

1. ARRIVAL OVERSEAS/ON-SITE ORIENTATION:

Upon arrival if accommodations are needed, there are a few different hostels in Galway. I would recommend SleepZone hostel. Reserve in advance! Hostels.com is a good site for online booking, but if there are no availabilities online, phone them directly and they often can find an opening.

NUI Galway had an orientation for international students. It provided information on obtaining a Garda International ID, the documents that are needed, how to register for classes, how to find accommodations, and life in Galway and at NUIG. It was incredibly helpful, clarified many unanswered questions, and is crucial to attend.

2. ACADEMICS:

The structure of academics at NUI Galway are very different than at UW. While there are some larger lecture classes, they are still significantly smaller than the large classes at UW; 100 students maximum. Most of the classes are much smaller; about 30 students. The instruction is similar, in which the professor will lecture in front of the class, however, often they do not use visual accompaniment such as powerpoint like they do at UW. Notes must be obtained solely from the verbal lecture. The structure of exams are also very different. For the majority of classes, the final grade depends on one final essay or one final exam. Continuous evaluation throughout the semester is very rare.

However, despite the differences in how the professors lecture, the content and quality of the instruction is still up to par with the standards of UW. All the instructors I had were very knowledgeable about the course content, engaged during lecture, and really interested in the students learning. Relationships between students and professors was also very similar in which professors had office hours to meet students need for more help and were always willing to answer questions.

The courses at NUI Galway directly relate to UW education. I am a psychology major, and while some of the classes I took in Galway will not count for specific requirements, I still receive UW credit and the courses still apply to my psychology education. Out of 6 classes, half were within my major and were incredibly relevant. The other half were purely based on my other interests and were just at informative and enjoyable. To future students, I would recommend that they do take courses outside of their major; specifically a class relating to Irish history or culture. While many of them are filled with American students, if one does not know much about Irish history, learning about it can definitely make the study abroad experience more enriching and valuable.

3. HOUSING:

I would recommend applying for housing immediately when you learn of your acceptance! The university owned apartments fill up very quickly and there are not very many vacancies. There are several apartment buildings available to students and are a mix of other exchange students as well as Irish students. I lived in Cuirt Na Coirbe; a great apartment only a short walk from campus with friendly apartment mates and neighbors. However, when I applied for housing in May, the apartment room I received was one of two left in all the complexes so I did not really have a choice of where I lived. Fortunately, I found that the apartments are a great way to meet new people and socialise.

4. PROGRAM/EXCHANGE SITE:

The campus is much smaller than UW and very easy to figure out in a short period of time. Similarly to UW, it offers a mix of lecture halls and classrooms, and offers a cafeteria and cafe to eat and study on campus. Galway city is also a smaller city and easy to figure out. In the city center, it is mostly pedestrian and offers lots of shops, cafes, bakeries, and pubs. Outside of the city center are houses, other shopping centers, and a boardwalk along the coast.

5. HEALTH AND SAFETY:

I went to the student health center once during my stay in Galway. The staff were very friendly and the care was excellent. As for the safety of Galway, it appears to be a safe city and generally is, but like in all cities, one must make smart and informed decisions. I would not recommend walking home at night alone; call a taxi that are inexpensive and easily available. I was not aware of any very unsafe areas, but heard that Salthill could be unsafe and one should be wary of their surroundings in that area,

6. CULTURAL ASPECTS:

In Galway, the best way to meet people are through your neighbors and through the nightlife. Through Irish neighbors one will meet their friends, go out with their friends, and meet more people. Going to a pub in Galway is similar to how people in Seattle meet for coffee. Another great way to meet other students is through the clubs and societies that the University offers. They offer a wide range of activities that fit many different interests, and they also offer great casual occasions to meet new people with similar interests.

One cultural difference that is very apparent are young people do not date. Generally, guys do not ask women out to dinner or to the movies when they want to get to know them better. Instead, they will meet the woman out at a pub in a group setting. In addition, another very apparent cultural difference is a sense of time. In Galway, many people are late for classes, appointments, and meetings. However, it is not a sign of forgetfulness but rather a more relaxed way of life.

