

The Skellig Ring

COUNTY KERRY, IRELAND · COMPLETE DRIVE GUIDE

~20 miles / 32 km

Drive Clockwise

Best: May – Sept

Full Day Recommended

AT A GLANCE

Start/End	R566, just west of Waterville (off Ring of Kerry)
Drive time	1 hr nonstop · 3–5 hrs with stops
Roads	Narrow, winding; some single-lane — drive slowly
Tour buses	Not permitted — far fewer crowds than Ring of Kerry
Kerry Cliffs fee	€5 per person (2026) · free parking
Best direction	Clockwise — ocean views on passenger side
Base towns	Portmagee, Cahersiveen, Kenmare, Killarney

DRIVING TIPS

- › Use designated pull-ins when meeting oncoming traffic
- › Watch for sheep on the road — they own it
- › The steep switchback climb between Kerry Cliffs and St. Finian's Bay looks wrong but is right — the views are worth every twist
- › Arrive early at Ballinskelligs — parking is very limited near the Abbey
- › Bring a rain jacket *regardless* of morning weather
- › Pack snacks; food options are limited outside Portmagee

SKELLIG MICHAEL

- › **Book months in advance** — licensed boats sell out fast, especially June & July
- › Crossing is ~12 km of open Atlantic; cancellations due to weather are common
- › Landing tour: climb 618 ancient stone steps to the 6th-century monastic settlement
- › Eco / circumnavigation tour: see the monastery and puffins without landing

KEY STOPS — SOUTH TO NORTH

- 1 Ballinskelligs Abbey**
Ruined 13th-century Augustinian priory at the bay's edge. Founded to house monks from Skellig Michael. Free & always open — almost always quiet. Park at the beach car park and walk.
 - 2 Ballinskelligs Beach & Castle**
Blue Flag beach with café and toilets. At low tide, walk across the strand to the 16th-century Ballinskelligs Castle at the waterline — one of the best photo spots on the route. Horse Island accessible at low tide.
 - 3 Skelligs Chocolate**
Artisan factory overlooking St. Finian's Bay. Watch chocolate being made through glass walls, generous samples included. Try: dark chocolate with seaweed, gin & honeycomb, or mint bar. Open daily 10am–5pm.
 - 4 St. Finian's Bay**
Small sheltered cove popular with surfers. Rocky creek crosses the sand; cliffs on both sides. On clear days you can see Skellig Michael on the horizon. A few eateries across the road (hours limited off-peak).
 - 5 Kerry Cliffs ***
300 m sheer drop to the Atlantic. Three viewpoints on easy walking paths. Wind can be extreme — dress for it. €5 entry, free parking. Open daily 9:30am–6pm (last entry ~3:30pm shoulder season).
 - 6 Portmagee**
Charming fishing village with colourful harbour houses. Departure point for Skellig Michael boat tours. Good spot for lunch, coffee, or a pint. Bridge connects to Valentia Island.
- ★ **Valentia Island (Optional Detour)**
Cross the bridge from Portmagee. Highlights: Geokaun Mountain (360° views), Tetrapod Trackway (385-million-year-old fossil footprints), Bray Head clifftop walk. Exit by ferry for a natural loop back to the mainland.

PUFFIN & SEASON GUIDE

Puffins arrive	Late April
Peak season	May – June (best 2 wks of each)
Puffins depart	Late August
Fewest crowds	Early May, late Sept
Best light	Early morning or late afternoon

QUICK FAQ

- › **Better than Ring of Kerry?** Many say yes — quieter, wilder, more scenic
- › **Can you visit Skellig Michael alone?** No — boat tour required; book months ahead
- › **Hard to drive?** Narrow and winding but manageable if you go slowly
- › **Total time needed?** 3–5 hrs for stops; full day with Skellig or Valentia

- › Puffin season: late April – early August; peak May–June
- › Build extra days into your itinerary for weather delays

Boats depart from **Portmagee**, Ballinskelligs & Cahersiveen. The landing involves steep, uneven steps with no handrails — not suitable for limited mobility or severe fear of heights.