



A five-star Red Carnation Hotels luxury stay, Ashford Castle has stood on the shores of Lough Corrib for more than 800 years.





# Go Ireland

**EXPERIENCE TRADITIONAL  
IRISH SPORTING ADVENTURES  
AT LUXURY HOTELS**

*Story by* • **KIT BERNARDI**



**IRELAND'S RICH, COLORFUL HISTORY** and the Irish people's passionate connection to nature and living off the land are tightly intertwined like an ancient Celtic knot. Centuries-old legends and myths tell of heroic hunts, fishing adventures and championship horse races to win hearts and kingdoms.

Today, visitors can enjoy outdoor sports steeped in Irish history, culture and lore at three luxury, five-star historic hotels in the west of Ireland—Ashford Castle, Glenlo Abbey Hotel & Estate and Cashel Palace.

From exclusive fly fishing, clay shooting and archery, to falconry, horseback riding and Thoroughbred racing experiences, skilled experts guide guests in Irish “country pursuits.”

Guests enjoy beautiful gardens and many outdoor sporting activities on Ashford Castle Estate's 350 acres.



## ASHFORD CASTLE

### COUNTY MAYO

A winding lane threads through dense woods and over the six-arch limestone bridge spanning River Cong to the turreted gatehouse guarding stalwart Ashford Castle, which was built in 1228. You have entered a huntsman's fairytale, indeed.

The 83-room Ashford Castle hotel, surrounded by 350 acres, is consistently ranked as one of the world's premier luxury stays. The hotel's recent renovation and additions include Ireland's first *Forbes* five-star spa so named in 2023, wine-tasting tunnels, a boutique and a private 32-seat cinema.

In 1715, the Browne and Oranmore families, who established the estate, built a French chateau-style hunting lodge addition and planted trees to create a perfect habitat for woodcock, a migratory bird that settles in Ireland during the winter. Woodcock is an Irish hunter's favored winged quarry.

Sir Benjamin Lee Guinness, as in the famous Irish brewing family, purchased the estate in 1852 and

expanded the castle's buildings and grounds. His son Arthur Edward Guinness, also known as Lord Ardilaun, hosted numerous shooting events, some attended by British royalty. The January 1910 Guinness Woodcock Shoot is famous for the record it still holds for the most woodcock shot in a single day—228 birds by seven guns. In 1939, Noel Huggard bought Ashford Castle turning it into a luxury hotel.

Today's guests enjoy clay shooting, fishing, archery, bicycling, paddling, boating, horseback riding, tennis and golf. Also, a variety of guided strolls are offered. A guest favorite is a morning dog walk with the castle's resident Irish wolfhounds and Irish setters. The onsite Ireland Falconry School's instructors conduct hawk walks.

David O'Loughlin, an Olympic cyclist who represented Ireland in the 2008 Beijing summer games, co-owns Ashford Outdoors with his wife Mary, who together run the estate's Adventure Centre, the hub for most sports activities.

Of shooting, O'Loughlin says, “Woodcock, springing teal, rabbit and pheasant are synonymous with the Ashford Castle estate, so our shooting targets simulate wild game typical of the region.”

For a true test of marksmanship, O'Loughlin recommends the “Ardilaun Challenge.” He says, “Guests challenge themselves against a set of 50 birds [clays] on the five-stand course with a leaderboard.”

Fly fishers test their skills in the estate's stretch of the River Cong and 44,000-acre Lough Corrib (“lough” is the Irish word for lake). Frank Costello is Ashford



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Guests of all riding abilities can take lessons and guided trail rides through Ashford Castle Estate's ancient forest and tranquil woodlands.

Castle's internationally renowned fishing expert. His grandfather and father were both Ashford Castle estate ghillies. Gillie is an ancient Scottish Gaelic word referring to a person who attends to someone on fishing expeditions.

Costello takes guests lake fishing for salmon, pike, perch and brown trout from his hand-built 19-foot clinker wooden boat. Experienced fly fishers cast for salmon in the River Cong's tricky waters. "The river is mostly fished while wading, which is quite difficult because of rocks and sudden drop offs," Costello says.

Upon request, Ashford Castle's award-winning chefs prepare guests' catches in the elegant, Waterford Crystal-chandeliered George V Dining Room restaurant named "Best of Award of Excellence" in the 2020 and 2022 *Wine Spectator* awards.

Chris Murphy, director of food and beverage, says, "The Ashford Kitchen celebrates our long, proud tradition of living off the land."

