HOW TO TRAVEL BETTER

We tackle the task of building a better trip by delving into topics large (how to be a more socially responsible traveler) and small (how to pack a hat). Along the way, you’ll find advice on getting married at sea, staying fit on a cruise, and keeping your data safe, plus our favorite travel products, tips, and tricks. Dive in, and we hope you’ll emerge with some useful advice — and some inspiration too.

CONTENTS

• Packing 88-94
• Visas 96
• Travel Products 96, 98-99
• Air Travel 100-105
• Apps 101
• Weddings at Sea 106
• Cruise Fitness 108
• Technology 110
• Fashion 112, 114-115
• Tipping 113
• Fragrance 113
• Food & Dining 116-120
• Responsible Travel 122
• Really, Really Cool Trips 124

*FEATURE ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOSIE PORTILLO*
HOW TO
SPORT LIKE AN
IRISHMAN

Learn the art of manor-born heritage games on the Emerald Isle. BY ELAINE GLUSAC

A STIFF SPRING BREEZE FROM GALWAY BAY, 30 MILES SOUTH, licks whitecaps atop Lough Corrib, dark even under the brightest of Irish skies. My fishing guide, or gillie, as the Irish call them, turns his polished larchwood boat downwind, facing the storybook thirteenth-century Ashford Castle. Salmon have just begun migrating back from the vast Atlantic to the mouth of their natal River Cong, where they will run a gauntlet of anglers, beginning with us, hoping to hook one before they stop feeding to spawn. Hours of peaceful trolling ensue, mostly in silence—a rare meditative state in a country better known for small talk and big boasts—which is abruptly broken by a sharp tug on my line and a victorious 15-minute fight.

As I reel in an 18-pound Atlantic salmon, word spreads down the swift river, over the rolling meadows, and into the nosy towns surrounding the castle. Stepping ashore, I learn there are few finer ways to impress an Irishman than to outfish him.

“Plenty of people around here have been trying and never caught anything close,” vows the courtly doorman of the castle-turned-hotel, stopping me as I enter.

“You’re a celebrity now,” affirms the barman, delivering a pint of Smithwick’s with new warmth, closeted yesterday. “There’s been feisín not staying here come in to ask about the lady who caught the fish.”

Nice as it is, the renown is bycatch on a time-arrested afternoon at Lough Corrib, scripted to school me in the ways of the countryside and the wiles of Irishmen.

In an age consumed with history—from vintage cocktails to period dramas such as Downton Abbey—Ireland evokes a rugged sense of tradition in pastimes that never faded, such as fishing and shooting, as well as those more recently revived, including falconry and archery. Irish manor hotels newly eager to show off their gentility trumpet activities beyond daily garden walks and nightly five-course feasts. A history-degreed outdoor fanatic, I signed on for a week of lessons in playing like a noble, learning not just to hook, fire, and aim like the landed, but to charm, drink, and lie like a local.
Clockwise from top left: A Harris’s hawk at Ballyfin, Ashford Castle transport, archery accoutrements, and Sheen Falls Lodge’s weapon of choice.
FALCONRY
How to befriend a falcon

The practice of falconry (flying trained raptors) volleys between visceral intimacies with sharp talons and purposeful beaks and a gentle walk in the park with a pet.

Eoghan Ryan of Kingdom Falconry arrives at a stone grotto on central Ireland’s 600-acre Ballyfin estate with owls, kestrels, and hawks magically stowed in his squat Fiat. He represents the latest in a line of falconers dating back to the Middle Ages, when traders and crusaders visiting the Middle East brought falconry west, where it was adopted by hunters and nobles. Nests of goshawks, known as “cook’s hawks” for their accuracy with small game, were noted as assets on estate maps from Britain’s seventeenth-century Irish conquest. As status symbols, birds feathered the social spectrum: Peregrines were reserved for princes, kestrels for knaves.

The advent of firearms simplified hunting. Estate shooting parties commonly targeted hawks, then considered pests, and falconry virtually vanished. But over the past ten years, the reintroduction of the golden eagle to Ireland renewed interest in birds of prey, and the breeding of easy-to-handle Harris’s hawks, imported from the southwest United States, prompted a proliferation of falconry centers, according to the Irish Hawking Club.

Uncaged from the Fiat, Sally, a Harris’s hawk, flies to the bough of a spreading beech as Ryan and I set off on a “hawk walk” through the woods.