7. FINANCIAL:

I would suggest opening an Bank of Ireland account which can be opened once a student ID and Garda ID are issued. With this bank account a atm card is issued which can be used only to take out euros from an atm. While American cards can still be used at any store or atm, a fee is charged for every transaction and this can add up over a long period of time.

In Galway, due to the exchange rate and a general high cost of living, living can be very expensive. One can expect to spend about 200euros a month on food, eating out, and nightlife. A good portion of these budget will be spent on entertainment and going to the pubs and clubs.

8. PROGRAM/EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATION:

I thought IPE was very effective and satisfyingly efficient throughout most of the process. Any questions were answered thoroughly and as quickly as possible. However, they give no help finding housing and no warning about how quickly housing fills up at NUI Galway. I would suggest that in the future IPE, if not helping more with housing, at least highly encourage students to find housing immediately after notification of acceptance.

9. PROGRAM/STUDENT TYPE:

The program to NUI Galway is best suited for someone who is looking for an adventure, willing to study hard, and is not afraid to do it alone. I do not think this program requires someone who is very extroverted, and a shy person could do very well. However, one should be excited to meet new people and willing to go out and socialise. It requires the student to be open to new experience, excited about the unknown, and prepared to face the new academic and cultural challenges.

10. OVERALL EXPERIENCE:

Before I went to Galway, Ireland I expected I would have to work hard academically but also would have loads of fun socially. I expected the Irish culture and people to be welcoming and open to meeting new people. After my experience, I feel my expectations were completely realistic. I put the same amount of effort in to my academics, but had an amazing adventure meeting new people at the same time.

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National University of Ireland Galway
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1) Arrival

- a. Accommodation: I stayed in off campus accommodation, "Dunaras Village", self serve apartments reserved primarily for student accommodation throughout the school year. I would suggest for future students to start searching for student accommodation housing as early as possible for the best locations and prices. There is on-campus accommodation or possibilities of renting a room in a house with other students. Most student accommodation is accessible to the university through walking or bus. My housing included a bus shuttle five days a week to and from campus which was very beneficial to my stay. I found my accommodation before arriving, however at the orientation, the university gave resources for students who did not yet have housing to find accommodation.
- b. The orientation was one day but included various optional activities throughout the first week. Orientation was very informative and welcoming with guest speakers from university staff and NUIG students and club members. They encouraged international student participation in off campus clubs and societies. Each international student was given a welcome pack with an academic handbook, which listed all the possible classes visiting students could take, and an orientation booklet which included a variety of recourses and information about housing, health, emergency situations, city life, entertainment options, travel and tourist information, campus and city maps, and many more answers to questions regarding everyday life. This booklet was extremely helpful and organized.

2) Academics

- a. Classroom structure at NUIG compared to UW was very similar with large lecture format with some classes requiring separate quiz sections once a week. My class sizes ranged from 150 students to 10 students, mixed international and domestic students, but due to the limited amount of courses available to visiting students, a large variety of my classes contained (American) international students. Lecturers were very approachable, accessible and understanding of the international student dynamic. The grading was very different from traditional UW grading scale; 70% is considered first class honors, which we were told is the highest and toughest grade to receive, while 40% is passing. Most of the classes grade solely on the final exams or two assignments, which was different for me based on the classes I took at UW. The administration and international office was always efficient in responding to emails and questions, but the administration in general in Ireland, I found, is much more relaxed and at times slower than in the USA. There was only one library on campus significantly smaller than the main libraries on UW campus. There are limited amount of computers, only one floor which contains perhaps 40 computers for the whole student body. It is almost necessary to have your own laptop and not rely on campus computers, as they are usually always in

use. Majority of NUIG campus's building are fairly new or have been renovated in the past 10 years. Buildings, classrooms and lecture halls vary in style and size depending on class size and building department.

- b. The quality and content of instruction was satisfactory. The lecture style is similar to UW but the expectations and reading assignments are different. Some of my classes contained multiple lecturers for one course, allowing students to experience lecturers with different areas of knowledge in one subject and multiple teaching styles.
- c. I would recommend the course "Imagining Modern Ireland: An Introduction to Irish Culture Studies" for students who are interested in learning about not just the history of Ireland, but the past literature, poetry, music and dance of Ireland. It covers three different sections of Irish culture with three different lecturers.
- d. At UW I studied Comparative History of Ideas with a focus on cultural and identities studies. At NUIG most of my classes had a focus on Irish history and Irish, Celtic, and European studies.