Wild game and ingredients grown in chef gardens and foods foraged from the grounds appear on seasonal menus. Honey from the estate's beehives and wood sorrel flourishing on the forest floor infuse Ashford Castle Drumshanbo Gunpowder Gin.

## GLENLO ABBEY HOTEL & ESTATE

### COUNTY GALWAY

Birds twitter in harmony with the rustling leaves of trees swaying in the breeze. The thwack of a well-hit drive rings across the private nine-hole golf course. Gravel crunches underfoot on walled garden paths. Dips and drips of a boat paddle in peaceful Lough Corrib's water. And the silence of a hawk's wings as the raptor descends, its sharp talons outstretched, to grasp your buckskin-gloved hand. These are the sounds of Glenlo Abbey Hotel & Estate, a country retreat built in 1740 just outside vibrant Galway, a historic port city on the Atlantic.

In the open skies above the 138-acre country estate, master falconer Jason Deasy introduces guests to falconry, the ancient art of training birds of prey to hunt for food for your table. Hunting with raptors

is called hawking. Based on archeological evidence, hawking in Ireland was practiced in 2000 B.C., perhaps even earlier. Guests learn about raptors' stealthy hunting techniques by working with Deasy's birds, all named after *Star Wars* characters.

"Falconry not only teaches patience, which is essential to hunting, but to think like a winged predator, which gives the hunter a unique approach to the quarry," says Deasy, a member of the Irish Hawking Society founded in 1870. "Fundamentals of falconry include positive reinforcement through operant conditioning, and the trust and transparency of that relationship with your birds has a positive effect in life overall."

Deasy tailors falconry experiences based on a guest's comfort with the birds. He starts with small owls, and as guests get used to falconry fundamentals he introduces them to larger species like the Harris hawk, the most social birds of prey as they hunt in groups like wolf packs.



Glenlo Abbey Hotel & Estate's guests relax at this historic, countryside luxury hotel legendary for fine dining, outdoor offerings and five-star Irish hospitality.







Master falconer Jason Deasy (top) introduces Glenlo Abbey Hotel & Estate guests to the fundamentals of falconry, an ancient hunting artform.

“Coolmore Stud is generally acknowledged as the world’s largest Thoroughbred race horse breeding operation.”

While there is no hunting on estate grounds, Deasy hunts with his falcon in the rugged Connemara where there is abundant wildlife, including rabbits and many types of birds, a falcon’s favorite meal.

“My passion is snipe hawking with my Gyr-Merlin hybrid falcon and my Hungarian Vizsla bitch,” Deasy says. “Because the quarry is extremely fast, snipe hawking is falconry’s most difficult discipline, and Vizslas are well suited for it since they are the only dogs bred for falconry since the eighth century.”

Glenlo Abbey Hotel & Estate’s location attracts fly fishing guests staying in the hotel’s 73 finely appointed rooms and individual guest lodges on Lough Corrib’s shores. Jim Riddell, the hotel’s ghillie for 40 years, takes guests fishing on the lake and swift flowing River Corrib. “The plentiful supply of trout, salmon, pike, perch and bream make these waters a heavenly haven for the keenest fishers,” he says,

Guests share fishing and falconry stories over candlelit dinners in the Pullman Restaurant composed of two ornate train cars—one a 1927 Oriental Express dining car. Attentive staff serve craft cocktails in cut crystal glasses and beautifully plated, delicious entrées kept warm by shiny, silver cloche domes.

“We source all of our seafood, oysters and game from purveyors in County Galway and neighboring districts,” Executive Chef Ultan Cooke says. A sure sign of authenticity is the menu’s precautionary note regarding fowl, venison and duck stating, “Game dishes may contain lead shot.”

## CASHEL PALACE

### COUNTY TIPPERARY

Just outside the medieval walled town of Cashel, a limestone outcropping bursts from the verdant plain. Crowning its summit is a skeletal, roofless massive thirteenth-century Gothic cathedral encircled by the cemetery’s lichen-encrusted, carved stone Celtic



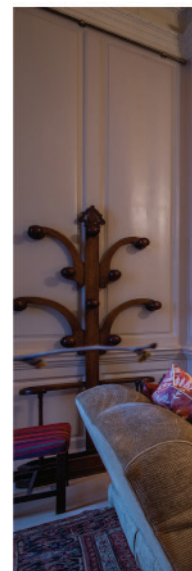
The Pullman Restaurant at Glenlo Abbey serves gourmet dishes featuring local, seasonal foods and the region’s fish and wild game.

crosses. This historic site, called the Rock of Cashel, once served as the seat of Ireland’s High King Brian Boru. In 1101, when St. Patrick converted the powerful King of Munster to Catholicism, the lofty location became one of the world’s most influential religious centers for six centuries.

