

Hogan's Alley

Golf & Travel Opinions by Bill Hogan (President of Wide World of Golf)

THE DOONBEG LODGE, SPA & GOLF CLUB – Ireland

GRADE: A+



This fantastic full service golf resort on the bluffs of the west coast of Ireland (about 1 hour from Shannon Airport) is my favorite place to stay in Ireland. I often tell clients it is “five star plus” and quite obviously “the best golf resort in Ireland”, as evidenced by the fact it was awarded “Best European Golf Resort” by the worlds golf tour operators (IAGTO) in 2010.

But don't think of it in terms of mega-American golf resorts. Instead, characterize it as small and quaint, luxurious and exclusive. It is actually quite small by “resort” standards, with just one golf course and a small but very high-end Spa. But the value is great ... five star accommodations and service at a fraction of the price of other “famous golf resorts”.

Dining is headlined by the restaurant in The Long Room, which is not only visually stunning, but the menu, preparation and service are outstanding too. It must be one of the top 3 restaurants in the west of Ireland! For me, however, a 36 hole day on the links is complimented best by some Guinness and Stroganoff in Darby's, their high end pub with views of the golf course. The atmosphere is so contagious that a “quick soup and sandwich” easily turns into a three hour laugh-a-thon.

The Doonbeg Golf Club, often a target of pundits, is actually quite good and certainly a tough links course! It may not be ranked in the world top 100, but I think every golf group should give it a try alongside its links neighbors Ballybunion and Lahinch. It is beautiful, with many holes with views of the sea and towering sand dunes framing many holes. Interestingly, Doonbeg GC is harder than Lahinch or Ballybunion, and I was told by an onsite pro that Greg Norman, who designed the course, never broke 80 from the championship tees! (Warning: don't play those championship tees ... there are some forced carries of over 260 yards.) Grab a caddy or trolley and set off for a most enjoyable day, this is a really good golf course and it is so beautiful that you will need an extra battery for your camera! (Many of my friends play 36 hole days here, due to the fact the course and clubhouse and accommodations are all so close.)

The accommodations are the best in the country, bar none. You can choose from sumptuous ocean view suites (1 to 4 bedrooms!) or economize like I do with my golf buddies, and stay in their fantastic 4 bedroom Golf Cottages. Wherever you stay, the décor and amenities are fabulous. Whereas the décor is classic and elegant, they thought of the little things too, like both US and Euro plugs, premium bath amenities, wireless internet everywhere, high end flat screen TV, and my favorite, the little coffee machines with fresh ground Cuban coffee. Awesome!

Doonbeg was removed from my “bucket list” and now appears on my “mandatory to-do list” every year. I highly recommend it for your group of friends or family too!

Bill Hogan is President of Wide World of Golf and is a Golf Magazine Panelist to rank the World Top 100 Golf Courses. He has played golf in over 50 countries since he began traveling the world in 1981.

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