

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

By **Bethany Graber**
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

GALWAY, Ireland — As Bostonians, you could say we are all a little bit Irish, particularly in March when it becomes apparent just how deeply Irish culture is embedded in our city's bones.

I have always had an affinity and adoration for Irish culture. It began with my childhood best friend, a hilarious, fun Irish redheaded Lahey, and grew to a pinnacle when I attended a small Catholic college which gifted me a gaggle of girlfriends with surnames like Reilly and Quinn. All culminating when I moved to Boston as an adult and was again surrounded by echoes of a culture I had become wholly enamored with. Despite my lack of hereditary connection to Ireland, I have been eager to visit its green shores for as long as I can remember.

So after years of saying "someday," the aforementioned gaggle and I somehow aligned our 10 schedules (yes, 10) to ring in 2017 back on the "old sod." Well, someone's old sod, anyway.

We wanted our trip to be equal parts rolling shamrock covered landscapes and pints consumed in cozy pubs. We wanted relaxation but also exploration. We had to decide where in the country would maximize our Irish getaway experience.

We considered Dublin, the country's capital and a seemingly obvious choice. But we didn't want to go somewhere that felt like home. We wanted to mix it up with the locals! We wanted an immersive Irish getaway! So we settled on a moderately sized city on the west coast, nestled in an inlet along the Wild Atlantic Way: Galway. The hidden gem of the Emerald Isle.

From Boston we hopped a red-eye shorter than a flight to California and awoke to smiling Irish eyes and countless buoyant brogues. Dreams really do come true.

Galway is just over an hour north of Shannon, where we landed. You can drive straight up inland, or you can opt for the slightly longer but beautifully scenic route along the coast. This passes by the Cliffs of Moher, one of the most breathtaking sites in Ireland or anywhere. A benefit of stopping off there before we'd even had a cup of Irish breakfast tea was the pleasure of having them all to ourselves as the sun rose. It was the perfect start to an Irish adventure, and an ideal antidote to our jetlag.

Arriving in Galway you realize one of its endearing characteristics is that it perfectly walks the line between historical charm and modern city feel; with restaurants and banks housed in 14th Century architecture.

The best place to start exploring the city is overlooking the colorful row houses on the Long Walk in Galway Bay, followed by walking the Salthill promenade along the water. If you cut across the Corrib River by the Spanish Arch you visit St Nicholas's Church on your way up to the city common, Eyre Square, to see the statue marking the spot where JFK spoke to the Galwegians a few months before his assassination. And after all that meandering in the finicky Irish weather, the only thing to do next is post up in one of the city's countless pubs.

Every other door up and down Quay,

IRELAND

Settling into a snug corner

Galway combines historical charm and modern city feel



BETHANY GRABER FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The row houses make for a colorful backdrop on the Long Walk in Galway Bay.

High, and Shop Streets (the main pedestrian arteries of the city) is a quintessential Irish pub with an open door drawing you in with wafts of traditional music and laughter. Whether you wind up in the historic King's Head Pub, the tiny Tig Cóilí, or the classic Quays Bar; you are bound to find friendly locals, flowing pints, and live traditional music.

If you want to tuck into a snug corner with the best Irish coffee you'll have in your life, stop into Garavan's. Each one is served in a specially designed glass and meticulously made with Irish Powers Whiskey. Or go just for the whiskey. The knowledgeable bartenders love to talk about it, and this historic city institution is known for its rare bottles and whiskey flights. Or if you veer slightly off the main drag, you find McSwigan's, the perfect spot to stay awhile and warm up. I can personally attest to the joy of time spent in any of these establishments.

One of the best surprises of visiting Ireland's west coast was how many things were near enough to explore with just a day trip. You can take a ferry ride to the Aran Islands, home of the famous Aran wool fisherman's sweaters synonymous with the Gaelic speaking folks who live there. You can drive an hour west to the Tullamore Dew distillery, which handily rivals the experience you might have at Guinness and Jameson — both in Dublin and far more touristy. Or head north, driving through the gorgeous Connemara National Park, to visit Kylemore Abbey and its adjacent mini cathedral.

The highlight of these excursions for us was the ride. We opted to have a local guide drive us (so as to avoid getting lost or driving on the wrong side sheep filled video game like roads), who was a great storyteller and schooled us in Irish history between stop offs in his favorite towns surrounding County Galway to let us have a dram in each of his favorite pubs. He gave us local experiences we would have never found on our own, and it was a true gift.

All the adventuring can make a person hungry, and don't let Ireland's notoriously drab culinary reputation fool you. Galway is full of under-the-radar places for incredible meals. Both Aniar and Loam have been awarded a Michelin star for their creative yet distinctly Irish tasting menus. Ard Bia at Nimmos sits right in Galway Bay and serves delicious local, seasonal food. Or if you want something quick and classic, pop into McDonagh's for traditional fish and chips, which are as enjoyable as the conversations you will find yourself in with locals along the communal tables.

