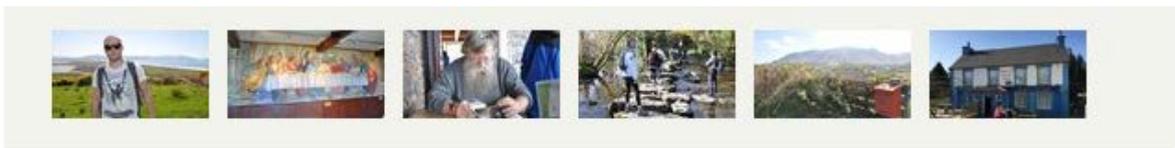


## The Kerry Camino

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*Tadhg Peavoy take us through his experiences on the walking trip through the Dingle Peninsula known as the Kerry Camino.*

“A day spent outside Kerry is a day wasted,” is a mantra one of my Kerry colleagues has recited many times over the years.

And as a result – without him even realising it - the Irish county has always intrigued me. Other than a brief trip there covering the Tour of Ireland cycling race in 2009, I had never really got to see The Kingdom, as it's fondly known, with my own eyes.

Indeed, as a sports journalist, I have seen the green and gold jerseys of Kerry dominate the world of Gaelic football, with their unique brand of brawn and brilliance. And so it is perhaps somewhat appropriate that my first trip proper to the county was one that involved exercise – a walking trip down the Dingle Peninsula – known as the Kerry Camino.

The Camino traces the route that St. Brendan took when he walked along the peninsula in the sixth century spreading Christianity from Tralee to Dingle. I made the journey with [www.irelandways.com](http://www.irelandways.com) – an enterprising start-up company, run by a Frenchman, Roland Monsegu, who fell in love with Ireland's countryside and transformed his passion into his business and livelihood.

Ireland Ways organised everything for me: transport from Dublin, accommodation in The Kingdom, and anything I needed along the route, taking any hassle that could have been there out of the way.

My base for the three days was Tralee, more precisely the Grand Hotel on Denny Street, a hotel bang in the heart of the town with a beautiful old period bar and one of the best restaurants in Tralee.

From the Grand you can do walking tours to learn more about the history of the town, and an interesting one it is too, incorporating a beautiful public park and the local courthouse, designed by a 16-year-old apprentice architect and decorated with two canons located at its entrance: one from the Crimean War and one from the Indian War.

One can also enjoy the local hostelries after a day's walking on the Camino. In truth, one spot jumps out above the rest to do this, Seán Óg's Bar, where the whole of Tralee seems to congregate for pints of Tom Crean's lager at day's end.

The Kerry Camino begins proper at St John's Church in Tralee where one gets one's first Camino stamp before heading along a route that has three sections along the peninsula: 1) Tralee to Camp, 2) Camp to Annascaul and 3) Annascaul to Dingle. It's a 57km trek that's completed over three days with stop-offs en route.

I've travelled across the globe searching for the most beautiful places known to society, and hand on heart, this stretch of land is one of them.

Isolated paths stretch along for kilometres with peaks such as the Slieve Mish and Brandon Mountains rising up on both sides, with gorse, rock and wild fields in the foreground, and the odd sheep or cow for company; this landscape is only broken by the sight of the Atlantic coast as the mountains drop down to the sea lapping against Ireland's wild south-western tip.

Along the route there are numerous superb stop-offs, one such spot is Inch, where the trail loops down from Camp to the sea, before diverting back along the coast to Annascaul at the end of day two. Sammy's Restaurant is located right on the beach at Inch, with its impossibly beautiful yellow sand strand running out ahead of the bar and restaurant, with surfers dotting the waves and the majesty of the surrounding mountains closing in all around in a natural amphitheatre. Fresh fish and chips here and a pint of Tom Crean's lager – named after the Antarctic explorer

born in Annascaul – sets you up for the second half of that day's journey on to Annascaul itself where Crean's very own bar is located with a statue of the great man erected directly opposite the public house.

From there the route winds its way on towards the final stop, Dingle, and St James' Church, made famous by RTÉ TV show Other Voices, where a multitude of musicians have performed live over the years. In reality the church is minuscule, and the intimacy of the venue, where one gets one's Camino passport stamped one last time, is palpable.

Sitting in its modest interior, Camino passport in hand, one gets an idea of what it must have been like to listen to the likes of Amy Winehouse, Jarvis Cocker, Mogwai, Seasick Steve or the Super Furry Animals playing the venue. One also gets a feeling for what it must have been like for one the early Irish Christians worshipping there.

Also in Dingle, in the former Catholic convent, one can see the fresco of the last supper by the mural artist Eleanor Yates, which is a beautiful way to round off the journey and muse over your experience along the route.

Back in Tralee, the superb restaurant at the Grand Hotel, or Finnegan's Restaurant and Wine Cellar, are the places to wine and dine those weary walking aches away.

My newfound knowledge of The Kingdom tells me that a day in Kerry is indeed a day well spent. The county is the definition of natural beauty, and those Kerry men and women that inhabit it add a wit, humour, vitality and warmth to the region that makes it impossible not to fall in love with The Kingdom.

### **How to walk the Kerry Camino yourself:**

www.irelandways.com will organise an entire trip for solo travellers, couples or groups. This includes accommodation, guides, transfers and any other personal requests. They are an incredibly helpful company that go out of their way to provide tailor-made trips for their customers. They also offer walking tours in other locations all over Ireland including the Burren Way along the world famous Cliffs of Moher, the Western Way, the Cholmcille Way, the Beara Way, the Sheep's Head Way, the Barrow Way, the Wicklow Way and more.

Their website is: [www.irelandways.com](http://www.irelandways.com)

Their phone numbers are:  
(01) 525 2886 (from Ireland)

1 646 801 7951 (from the US)