



THE ASHFORD ESTATE

County Mayo, Ireland

I was mesmerized from the moment I drove up Ashford Castle's winding driveway, surrounded by a golf course that resembled a sea of rich green velvet. One of the most renowned properties in Ireland, the 800-year-old crescent castle sits along the shores of Lough Corrib, the largest lake in the country. Built in 1228 by the Anglo-Norman House of Burke, Ashford has a storied history of royalty and dignitaries—eventually purchased by Sir Benjamin Lee Guinness as his family's summer home. I may not be a Guinness, but the staff treated me like a queen, always greeting me by name and welcoming me with a gin cocktail blended with elderflower syrup foraged on the estate grounds. —**Margie Goldsmith**

The Stay. The 350-acre estate houses Ashford Castle and The Lodge at Ashford Castle, both with opulent accommodations, wonderful restaurants and pubs, and thoughtful touches like wrilies and jackets for every guest. The sweet fragrance of fresh-cut flowers wafted throughout my Castle stateroom, where a four-poster canopied bed and Connemara marble bathroom felt luxurious yet cozy. A private seating area looked out at the sparkling Lough Corrib—an stunning view that's inspired many writers and artists over the centuries.

The Exploration. Teaming with wild brown trout and salmon, the lake is a fisherman's dream, but for me it was all about a relaxing boat tour. Later, I inhaled the woody air on a guided horseback ride along the ancient forest trails, and a walk with Ashford's huge Irish Wolfhounds, once bred to hunt wolves, in the glush theater. I watched *The Quiet Man*, the 1952 classic starring John Wayne that was filmed on the estate. After swimming laps in the indoor heated pool, I indulged in a soothing massage at the spa, then took a moment to watch the swans glide along the lake.

The Food & Drink. Afternoon Tea in the Connaught Room is a tradition preserved at Ashford Castle since 1868—Lord and Lady Ashford's silver tea set is on display as you dine. The service now comes with a Champagne toasting, which I paired with Guinness smoked salmon mousser and Dorset's crab, followed by freshly baked hot scones with clotted cream and fruit preserves. My formal dinner was in the elegant George V Dining Room: Wild partridge Balkrishne with spiced and truffles, followed by herb-crusted venison. I floated back to my room, where a pair of chocolates handmade by Ashford's Director of Chocolate and Pastry were placed on my pillow, along with an original poem about the grounds.

What I'll Never Forget. Ashford is home to Ireland's first Falconry School, so I knew a private Hawk Walk around the estate with a professional falconer was a must. As we walked through the woods, an enormous Harris hawk followed us from above, flying from tree to tree. I held out my leather-gloved hand and it swooped down gracefully, landing on my fist. Such a majestic experience, it's easy to understand why falconry (once called hawking) is considered the sport of kings. 🦅

📍 **Next Level Stays.** To learn more about these incredible properties, enter OFFER408329 on the website found on the back page, or call or email us for further travel.

Photos: from left, The Falconry School at Ashford Estate; the elegant George V Dining Room; the indoor heated pool at The Spa; opposite: Ashford Castle, circa 1228.