As connected as I felt to the Irish before our Galway getaway, this hospitable little city increased that feeling tenfold. It is unironically quaint, and full of kind people who were happy to share their traditions and stories. I experienced so much in the short time I was there, but could have happily spent a week or more melting into snugs and inhaling the salty ocean air. It was a city that made me feel at home and a little bit more Irish just for having been there. It is the hidden crown jewel of the Emerald Isle.

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HERE

UNDERGROUND TOUR AT NEWPORT MANSIONS

Glimpse the never-before-seen working side of the Vanderbilt family's summer home with Beneath The Breakers Tour, the Preservation Society of Newport County's newest offering in its roster of Newport Mansions experiences. A stunning example of 19th-century architecture, The Breakers (1895) was built with state-of-the-art technical systems by famed architect Richard Morris Hunt. The tour begins in the caretaker's cottage before descending stairs to view the massive underground boilers that powered all five floors of the mansion. A 360-foot long tunnel connects the boiler room to the basement of the main house where visitors can check out century-old construction techniques, electrical systems and plumbing, as well as their modern counterparts. Guided tours offered every 30 minutes; reservations required. Adults \$25; ages 6-17 \$10. 401-847-1000, www.newportmansions.org

HISTORIC HOTEL GETS DÉCOR MAKEOVER

Say goodbye to stuffy and hello to breezy-chic. Wentworth By the Sea, a Marriott Hotel & Spa, has spruced up for spring with a complete redesign of its 140

guestrooms in the main hotel. Built in 1874, the historic New Hampshire hotel's new décor combines contemporary design sensibilities (think subtle earth tones with pale blue accents) with a 19th-century New England seaside experience. Each guestroom offers water views of sea or bay, and an abundance of light that originally attracted the Victorian travelers to its historic "wedding cake" white towers. The resort boasts a 10,000-square-foot full service spa, indoor and waterfront restaurants, indoor and outdoor pools, nearby ocean beach, plus fitness and business centers. Spring rates from \$219; summer from \$329. 603-422-7322, www.wentworth.com

THERE

WHERE THE WILD DRAWINGS ARE

Looking for a fun spring break family trip? Head to Cooperstown, N.Y., for an exhibit at the Fenimore Art Museum that commemorates the work of beloved children's book author and illustrator Maurice Sendak. "50 Years, 50 Works, 50 Reasons, Maurice Sendak: The Memorial Exhibition" presents, as the exhibition's title implies, 50 works of art accompanied by quotes from 50 celebrities, renowned illustrators, friends of the artist, politicians, and other

personalities who share how Sendak inspired them, influenced their careers, and touched their lives. The exhibition features original illustrations from "Where the Wild Things Are," "Little Bear," "In the Night Kitchen," and other books, as well as set design and costume sketches, animation reels, posters, sculpture, and more. April 1-May 14. 888-547-1450, www.fenimoreartmuseum.org

MIAMI AIRPORT HOTEL'S \$10-MILLION FACELIFT

Miami is a destination of its own but it is also a jumping off point for cruises and flights to far flung places. Those who have a Miami overnight in their schedule can now enjoy their limited visit in style at the Sheraton Miami Airport hotel where a ten-million dollar renovation offers resort-style experiences just one-quarter mile away from MIA. Highlights include luxury renovations to 405 guest rooms, chic redesigned lobby and restaurant, and outdoor pool with Miami River views and pop-up powder white sand beach. The hotel is adjacent to the PGA rated, 18-hole Melreese Golf Course. Direct pedestrian access to both airport and recently opened Miami Intermodal Center provides direct connections to South Beach, Brickell, and other regional destinations. Spring rates from \$159. 305-871-3800, www.sheratonmiamiairport.com

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EVERYWHERE

NEW GEAR DUFFLE

Pack smart with Kelty's new



lightweight Dodger Duffel, a 40-liter gear bag that combines form and function with fun. Handy features include a fully padded exterior for protection and structure; padded shoulder strap with quick cinch adjustment (to switch from shoulder to messenger carry); and four "grab and go" handles conveniently located on each side. One large U-zip provides access to the main compartment; a zippered end pocket can be used for shoes; two internal Velcro pockets keeps your other stuff organized; and a safety

pocket can hide important items. When empty, folds small for storage. Available in a variety of colors. \$74.95. kelty.com/dodger-duffel/

TINY WHITE NOISE AND STREAMING MACHINE

Gotta love this teeny wireless sound machine, the LectroFan Micro. Perfect for travelers who need white noise sounds for sleeping — choose from five different digital fan sounds and four variations of pure white noise, plus an ocean sound — and also great for those who enjoy streaming high-fidelity music on the go. Only 2 inches high and 2 inches in circumference, the system is easy to pack or carry in your pocket, the design allows you to swivel the speaker either upward or forward to direct the sound exactly where you want it. USB rechargeable battery lasts up to 16 hours in sleep-sound mode or up to six hours in Bluetooth mode. Available in black and silver or white and silver. \$34.95. www.soundof-sleep.com/lectrofan

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