



The [Office of Public Works](#) cares for the island on behalf of the Irish State.

Skellig Michael (also known as Great Skellig), is a towering sea crag rising from the Atlantic Ocean almost 12 kilometres west of the Ivereagh Peninsula in County Kerry, Ireland.



Located at the western edge of the European landmass, Skellig Michael was the chosen destination for a small group of ascetic monks who, in their pursuit of greater union with God, withdrew from civilisation to this remote and inaccessible place.



Sometime between the sixth and eight centuries, a monastery was founded on this precipitous rock giving rise to one of the most dramatic examples of the extremes of Christian monasticism.

Skellig Michael and its neighbouring islands contain some of Ireland's most important sites for breeding seabirds both in terms of size of colonies and diversity of species.



The well-preserved monastic remains have retained a strong spiritual appeal. To witness the physical achievements of the early monks and experience the solitude, broken only by sounds of seabirds and the ocean, evokes a quiet sense of magic.



George Bernard Shaw, on a visit in 1910, described it as an 'incredible, impossible, mad place, part of our dream world'.

In 1996 UNESCO inscribed the island on the World Heritage List as a site of outstanding universal value.

Visitor Risk Management

Its isolated location and difficult access pose considerable challenges in managing the site. There are significant constraints to finding solutions for some quite complex problems.

OPW, in managing the site, aims to provide a safe environment where the risks are at an acceptable level; however a safe environment does not imply the absence of risk. It is critically important, therefore, that visitors are made fully aware of the risks presented by the nature of the terrain and other natural hazards that await them. By applying the VSCG principals OPW seeks to achieve a balance between conservation of the built and natural heritage, visitor access and safety.

Notwithstanding the monument's archaeological, cultural, spiritual and environmental importance, it is not OPW's objective to provide easy access for all, irrespective of levels of fitness and agility.

Due to its location (some 11.6km off Bolus Head out in the Atlantic Ocean) access to Skellig Michael is by boat and is only possible when weather and sea conditions are favourable. Visitors are only allowed from late May through to late September.

Following noticeable increase in damage to the site in the early 1990s OPW introduced a daily limit of 180 visitors. This is managed by a permit system which controls the number of boats and passengers allowed to land on the island.



Visitors are exposed to significant trip and fall hazards. Disembarking from the boats can be difficult, and once on the island, access to the monastery is via approximately 600 steps.

These steps, although maintained, are irregular and of dry stone construction and by their nature do not comply with modern safety standards. Handrails have not been introduced because they would compromise the exceptional heritage value of the site. However, visitors are advised by on-site signs of the intrinsic hazards of visiting the island. Information signs which include safety information are also located at all departure ports. Information on visitor safety is also provided on websites in the form of a safe access guide publication and a safety video.

A further important issue relating to the safety of visitors on the island is the duration of their stay. Boat timetables allow sufficient time to climb the steps and tour the monastery before descending to take the boat back to the mainland.

A regular guide service was introduced in 1987 and has operated each season since. The main function of the guide service is to protect the site, interpret the history, archaeology and significance of the monastic settlement, regulate the numbers of visitors within the monastic enclosure, monitor visitor numbers, the number of boats landing and weather conditions.

To further reinforce the safety messages, visitors are met at the bottom of the steps by a guide, who gives a brief talk on visitor safety and protocols to be taken on their visit to the Island.



Emergency Planning

OPW is committed to ensuring that high levels of health and safety for visitors are maintained on the island. Close links have been established with the area air and sea rescue organisations and the local coastguard. With their co-operation, full-scale safety evacuation drills are carried out regularly to complement and inform the current emergency plan for Skellig Michael.

2010 Risk Review

Following two fatal incidents on Skellig Michael in mid 2009, OPW commissioned Byrne Ó Cléirigh to undertake a detailed risk review. You can view their final report here:

[Skellig Michael Safety Review April 2010 - Final.pdf](#).

Current Safety Advice

The latest sign design is available as a PDF here:

[OPW Skellig sign final proof 300311.pdf](#)

The safe access guide leaflet and information flyer are available here:

[Safe Access Guide.pdf](#)

[safety notice2010 Temp Flyer.pdf](#)

You can view the safety video by following this [youtube link](#)

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