




# The west awakes

Most of us think our town or neighbourhood must be the best place to live in Ireland, but unless you are in Westport, you might just be wrong, says **Janice Butler**



**D**on't take my word for it though: the Irish Times also claimed the title for the Co Mayo town. Despite that accolade and the fact that I grew up in the west of Ireland, I was still shocked to realise it had been almost a decade since I had been in Westport. A trip to Mayo's main town was well overdue and with everyone talking about the Wild Atlantic Way and the Greenway, I went to see for myself what all the fuss was about.

Just like it says in the brochures, Westport has buckets of charm, personality and craic, not to mention more pubs than any Irish town I've ever been in. Located beside Clew Bay and overlooked by the famous Croagh Patrick, it really is no wonder that this coastal town is one of the country's most popular holiday destinations.

We had two days to explore Westport, so arriving on Friday evening, we spent the last few hours of daylight walking the stunning beaches of Achill Island, a 30-minute drive from Westport town. With dramatic Slievemore as the backdrop, Keel Beach on Achill is the stage for surfing, canoeing and kayaking, but we didn't do any of that – just to stroll the strand was a lovely treat.

The next morning, we escaped the bustle of urban life and took to the Great Western Greenway with

bikes hired from Clew Bay Bike Hire. A recent addition to Westport's attractions, the Greenway is the longest off-road cycling and walking trail in Ireland and winner of this year's European Destination of Excellence. Following the route of the old Westport to Achill railway line, this 42km traffic-free way is ideal for those looking for a bit of exercise but thankfully most of it is flat and very manageable. It took us just about four hours with a couple of stops along the way. The route is well provided with cafés and lovely pubs, if you're in need of refreshment.

Bike hire starts at €15, but this includes a minibus ride all the way to Achill so you can ride back to Westport with the wind behind you. You could of course bring your own bikes.

Later that afternoon, we made our way out to Westport House & Gardens, which was once home to the pirate queen Grace O'Malley. This is a child's (and big child's) dream, with zip-wiring, zorbing, mini-golf and a pirate's adventure park on the grounds...plenty to keep everyone happy. The house itself is well worth a look around, with original artefacts, artwork and treasures to fascinate culture-vultures.

The underground tea-rooms were particularly welcoming as some wet weather set in.

That night, we had a wonderful dinner in the Westport Plaza where we were staying and then hit the town for a few scoops and a sing-song in the famous Matt Malloy's, where both tourists and locals get involved with gusto.

Before hitting the road back home on our last day, we decided to attempt Croagh Patrick. In hindsight – and bad weather considered – this probably wasn't the best idea but we survived the wind, rain and tricky terrain. The famous pilgrimage mountain, known locally as 'the Reek', lies 10km west of the town near the villages of Murrisk and Lecanvey. The mountain creates a striking backdrop to the town; that is, if the top isn't covered in stormclouds as it was on this day. We exchanged sympathetic greetings with the mere three or four other hikers we passed on the way up and I recommend

checking the weather before you set out. When we finally reached the bottom, a heartwarming meal at The Tavern was heavenly, before the journey back to Dublin, a little jaded, a little bashed and bruised but feeling very much alive.

Westport has it all: beautiful scenery, shopping, nightlife, gourmet dining, award-winning accommodation, Blue Flag beaches, Croagh Patrick (on a good day!) and hundreds of leisure and adventure activities. Adventurous or not, the choice is huge and I won't be leaving it another ten years before I go back.

More information at [destinationwestport.com](http://destinationwestport.com)

## Top things to do in Westport

- Climb Croagh Patrick
- Cycle the Great Western Greenway
- Visit Westport House & Pirate Adventure Park
- Explore the selection of Blue Flag beaches
- Experience the Blueway Waters of Clew Bay
- Zip, zorb or scale great heights with activity sports
- Enjoy 18 holes of championship golf

## Places to stay

- Castlecourt Hotel (4\*) [castlecourthotel.ie](http://castlecourthotel.ie)
- Westport Plaza Hotel (4\*) [westportplazahotel.ie](http://westportplazahotel.ie)
- Hotel Westport (4\*) [hotelwestport.ie](http://hotelwestport.ie)
- Clew Bay Hotel (3\*) [clewbayhotel.com](http://clewbayhotel.com)
- Mill Times Hotel (3\*) [milltimeshotel.ie](http://milltimeshotel.ie)
- Knockranny House Hotel (4\*) [knockrannyhousehotel.ie](http://knockrannyhousehotel.ie)

## Activities

- Westport House & Pirate Adventure Park [westporthouse.ie](http://westporthouse.ie)
- Clew Bay Bike Hire [clewbaybikehire.ie](http://clewbaybikehire.ie)
- Adventure Islands [theadventureislands.com](http://theadventureislands.com)
- Adventure West [adventurewest.ie](http://adventurewest.ie)
- Westport Golf Club [westportgolfclub.ie](http://westportgolfclub.ie)