Pinching a scrap of beef tongue under my gloved thumb, I hold it high for her. Sally’s approach is low, then angles sharply, her outstretched wings grazing my cheek as she stabs at the bait while landing. Though untethered, she doesn’t chase rabbits, at least not today. The supplied food quells her predatory instincts, and instead we exercise her like the aerial version of a dog, allowing her to fly into the shady trees between feedings.

“Falconry gave us terms like ‘hoowieden,’ from the mask used to blind birds,” says the clearly besotted Ryan, gently stroking Sally. “There’s something beautiful and calming about birds.”

THE HOTEL: Falconry has a fitting home at the historic manor house Ballyfin, reopened in 2011, after a decade of careful restoration, as a 15-room hotel filled with period art and antiques. A new indoor pool and spa provide a modern complement to its well-stocked library and costume collection for period dress-up dinners. Doubles from $1,400, including meals, nonalcoholic beverages, and gratuities, plus afternoon tea for two or a bottle of wine with dinner; falconry, $953 for 3 to 30 people.

OR TRY IT HERE: The 69-room K Club, set on 550 acres in County Kildare, offers a falconry menu that includes appearances by owls, golden eagles, and kestrels. Guests can also fly-fish on the River Liffey, shoot clays, and ride horses. Doubles from $275, including breakfast daily and a $100 resort credit; falconry, $340 for two people for 90 minutes.
ARCHERY
How to hit a bull’s-eye

Patsy Cronin, my septuagenarian archery instructor at County Clare’s imposing Dromoland Castle, is all business, driving us in his cluttered Toyota Corolla 50 yards across the hotel lawn to reach the resort’s archery target. The castle’s sixteenth-century crenellated towers once gave archers a defensive advantage and now play backdrop to bowmen’s fantasies.

Buttoned into a gentlemanly tweed jacket and holding a quiver of six arrows, Patsy instructs me to thread one into a substantial plastic bow, then pull it back evenly and peer down the shaft, aligning its metal tip with the bull’s-eye tacked to a large hay bale about ten strides away. Straining, I miss wide. There’s no comfort in Patsy’s voice as he tells me to hold steady and try again.

Since the Paleolithic era, archery has been a weapon of war and the hunt. When rifles made bows obsolete, archery became a sport, celebrated by kings and commoners alike. Today, it’s an Olympic event, a hunting challenge, and, as a resort attraction, pure novelty.

“Archery is popular with Americans,” Patsy explains as he pulls arrows from the hay, tallying points assigned to each concentric target ring. He personally prefers shooting, but says visitors “want to do things they wouldn’t have the chance to do at home.”

I eventually find my range, but Patsy remains critical: “You have a bad habit already of moving your left hand when you shoot. It’s like you want to help it.”

Still, my high rounds are 39, 37, and 36 — respectable, apparently. “Lots of people score a round of 32. Some miss the target altogether,” he offers as we stow the bow in the back of the car for the ridiculously short ride back to the castle door.

“You were pretty good, for a beginner,” he nods in paring warmth, which I chalk up as a personal bull’s-eye.

THE HOTEL: Ancestral home of the O’Brien clan, Dromoland Castle Hotel & Country Estate now houses 113 recently refurbished rooms, each with high ceilings, Louis XV-style furnishings, and unique decor. Diversions include falconry, lake fishing, and 18 holes of golf on its 450-acre grounds. Doubles from $387, including breakfast daily and a $100 dining credit; archery, $52.

OR TRY IT HERE: Mount Juliet manor near Kilkenny in the southeast offers traditional archery on its forested grounds to archers as young as age 6. A Jack Nicklaus golf course, equestrian center, and lake and river fishing provide a full spectrum of on-property sports. Doubles from $328, including breakfast daily; archery, $45.
CLAY PIGEON SHOOTING
How to shatter clay prey

Avid hunter and part-time auctioneer Donal McCarthy, my shooting guide at Sheen Falls Lodge in County Kerry, doffs his earphones and ducks into the wooden hut that serves as the shooting range headquarters in a forest thick with pines and hardwoods. We've driven safely out of earshot of the riverside lodge to this remote thicket among its 300 acres. From a gravel clearing, we've been shooting neon-orange clay targets, or "pigeons," launched mechanically into the air above the trees by McCarthy when I shout "Pull!" The idea is to track the moving object — an eco-friendly understudy for a game bird—down the barrel of a 12-gauge Beretta pressed against my shoulder and tilted skyward. With one eye closed for focus, I repeatedly squeeze the trigger, and the shotgun slams backward into my shoulder (a tennis-ball-size bruise will soon mark the spot). I've nicked a few targets, but suspect my talents lie at the latter end of the hunter-gatherer continuum.