Today, Cashel is one of the world’s most powerful centers for breeding and training Thoroughbred racehorses. It is in Ireland’s fertile agricultural region called the Golden Vale.

At the venerable Rock of Cashel’s sloping base, Cashel Palace hotel preserves both the town’s fervent religious history and Ireland’s passion for horses. In 1732, the Church of Ireland Archbishop built this Palladian architectural-style manor house, which was a center of religious life for more than 200 years. In 1962, the grand residence became a posh hotel hosting celebrities including Jacqueline Kennedy, Elizabeth Taylor and Diana Spencer before she became Princess Diana.

Cashel Palace recently underwent an extensive restoration and renovation funded by the property’s



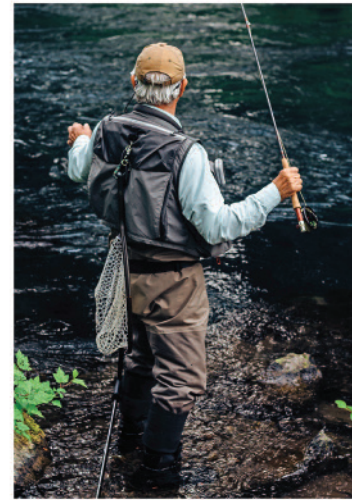
Photos Courtesy: Glenlo Abbey Hotel & Estate, Cashel Palace





The restored and renovated 300-year-old Cashel Palace mansion is one of Ireland's newest luxury hotels located in the heart of verdant Thoroughbred racehorse country.

▶ GO IRELAND



newest owners, the Magnier family, who also own Coolmore Stud headquartered in nearby Fethard. Coolmore Stud is generally acknowledged as the world's largest Thoroughbred racehorse breeding operation. Over the years, their championship breeding stallions have included Sadler's Wells, Danehill, Galileo and, most recently, Blackbeard.

A Relais & Chateau hotel, 42-room Cashel Palace reopened to the public in spring 2022. Its grand entrance's ornately carved wood-paneled walls, corniced ceiling and Corinthian columns are original, as is the intricately carved staircase. Plush couches upholstered in brocade fabrics face massive marble fireplaces. Museum-quality paintings, sculptures and ceramics are based on the Magnier's private collection. Art displayed throughout the hotel depicts country life, landscapes, fox hunts, heated Thoroughbred races and race-day pageantry.

The numerous paintings come to life for guests when they participate in the hotel's activities including ghillie-guided fishing trips on the River Suir, culinary

excursions to regional artisan food purveyors and private horse-centric excursions. The expansive hotel's dedicated equestrian concierge books behind-the-scenes experiences through Thoroughbred Country, a boutique luxury travel purveyor with very strong connections to Ireland's "racing royalty."

Laura Magee, Thoroughbred Country's founder and CEO, has worked in the Thoroughbred industry for more than 15 years. "Whether one's interest lies in breeding, racing, training, education, farriery or bloodstock, our portfolio of exclusive experiences offers guests opportunities to witness and feel the bond Irish people have with their land and their horses," she says.

At 7,000-acre Coolmore Stud, guests walk through Thoroughbred racing's hallowed grounds accompanied by knowledgeable staff. At the world-renowned stud farm's immaculate, royal blue-painted stables, guests are allowed to get within safe proximity of prized, glossy-maned muscular stallions. The private Magnier Family Legacy Museum displays treasured horse racing trophies, champions' saddles, colors and a commemorative exhibit of world-renowned race champion and sire Sadler's Wells.

Open to the public, the nearby, compact Fethard Horse Country Museum delves into Ireland's 2,000 years of horse history, told through interactive exhibits and heart-pumping films of landmark races. Insightful videos of famous jockeys, breeders and trainers explain their roles in Thoroughbred racing.

Back at Cashel Palace, guests unwind at the luxurious spa before dining in The Bishop's Buttery. Smooth flagstone floors, the vaulted ceiling and massive hearth are original from when the subterranean space was the kitchen. Stellar wines and the chef's memorable tasting menu showcase Tipperary's culinary bounty. When it comes time for the much-deserved nightcap, choose from the cozy cellar Guinness Bar, local favorite Mickey Ryan's pub occasionally hosting live Irish music or the guests-only, private Residents Cocktail Bar overlooking the illuminated Rock of Cashel. &



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