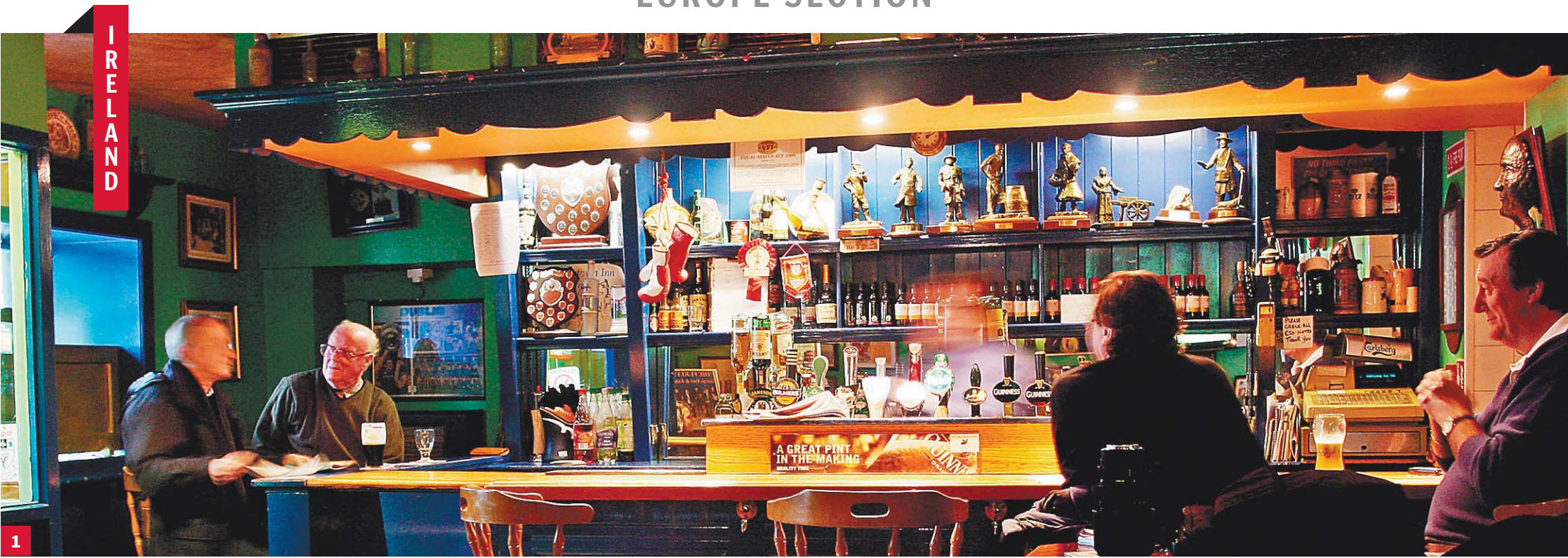
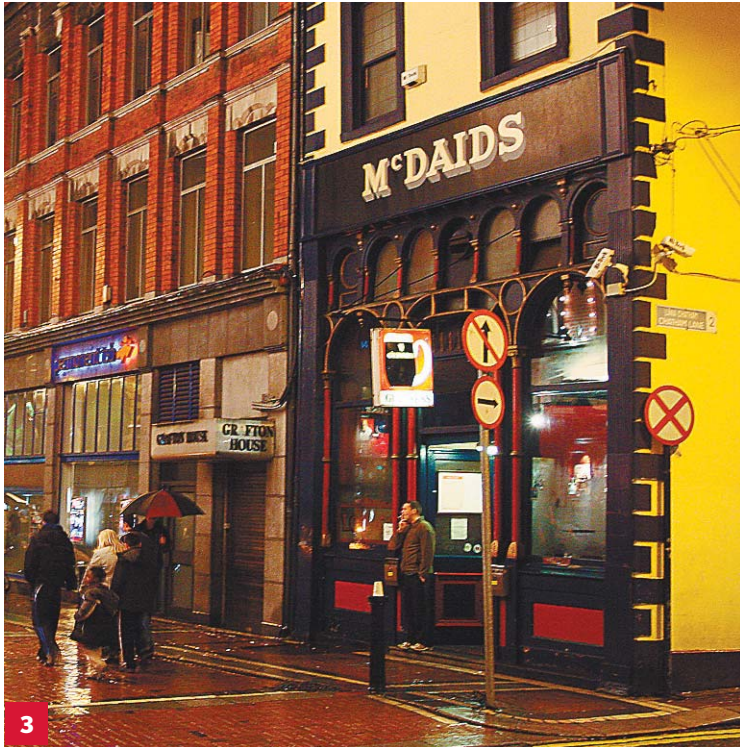