McCarthy emerges from the shed with two stiff Irish coffees and hands me one.

"It usually improves the shooting," he says, in toast.

On the next round, a double launch in which the shooter must squeeze off two shots in quick succession, I shatter the pair on the second attempt.

"A double is excellent!" he yells as the smoke clears, offering me a complimentary second box of 25 shells in encouragement. But I decide to quit, before the whiskey wears off.

THE HOTEL: Just before it empties into Kenmare Bay, the River Sheen cascades in front of aptly named Sheen Falls Lodge. All of its 66 rooms have water views, and several also overlook a circa 1777 stone-arch bridge. Its grounds include gardens planted in 1861 to welcome Queen Victoria, and a resident gillie guides fishing outings on the river and in the highlands. Doubles from $340, including breakfast daily and a bottle of wine on arrival; clay pigeon shooting, $88.

OR TRY IT HERE: In addition to its famous links course, the 189-room Trump International Golf Links & Hotel in Doonbeg on the coast of County Clare offers clay pigeon shooting in view of the sea, as well as archery and more contemporary pastimes such as surfing and yoga on the beach. Doubles from $391, including breakfast daily and a $100 dining credit; clay pigeon shooting, $67 with a minimum of six people.

Smoking guns, serene setting, and an early start shooting clays at Sheen Falls Lodge.
SALMON FISHING

How to earn an Irishman’s respect

Where Lough Corrib meets the River Cong in County Mayo, fish — namely Atlantic salmon and brown trout — abound. Catching one, of course, is another matter, one I entrust to second-generation gillie Frank Costello, whose grandfather once managed Ashford Castle’s farm, then owned by the Guinness family. When he tells me that returning salmon lose their appetite while their physiology changes to accommodate freshwater, I believe him, mostly because he doesn’t waste words. I come to think of Costello as “The Quiet Man,” both for the classic 1952 film made on the property and his calm demeanor, smoothed over 20 years of professionally trolling and casting on these waters.

Fishing, we agree, is meditation disguised as sport, disturbed by rare minutes of frenzied activity, all the better to appreciate the mallard family paddling past, the osprey circling overhead, and the magnificent Anglo-Norman castle on shore. After nearly two soft hours of listening to the water lap the boat, my quarry falls for the artificial spoon lure and exhausts us both regretting it. Later I learn it’s the second-largest fish of the season — I’m just behind the butcher in nearby Cong, who got a 20-pounder.

“Tell him you got 21,” winks Costello. “He lies about his anyway. By next year it’ll be 30.”

THE HOTEL: Set on 350 acres near Galway, the crenellated, multistoried Ashford Castle was founded in 1228 as a stronghold of the de Burgo family. With 83 regal guest rooms, the property is undergoing an extensive renovation this year.
Guests can explore the property's sunken gardens, wooded trails, and riverside paths on horseback, bicycle, or foot. Doubles from $615, including breakfast daily and a massage once during stay; fishing, $245.

OR TRY IT HERE: Near Killarney National Park in County Kerry, the 74-room Aghadoe Heights Hotel and Spa overlooks Lough Leane, the largest of the three Lakes of Killarney, where it offers guided trips to troll for salmon and fly-fish for trout. Doubles from $325, including breakfast daily, a private whiskey tasting, an Irish cheese board and wine upon arrival, and a $100 spa credit; fishing, $130 for a half day.  

- Endless vistas so dramatic they will take your breath away
- Awe-inspiring scenic beauty, magnificent glaciers and abundant wildlife
- Authentic, one-of-a-kind experiences and people

tip

"At Ashford Castle, introduce yourself to Paddy Costello, the legendary doorman. He’s been there for 37 years and will tell you immediately if you have any Irish relatives."

— Martha Gaughan, travel advisor, Atlanta

This celebration... I will always remember.

An exclusive yacht experience perfect for birthdays, anniversaries, weddings and other special occasions.

With only 112 guests, 95 award-winning crew, 5-Star cuisine and inclusive fares...

It's yachting, not cruising.

Experience the difference.

Please contact your Virtuoso Travel Advisor for Information and Reservations.

VIRTUOSO
PREFERRED