

## Westport – Turlough Village – Knock

**Castlebar** is the administrative capital of County Mayo and has a population of 6,000. Founded at the start of the 17th century by John Bingham who later became Lord Lucan, the town gets its name from a castle built by the de Barra (Barry) family in the middle of the 13th century. Castlebar featured prominently in the “Year of the French” when in August 1798, General Humbert’s French-Irish force defeated the British and their hasty retreat has led to the engagement being known ever since as the “Races of Castlebar” The Arts and Education Centre occupies a chapel, the foundation stone which was laid by John Wesley in 1785. Margaret Burke-Sheridan, one of the world’s great operatic prima donnas was born beside the Mall in Castlebar (a plaque marks the house). Also born in Castlebar were Ernie O’Malley the Republican writer and Louis Brennan, the inventor of the dirigible torpedo and the gyroscopic monorail.

From Castlebar follow the N5 East for four miles to **Turlough village** ( left off N5). Located here is The **National Museum of Country Life**. Home of the national folklife collection, the Museum is a branch of the National Museum of Ireland. Visitors to the Exhibition Galleries experience the story of Irish Country Life between 1850 and 1950 through the innovative combination of artefacts and displays, archival video footage and interactive screens. Admission is free.

You can either continue on the N5 to Knock via **Bohola, Swinford** and **Charlestown** or return to Castlebar. From Castlebar take the N60 to Claremorris. In **Balla** we see the early monastic site and round tower.

Continue on to Claremorris and take the N17 to Knock. **Knock Village** is one of the most famous Marian Shrines of the world. Over one and a half million pilgrims visit annually to worship where 15 people saw a vision of the Blessed Virgin in 1879. Numerous miracles have been recorded at Knock, and private pilgrimages take place all year round, with special programmes of devotion and ceremonies from April to October each year. **Pope John Paul II** came as a pilgrim to Knock on 29th September 1979 and **Pope Francis** visited Knock on the 26<sup>th</sup> August 2018.. The focal point of the shrine is the gable of the apparition, on the west wall of the church of St. John the Baptist, and the shrine oratory. Nearby is the **Basilica of our Lady, Queen of Ireland**, this being the largest church in Ireland accommodating up to 20,000 people. The beautiful landscaped site has hostels for the sick, two rest houses for the invalids and the Chapel of Reconciliation. Masses and ceremonies are held daily in the apparition Chapel, the old Parish Church and the Basilica.

**Knock Folk Museum** is also worth a visit and is situated in the Shrine grounds, containing a wide range of artefacts of rural life from the 19th and 20th century. There are also various reports and documentation relating to the apparition. (Open May-October). Refreshments are available in Knock Village. You can either return to Westport as you came or alternatively through Kilkelly, Charlestown, Swinford, Bohola and Castlebar.