EUROPE SECTION



THERE'S THIS PUB IN ...

LIFT A PINT OR TWO AT A HANDFUL OF THE FAVORITE HAUNTS OF BARKEEPS IN BOSTON



PHOTOS BY PHILLIP MASSEY/WPN/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

By Meredith Goldstein
GLOBE STAFF

In almost three years of writing about night life for the Globe, I have become well acquainted with the venues that are the backbone of the city's social scene: its Irish pubs.

On almost every visit to one of these establishments on assignment — whether it's a Ben Affleck-endorsed tavern in South Boston, a cozy watering hole in Jamaica Plain, or a sleek Irish bar downtown — I have found myself talking to Irish barkeeps happy to tell me about their favorite pubs back home.

"If you ever find yourself in Ireland . . ." they will say, before mentioning the haunts where they first became familiar with

Guinness (or Beamish) on tap and learned how regulars should be treated.

When a friend and I booked a vacation to Ireland this winter, I checked in with these local personalities so that I could see their favorite bars firsthand. What I wound up with was a unique pub crawl.

McDaid's, Dublin

(Recommended by Joe Dunne, owner of McGann's near the TD Banknorth Garden and Lir in the Back Bay.)

When Dunne isn't running his Boston pubs, he's visiting Dub-

IRELAND, Page M4

1 **Speaker Bar**, Celbridge, recommended by Shay Hearn, barkeep at Shenannigans in South Boston.

2 **Lawless's**, Dunshaughlin, recommended by David Cawley, co-owner of the Blarney Stone in Dorchester.

3 **McDaid's**, Dublin, recommended by Joe Dunne, owner of McGann's near TD Banknorth Garden and Lir in Back Bay.

4 **Baby Hannah's**, Skibbereen, recommended by Paul Byrne, owner of James's Gate in Jamaica Plain.

Get off the too-trod path and rent a place

By Kari J. Bodnarchuk
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

PUCKANE — Nestled in the corner of counties Galway, Clare, and Tipperary lies Lough Derg, a 50-square-mile lake that's the second largest in the country. Dubbed "Ireland's pleasure lake," Lough Derg is the Lake Winnepesaukee of central Ireland, an outdoor haven that draws bird-watchers, anglers, and boaters of all kinds.

The villages ringing its shores are home to a mix of new and old, where artists create modern-day sculptures from 4,000-year-old bog wood, and new thatched homes sit next to centuries-old ruins. Here, people still weave scarves by hand, and cows graze on land that has never been artificially fertilized.

Lough Derg's location just 50 to 100 miles from either coast gives travelers easy access to other areas of the country: eastward to Dublin, the capital, on the River Liffey and Dublin Bay; southwestward to the Cliffs of Moher, rising nearly 700

feet above the Atlantic; and farther south to the Iveragh Peninsula with its stunning oceanside drive, the Ring of Kerry, can each be reached on a day trip.

For families and budget-conscious travelers, the area offers plenty of homes for rent. You can spend a week in a thatched cottage with a peat-burning fireplace, several bedrooms, and a full-size kitchen for a reasonable price. Base yourself in a village on the shores of Lough Derg, and you'll soon know the locals from trips to the area's colorful shops, markets, and pubs.

