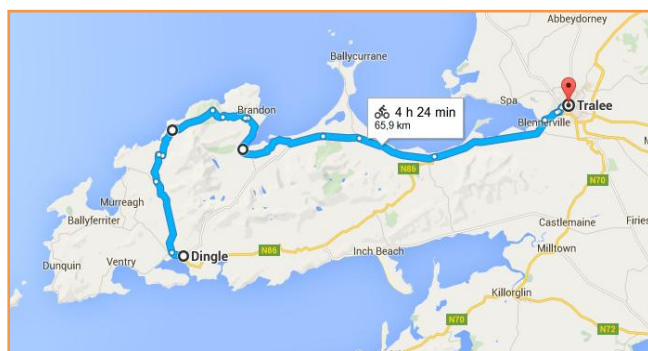
Following the route, we recommend to the cyclist stop in Lispole. Historically, this place consists of two parishes: Kinard and Minard. At Kilmurry Bay, the visitor can observe the ruins of Minard Castle. Nowadays it consists in a ruin tower, which was destroyed during a wild storm. Kinard is a small beach used most of the time by sea anglers.

Near the National Park of Killarney, there is the road N70 which follow the coast in the known "Ring of Kerry", with lots of interesting towns and villages. This is optional for the cyclist who realize the route.

After a long journey, the cyclist will arrive to Dingle. This is a peculiar town, very colourful. For relax the cyclist can leave the bicycle in the accommodation and walk round the town. John Banny's Pub, is the most popular pub in the area, with live Irish music sessions.

About the accommodation, we recommend, the following places: Boland's B&B, Barr Na Sráide B&B, The Hideout Hostel, Rainbow Independent Hostel and Camping

Stage 7: from Dingle to Tralee.



Map 14. Dingle to Tralee

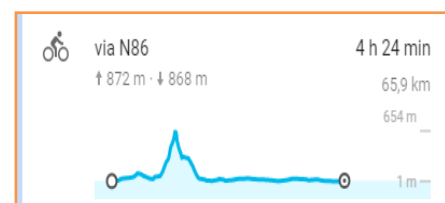


Fig. 25. Difficulty of elevation in stage 7

From Dingle via the road N86, the cyclist will cycle to our last destination in this tour, Tralee. For this, the cyclist will go to the part north of the Dingle Peninsula.

The first stop is Mount Brandon, it is the hardest part of this stage, but the rest of the stage is all flat (more or less). The next villages are Cloghane, Drom, Camp, Blennerville and finally Tralee. From Camp, the tourist can see the Tralee Bay and then he or she will continue by the coast to Tralee.

Tralee is a small city with a lot of things to do; our recommendation is to visit the next places: Kerry County Museum, Tralee Town Park, Tralee Bay Wetlands Centre, St. John's church, Fenit Lighthouse and the Ratto Round Tower, but there are more places to visit and discover in this city.

Our proposal is a visit to the Ballygarry House Hotel and Spa, for relax and then eat a delicious food in the restaurant and sleep in a good quality conditions in the hotel rooms. This place have good references from the customers.

About the accommodation, there are plenty places where the tourist can stay and enjoy a deserved rest: Cois Li B&B, Woodlands Caravan & Camping Park, The Grand Hotel, Castle Hostel, The White House Accommodation Hostel.

Then, to return to Cork, the best option is to take the Bus Éireann, which has schedules with a lot of depart options. The target price is around 25€ from Tralee to Cork. Another option is the Irish Rail, with several alternatives with the schedules and the price is about 15€. For travel with the bicycles, the cycle tourist must notify to the company.

11. CONCLUSIONS:

In this work we made a study about the Wild Atlantic Way, the counties which host the route and the actual situation of the route. Moreover, we realized a proposal for a cycle route along the southwest part of Ireland, promoting coastal and sustainable tourism in Ireland for the Spanish market.

After the study of the project, our conclusions are that another idea of sustainable tourism is possible; it is necessary to increase awareness in the population about the importance of travelling on a sustainable way. It is also important to exploit the coast with another idea of tourism, and it is possible, the model of "sun and sand" coastal tourism is growing obsolete. The tourists are looking for new experiences, they want to relax but at the same time they want to be part of the active tourism, doing different coast and water activities.

As we have seen on the SWOT analysis, this Wild Atlantic Way route, presents some weaknesses that we want to improve, in order to offer a good quality route along the Atlantic coast of Ireland. The principal objective to improve is the marketing, we need to promote the route in the social network. Then, we must confront the seasonality, because is bad for the place focus all the tourism only in the summer months. The seasonality is not only stressful for the staff who work in tourism, is stressful too for the infrastructures and the environment, furthermore this month will be expensive to compensate the deterioration which involve this way of tourism.

Our idea is to promote the tourism all along the year, not only during the peak season. Ireland has a bad road infrastructure and this is an important point to the tourism, because the tourists want good quality roads for the displacements and it is very important for our proposed route, because the cyclists need to feel comfortable and safe in the roads. Also, to increase drivers awareness to be careful in the roads is necessary because of the climate difficulties. Another point that we need to improve is the language barrier, we need to translate all the information signals into another language aside from the English or Gaelic.

Our proposal route "Heaven Coast Cycle Route" is facing to the Spanish tourism. We can define it as active tourism. Our idea is to create a cycle route to foment Ireland as travel destination. We think this country has a lot of possibilities to offer a deal to the Spanish tourism. We propose a route to discover the Ireland coast, not for complete a big amount of kilometres. The tourism needs to enjoy the environment and the landscape. Ireland has one of the most beautiful coasts in the world, wide cliffs, lovely beaches, and amazing landscape.

We think that the first step to promote a cycle route is the promotion. Nowadays, it is easy with the social networks and Internet. There are plenty applications for promote the route: Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Google+ and Tripadvisor. These are the most popular and these applications have millions of followers.

In general terms, we think that cycle tourism is a great possibility to promote Ireland between cycle tourists in general and Spanish cycle tourists in particular. Healthy life and sport life is booming and we need to take this opportunity to promote our route and the active tourism.

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