3) Housing

- a. I stayed at "Dunaras Village" about 30 minute walk from campus and a 40 minute walk from the city center. I found and paid for the accommodation on my own online before arrival. There are recommendations for student accommodation on the NUIG website for full year or one semester abroad students, but I would advise to look as soon as possible after being accepted into the university for the best locations and prices. The NUIG Facebook group for students provided a lot of international, and domestic, students in Ireland to advertise rooms in shared houses and apartments for rent.
- b. I chose Dunaras because it was said to be a good location close to campus, which was a bit misleading, but a good location between shopping areas, Salthill Beach and the University. The apartment rent also included a free shuttle to campus almost hourly 5 days a week which was a big part of my decision. I wanted to guarantee housing upon arrival and Dunaras was one of the only student housing accommodations with space left, as I applied later than most.
- c. I would recommend housing closer to the city center or campus. Dunaras was satisfactory in some ways, but the domestic students and visiting students are separated in the housing, so there is little interaction with the domestic students.

4) Program/ Exchange Site

- a. Galway: Galway is a very walk-able city. It is small and quaint, but always has places to explore. Salthill promenade is a beautiful walk; I could take a long walk from my housing, to the promenade and straight to the city center. The city bus system is somewhat reliable, but the coach buses allow easy access to tourist places like Kylemore Abbey, the Aran Islands and the Cliffs of Moher. Galway bus station makes it easy to get buses out of Galway to other major cities around Ireland. I always felt very safe in Galway even at night walking with a friend. There is nightlife every night, with music in every pub and some night clubs. There is a daily farmer's market, with the best donuts I have ever eaten, and

dozens of cafes, restaurants and tourist shops. It is easy for all types of people to find their own little “spot” in Galway.

5) Health and Safety

- a. There is a clinic on campus but certain facilities are not free for students and there is the hospital right across the street from the university. Galway is a fairly safe city, and I noticed on campus it is very common for students to leave their bags, laptops and personal belongings out in classrooms and the library without any supervision, yet no one touches it, so possessions seem pretty safe. The Garda police station is near the city center. Walking around at night is safe as well, but of course, it is safer to walk with a friend late at night, and there are affordable taxi's everywhere. Ireland has a lot of mold, so if someone has mold allergies, I would suggest they keep that in mind in their housing and cleaning.

6) Cultural Aspects

- a. Almost all of my classes were mixed with some domestic students, so I was able to have conversations with locals there. The people that lived in my apartment complex were mostly international students and we would occasionally attend social events and clubs like, baking society and film society, which allowed us to interact with other students. Some societies plan international trips and I was able to attend one with the Archeology society to Wales, UK with a mix of domestic and international students. Going into cafés, the city center and Galway's pubs and night life was the easiest way to meet local Irish people.
- b. There was a large amount to Americans studying abroad second semester and it was difficult to meet local Irish students, I tried to find a balance between making sure I did not fall into a routine of staying where I was comfortable by being around what was familiar to me, but still sharing new experiences with other visiting students. Having to adjust to costumer service and time was noticeably different; punctuality of time is different than what I am used to, Irish time is much more flexible than Seattle time. Social etiquette is different than I am used to, from locations such as the grocery stores to ordering food in pubs. It was a learning curve, but it was most helpful to observe locals and how people interact with each other, as well as not being afraid to ask clarifying questions. Even though it was obvious that I was not a local but an international student, people overall were not hostile or unhelpful.