The twin towns of Killaloe and Ballina on the lake's southernmost tip are linked by a bridge with 13 arches and serve as a gateway to the Shannon region. The Lough Derg Cycleway,

COTTAGE, Page M4

You can spend a week in an Irish cottage with a fireplace, several bedrooms, and a kitchen.



KARI J. BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE



PANORAMIC IMAGES

INSIDE

LUXEMBOURG

The capital's quaint Old Town of stately buildings (left) complements its stature as an important member of the European Union. **M8**

AUVERGNE

Here in "backpack France," six hours south of Paris, the many shades of green are outdone only by the hearty, inexpensive fare. **M8**

DURHAM

Wander its cobblestoned alleys to a market and cathedral 1,000 years old in this overlooked English university town. **M6**

BERLIN

Served well into the afternoon, brunch is all-you-can-eat, reflects neighborhood tastes, and perfectly suits a hard-partying city. **M7**

An antique side of Ireland, with ruins and bogs and art

► **COTTAGE**
Continued from Page M1

an 82-mile, relatively easy route circumnavigating the lake, begins and ends at Killaloe. And the Lough Derg Way walking trail passes through town on its way to Dromineer, about 20 miles away and home to one of the oldest yacht clubs in the world.

Stop at the Brian Boru Heritage Centre in the old lockkeeper's house by the bridge and pick up information on the driving loop around Lough Derg. This 78-mile route — along often narrow, twisting roads — takes you past the ruins of old stone churches, castles, and monasteries; to bustling

harbors and quiet villages; and up to lookouts for sweeping views of the lake and green, rolling hills (don't miss the hilltop view from Portroe on Route 494).

Along the way, you can meet hand-weavers, glassblowers, and local artists such as Tony Downey, who creates sculptures of birds and other wildlife out of age-blackened timber. In his studio at Garrykennedy a sheltered fishing and boating hamlet on the lake's eastern shore, Downey uses a band saw and a sander to create elegant wistful shapes out of oak that has been preserved by the area's bogs for millennia.

"This wood has been buried in

the Irish soil through the Bronze and Iron ages, and while the Egyptian pyramids were being built," says Downey. "It's at least 4,000 years old."

The bogs of central Ireland consist of acidic water and compressed vegetation, like heather and sphagnum moss. Over the years, fallen trees have been swallowed by the bogs, which now serve as treasure chests of the past.

"The wood in the bogs is a nuisance to farmers," says Downey, "but as far as I'm concerned, it's black gold."

You'll spot Downey's bog oak sculptures in shops around the region. More "contemporary" treasures can be found at the Antique Centre in Ballinderry, where a sign on the door reads, "Please ring the bell for assistance. The owners of the shop are fairly antique themselves, so please give them time to respond, or go to the house at the back of the shop and shout 'cos we are deaf too!" Here, Denise Shaw sells an eclectic mix of antique mirrors, Georgian furniture, and "the usual bric-a-brac," she says, "but they're fine-quality pieces, not rubbish."

A few steps down the road at Kilgarvan Quay, rumor has it that the local anglers club runs a com-



PHOTOS BY KARI J. BODNARCHUK/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

In summer, a tour boat takes visitors to Holy Island in Lough Derg with its ruins of a seventh-century monastic settlement. Rory Costello, a local fisherman, also takes tourists there.

petition for the biggest fish caught by an overseas visitor. Word is, the trout start biting in May. You'll probably want to rent a boat, or you can try snagging a pike or perch from shore.

Heading north on Route 493, you pass through the village of Ballinderry, known for its dry stone walls, and Terryglass, which twice won the national Tidy Town award, a distinction given to a town each year for its exceptional

landscaping, overall tidiness, and nature-based amenities, among other criteria. While here, stop for a pub lunch in the Derg Inn, famous for its homemade soup and farm-fresh ingredients, then explore the town's ruins: a 13th-century Norman castle with cylindrical towers, and the remains of a 6th-century monastery.

