



GALWAY CITY

Roger Wheeler enjoys the craich in Galway City and finds out the price of a pint of the black stuff

Two pints of Guinness. €8 please. One of the first surprises about drinking Ireland's nation beverage in Ireland is the price, £3.46 a pint! We were in one of the many little pubs that give the centre of **Galway City** its character. Galway, you've heard the name but probably don't know exactly where it is. Ireland's fastest growing city, Galway City (the County is also called Galway hence the word 'city') is

restaurants and of course the bars. This is Ireland after all and the bars are literally everywhere. Each one is different, mainly quite small and very friendly. The 'craich' is a famous Irish word meaning atmosphere and each bar has this in spades. It's not at all unusual for a small group, sitting quietly in a bar, to suddenly start playing music. For the essential old style bar go to **O'Flaherty's** or **Murphy's**, both on **High Street**.

It would be true to say the entire city has the 'craich', it fizzes with life. The **National University of Ireland, Galway**, was founded in 1845 and it is the most modern university in the Republic. The 20,000 students comprise about 25% of the total population. There are several art centres so you can suddenly be surprised with an impromptu street event and of course there are always loads of buskers, street performers or just young people creating a show out of nowhere.



RIVER CORRIB & CATHEDRAL

regarded as Ireland's cultural heart. Its lies at the mouth of the river **Corrib** on the far west coast, 208km due west of Dublin. The river flows into **Galway Bay**; scenically the city area is not particularly thrilling, being on a coastal plain with a harbour and at the head of the world famous bay. The surrounding countryside is extremely beautiful with the hills and lakes of **Connemara** immediately to the North and the rolling scenery of the **Burren** to the South. But on your first visit you really need to spend time in the City itself.

The City centre is mainly pedestrianised and easy to wander round, there are many small shops stocking everything imaginable. Famous book shops, bakers, cheese shops, cafés,



EYRE SQUARE

Although Ireland is English speaking, they drive on the left and are a Republic. And don't forget it! They were granted their independence from the English Crown in 1921 after a particularly bloody conflict. The currency is the Euro and these days that makes the whole Country expensive, but it's certainly worth it and needn't cost an arm and a leg if you're careful.

There are plenty of hotels and B&Bs to suit every pocket; top of the range is the four star **Meyrick Hotel** on **Eyre Square**. Not cheap,

but for around €200 per person you can get two nights with dinner, breakfast and champagne, and it really is luxurious. Eyre Square is the main square of the city, recently renovated and is now growing into a very pleasant open space. If it is boutique style accommodation you're after then the new **G Hotel** is the place to go.

For a very straightforward B&B you could do a lot worse than **Mary's** in **New Road**. Bang in the centre of the city, this is an exceptionally nice place to hang your hat for a day or so and very gay friendly*. The legendary Irish breakfast she serves means that you won't be hungry until dinner time. The price of €60 for a double room with bathroom or €35 for a single is just about the best value in town.



BRIGHTON BELLE

Just two miles out of Galway on the N59 is the **Glenlo Abbey Hotel**. County Galway's only five star hotel. Its real claim to fame is the fact that its restaurant is a coach of the old Brighton Belle train. Parked just outside the hotel building, **Coach Leona** has been restored to its former glory. It's really strange to see something so familiar in this setting.

Getting to Galway is reasonably easy; there is only one direct flight with **Aer Arann** from Luton to Galway. From Gatwick **Ryanair** flies to Shannon and **Aer Lingus** to Knock, both about an hours' drive from Galway.

They have just opened a new motorway linking Galway and Dublin so you can now drive the 200km in under two hours.

We are grateful for the fantastic assistance of **Tourism Ireland** for organising and advising us on this trip.

www.galway-ireland.ie
www.theghotel.ie
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