7) Financial

- a. The best way for me to transfer money was to open a Bank of Ireland student account at the university to receive a local debit card, and transfer money from my home bank from Bank of America.
- b. My rent was a deposit (300 euro) and one time transfer payment for the semester of (5 months) before I arrived in Ireland; if the apartment was to go over the electricity bill the tenants in the apartment were notified to pay an extra fee. My roommates and I did not exceed our bills and at the end of stay, we were refunded our deposit. Included bus shuttle from our apartment to campus helped with transportation costs, but if making trips to town by public bus (2 euro one way) or

taxi (about 10 euro to city center), cost was probably around 10-40 euro a month depending on transportation methods in Galway (not including prices for coach buses traveling around Ireland). A lot depends on how often students are going into the city center or going out to eat, rather than cooking at home, and international traveling, but I would budget for food, transportation, housing supplies, and extra spending money in Galway on average to be about 200-400 Euros a month.

- c. It was an expected charge, but the student residence card for international students in Galway studying for more than 90 days was 300 euros. There were not any unexpected charges, fortunately.
- d. I relied heavily on the financial aid reward in Ireland but for the first month (January) I had not yet received my award. I had a small amount money accessible to me at the beginning as I was waiting for the award, but there were complications with the financial reward, which delayed receiving the money for the first 4 weeks or so. There were also complications with my tuition money meant to be sent to the university in Galway which was eventually straightened out late January, but was an unrelated issue to my financial aid. With the time difference from Ireland and Seattle it was very difficult to straighten out the issue through email as to why the money was not being directly transferred to my account, but eventually my mother was able to contact the financial aid office at UW and the issue was sorted.

8) Program/ Exchange Administration

- a. The program in Galway was an Exchange program but the tuition was not directed through UW, rather I arranged tuition payment and housing on my own. The study abroad office responded to emails and questions while I was abroad quite efficiently and satisfactory. The situation with the financial aid office was stressful but was resolved. The company that NUIG university is partnered with to transfer the tuition, located in Chicago, I found to be very unhelpful and rather unprofessional; their guarantee about tuition payment deadlines and communication between me and the Galway university was not held and unreliable. The NUIG University however, was always very patient, understanding and helpful to me when I was stressed about the delayed tuition payment. After dozens of emails between the NUIG University and the company who handled tuition and myself, eventually everything was settled. Even with hundreds of visiting international students, Galway's university international and administrative offices were always efficient, personable and helpful to me, allowing my transition to Galway to be much more relaxed. In terms of IP/E support, I would recommend more support and clarity of the paperwork/ credits needed from the abroad university and what is expected from the students before students leave for study abroad and upon the students' return, discuss the official return paperwork. Upon my return to UW, I felt I was given misleading or lack of information before my departure in terms of credit calculation and communication with the financial aid office.

9) Program/ Student Type

- a. I think this type of Exchange program is for someone who wants to be more independent, likes trying new things, meeting new people, and does not mind being by themselves. I think this program is good for students who want to make international friends, but at the same time, understand there will be times where students need to be comfortable being by themselves and do not mind feeling lonely sometimes, especially at the beginning when trying to adjust to a new environment.

10) Overall Experience

- a. On this program in particular, I went along not knowing anyone which allowed me to be open to meeting all sorts of people. However, I was not aware of how many other American students there would be (400+) while there were significantly less international students (~100) and visiting students' limited options for classes limited the amount of interaction with Irish students. The lifestyle of Ireland was new and the socialization of people was different than what I had expected but I luckily got to travel around Ireland, and was able to experience the touristy and non-tourist areas. Academically, I knew was going to be different than UW to in terms of European grading style and expectations but the lecture format and student to teacher interaction was similar to UW. I expected to meet a lot more Irish students to consider friends, but only left knowing a few. Most of my good friends became other Americans and international students. The first month was somewhat miserable because of how many things seemed to have gone wrong in terms of official paperwork with the universities and financial aid, plus the extreme winter weather conditions I was not used to added to the feelings of frustration and misery. The scenic beauty of Ireland is beyond what I had imagined. Overall, the experience was different than I had pictured, perhaps less romanticized, but better than I could have expected because the experiences and memories I have from my time in Ireland and traveling are unique to me. The memories, whether ecstatic or miserable, are mine and I cannot compare them to anything else or anyone else's experience. I felt very comfortable, safe and content while in Ireland, hardly ever homesick, and made truly great friends I plan on seeing in the future. I would not change or trade the experience for anything. It was everything I wanted and more, I fulfilled a dream to live in Ireland.