Portumna Forest Park on the northern tip of Lough Derg, near where the River Shannon empties into the lake, has miles of trails for walkers. Wander over to the recently restored 17th-century castle, stroll along the lake, or hike through beech groves and forests of juniper and yew, stopping to climb the lookout tower for a bird's-eye view of the area.

One of Lough Derg's main highlights is Inis Cealtra or Holy Island, on the southwestern end of the lake, which has stone ruins from a 6th-century monastic settlement and what is considered the lushest and most fertile land in County Clare.

This 50-acre, grassy hump has been home to monastic and Christian communities, and a renowned university that once drew students from around Europe. It was repeatedly plundered by Vikings and later became a place of refuge for people practicing ancient, forbidden religions. Religious gatherings were banned in the 1800s and Holy Island was then leased to farmers like James O'Brien, who eventually purchased the island.

O'Brien spends his days here tending his cattle and taking care of the national monuments: an ancient graveyard, a hermit's cell, four stone churches, and a 75-foot-high round tower. Because of its rainy weather and remote location, Holy Island has escaped modern farming methods. The land has never been tilled so it contains organic herbs, grasses, and flowers found in few other places in Ireland, a perfect feeding ground for O'Brien's cattle come summertime.

"Once they go there, like, you know straight away," says O'Brien. "After three or four weeks, they have healthier complexions and the quality of the meat has drastically improved."

In summer months, boats regularly take visitors from the town of Mountshannon to Holy Island, a little over a mile away. Look for the blue-and-white caravan on the Mountshannon pier. Off-season, ask around town and a local fisherman may take you over to the island for a look-see (just keep an eye out for the "Live Bull on Island," as a sign by the dock warns).

Before completing your driving loop, visit the East Clare Heritage Centre in Tuamgraney, just south of Scariff. The center is located in the oldest church still in continuous use in Ireland, the 10th-century St. Cronán's Church, and has tourism information and a seasonal museum that highlights local architecture and historical finds.

If you go . . .

Information

Tourism Ireland

800-223-6470

discoverireland.com

Maps and all kinds of useful information.

Brian Boru Heritage Centre

Killaloe

011-353-061-361511

shannonheritage.com

Provides tourist information and

chronicles the history of Brian Boru, the former high king of Ireland, who drove the Vikings from Ireland in the 11th century.

East Clare Heritage Centre

Mountshannon

011-353-061-921615

eastclareheritage.com

Tourist information on County Clare and Lough Derg, and a seasonal museum.

Where to stay

Rent an Irish Cottage

51 O'Connell St., Limerick

011-353-061411-109

rentacottage.ie

Nearly 40 cottages for rent in Mountshannon, Puckane, Terryglass, and Whitegate from about \$440 to \$1,065 a week.

Tir na Fiuse

Terryglass

011-353-067-22-041

tirnaifiuse.com

Traditional Irish cottages for rent on the Heenan family's organic farm; visitors may help on the farm if they wish.

What to do

Holy Island Tours

Mountshannon

011-353-086-874-9710

eastclareheritage.com

Boat trips to Holy Island, April-September, or by arrangement, adults \$11.75, children \$5.90.

Then wander over to McKernan Handweavers, where Eugene and Anke McKernan use hand and power looms to make scarves out of merino wool, silk, and mohair. They also offer weaving demonstrations and tours of their workshop, where they have all sorts of homemade contraptions.

The McKernans first started weaving more than 20 years ago, using an old farmer's loom from Germany. Now, they have three slick power looms dating to the mid-1860s.

"This is our own industrial revolution," Eugene says. "We're just 200 hundred years late."

Like much of Irish life, the McKernans are simply blending the old and the new, using antique equipment to create modern treasures.

Kari J. Bodnarchuk, a freelance travel writer and photographer, can be reached at travelwriter@karib.us.

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