

5 of the best...

Unusual Places to Stay in Ireland



01

INDOOR BEACHES, HAUNTED BEDROOMS AND PRIVATE FERRIES – ACCOMMODATION ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND COMES IN MANY GUISES, AS TRAVEL WRITER YVONNE GORDON DISCOVERED ON A RECENT DRIVING TRIP AROUND THE COUNTRY

01 INDOOR CAMPING

Do you just love camping and the cosiness of a tent, but worry about the weather? Well what about camping indoors at the Gyreum Ecolodge in Sligo? The Gyreum Ecolodge offers a range of eco-friendly accommodation, from 6-bed dorm rooms to double rooms, but the 14 capsule-like tents in the large round central hall are a popular option, especially for large groups. The tents can be used as

singles, twins or doubles and are chosen by many guests for their privacy and cosiness. The tents have a choice of real or inflatable mattresses and come complete with duvets and pillows. And they are set up around the fireplace where people can meet and mingle – all that's missing is the marshmallows. Gyreum (the name 'gyre' means 'round' in Greek and the '-eum' ending implies 'building' in Latin) is a 100ft-wide round building, described by its creators as a 'discreet hobbit-like edifice'.

It is aligned to the summer and winter solstices and points toward the megalithic cairns of Moytura, Carrowkeel and Queen Maeve's 'tomb' on top of Knocknarea. In the Gyreum, guests can also watch movies on the large screen, relax in the circular hall or read in the glass-domed library. Gyreum overlooks Lough Arrow and has won awards for its eco-friendly tourism.

Co Sligo
gyreum.com

02 INDOOR BEACH

Would you like to stretch out on the warm white sands of the beach, in 36 degrees of heat, hearing sea sounds in the background and feeling the warm glow of the sun on your back, without having to pack or travel too far from home? The Sabia Med indoor beach at Spirit One Spa at the Radisson Blu in Galway is a special light treatment chamber that recreates the experience of a day lying in the sunshine on a beautiful sandy beach – one of

the most enjoyable elements of a holiday in the sun. As you lie on the warm sand, you can relax and breathe in the aroma of a coconut-kissed beach. The highlight of the experience is the relaxing UV and coloured lights, which take you through a meditative dawn-to-dusk light cycle in around 30 minutes. Perfect for lifting the spirits and enhancing well-being, especially on gloomy winter days. Sabia Med is part of the thermal suite in Spirit One which has various areas designed to detox, relax and invigorate the body. These include a laconium, aroma grotto, rock sauna, experience showers, a hamam steam bath and heated loungers. And on the floor below, which has a heated indoor pool, jacuzzi, sauna and steamroom, there is an outdoor hot tub overlooking Lough Atalia.

Co Galway,
radissonhotelgalway.com



03 DOGGIE ROOMS

If the thought of leaving your best friend in kennels while you're away makes you too sad to leave, why not book your pooch into a doggie room at your

hotel? Rathmullan House in Donegal is fully set up to accommodate your furry four-legged friend. The Superior Doggie Rooms each have an internal room for the dog, equipped with doggie beds and dog toys. The dog has access to the gardens and beach through their own patio door and pooper-scoopers are also provided. Rathmullan House is a four-star country house hotel set on the shores of Lough Swilly on Donegal's beautiful Fanad Peninsula. The elegant Georgian house is as well known for its fine dining as it is for its superb accommodation. And as well as seven acres of grounds, there are plenty of nearby woods and golden beaches on Lough Swilly's shores, ideal for long, beneficial dog walks. There's plenty more for dog owners to enjoy too, with an indoor heated pool, steam room, beauty treatments and tennis courts. As well as the pretty village of Rathmullan to explore, there are great drives around the rugged Fanad Peninsula, topped by a picturesque lighthouse at Fanad Head,

with superb views of the Atlantic Ocean and Tory Island – and there are lots of dog-friendly beaches along the way.

Co Donegal
rathmullanhouse.com

04 A GHOST ROOM

Are you brave enough to visit a ghost's bedroom? Many castles and hotels report to be haunted but not all ghosts have their own bedroom. However the Ghost Room at Ballygally Castle is dedicated to the hotel's resident ghost. Ballygally Castle in Co Antrim dates back to 1625, when it was built by James Shaw and his wife Isabella Brisbane. It was built as a place of defence as well as one of residence, hence the French chateau style of the building, with high walls, a steep roof and corner turrets. The Castle's ghost has been around for nearly 400 years and is reported to be that of Lady Isabella Shaw, the wife of Lord James Shaw. Apparently Lord Shaw wanted a son,





and when his wife delivered his heir, he took the baby away and locked her in a room at the top of the castle. When she tried to escape to search for her child, she fell to her death from the tower window. Some say that she was thrown from the window by the cruel Lord Shaw. The ghost of Lady Isabella is supposed to be a friendly ghost who wanders the hallways of the old castle, which opened as a hotel in the 1950s. Over the years, some guests have reported unusual experiences or feeling a presence in their rooms and there are stories of unexplained noises in the night. However the hotel is very proud of its permanent resident and has dedicated a bedroom to her – the Ghost Room – in one of the turrets in the oldest part of the castle. There are 44 bedrooms in the hotel, most in the more modern wing of the castle, so there are plenty of non-haunted rooms for the less brave!

Co Antrim
hastingshotels.com/ballygally

05 A FERRY TO A PRIVATE ISLAND

What about staying on a lush private island in the middle of a lake? It sounds exotic but for this experience you need travel no further than Lusty Beg Island on Lough Erne, at the heart of Fermanagh's lakelands. After driving onto Boa Island and taking a three minute ferry trip, you'll be on this tranquil and relaxing island paradise. Lusty Beg has a range of accommodation, from secluded 5-star self-catering lodges overlooking the lake to rustic rooms at the Courtyard Bed and Breakfast. You can eat and drink at the Island Lodge restaurant and adjoining bar, and guests can also enjoy the tennis court, nature trail, games room and indoor swimming pool. Activities that can be arranged include off-road driving, archery, canoeing and watersports. Lusty Beg actually gets its name from the Irish words for small and fertile. The nearby island, once connected to Lusty Beg by causeway, is Lusty Mor. A stay here is ideal for

exploring the Fermanagh lakelands – as well as Lough Erne and its other islands, there is Belleek Pottery, Castle Archdale Country Park and the Cliffs of Magho in Lough Navar Forest, to explore. To get to the island, visitors drive to a private car park on

the lakeshore and can bring their car over on the tiny ferry. And it really is private – only hotel guests are allowed on the island, making it an extra special escape.

Co Fermanagh
lustybegisland.com

