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Galway, Ireland

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Life in Ireland: Perspectives from an Irish Native and an American Student

The time I have spent in Ireland thus far has been challenging but also wonderful, and a significant part of the positive experiences is due to the people that I have been able to get to know. The Irish are a very kind people, and those I have been lucky enough to get to know have helped me greatly in settling into this new environment. One of those people is Bryna, a girl I met through playing soccer for the university. While all the girls are wonderful, Bryna was one of the first who introduced herself and made an effort to make conversation with me on the first day I played with the team, so when we were asked to interview someone I knew I wanted to talk to her. Bryna is from Clarinbridge in county Galway, although she is a first year student studying global commerce at NUIG. She speaks both English and Irish, which she has been learning since she was 5 years old and in her 1st class primary school. When asked about her plans for the future, Bryna said that in 5 years she has the goal of doing a graduate program in a Dublin firm, specifically focusing on either economics or accounting.

As an Ireland native, Bryna certainly knows the best places to see and things to do. When it comes to being in Galway, she recommends trying out the Front Door, McGinn's, Busker Brownes, and Sisco (the local silent disco) if you are looking for a fun pub night out on the town. As for the food scene in Galway, Bryna suggests Magnetti's, Blake's and DeRoberta's if you are hoping to find a delicious meal. A little outside of Galway city, she also talked about visiting places such as Connemara, specifically Dog's Bay or Clifden if the sun happens to be shining, Quay Street, and the Burren if you are geared up to spend some time hiking outdoors. There are so many wonderful things to do in Ireland,

whether you are visiting or calling this place home. When asked what her favorite parts about living in Ireland are, Bryna said that she loves “the atmosphere and scenery, everyone is so friendly and it feels like a big community wherever you go!”

What surprised me most about the lifestyle, norms or habits of Bryna in comparison to my own was actually how similar a lot of the aspects of her life are to mine. It can be easy to assume that people in other countries are very different from us, but aside from bigger cultural differences, many of the activities and aspects of daily life were similar such as going to school, spending time with friends, hiking and playing soccer. Some cultural differences that we experienced were the way that we spend time with our friends and how we experience university. While there are many ways that time spent with friends is similar between us, there is the exception of the presence of pub culture here that I do not experience back home. It is common for people around my age and younger to go out with their friends on Tuesday, Thursday and sometimes the weekends to the pubs; starting late and staying out until the early hours of the morning. That is something I have never experienced with my friends back home, due to the difference in legal drinking age. As for our experiences at university, the higher education system here is structured differently than back at home. For example, they have a shorter instructional part of the semester but have a field trip week and over two weeks for final exams, one or two essays or exams determine the entire grade for the semester, and a lot of programs are 3 year courses instead of 4. The way Bryna experiences going to college is definitely different than the way I do, but being here for a semester has given me the opportunity to have insight into both systems of education.

Interviewing and just getting to know Bryna throughout the semester has really opened my eyes to a side of Ireland that I don't think I would have gotten to know as well without becoming familiar with people like her who live here. I got to learn about Irish slang, what it was like growing up in Ireland, how students here navigate university and so many other things that make Ireland the unique place it is. For a while at the beginning of my time here I always felt like a tourist, but interviewing Bryna and honestly asking questions of and getting to know other Irish people has made me feel less like an obvious outsider and more like I am in a place that feels homier. This semester in Ireland so far has made me

realize how fast-paced my life often is back in the United States. Not to say I don't love my life back home, because I do, but being here has given me the chance to really slow down and learn how to do new things I never made time for back home because I was always so busy. I have learned even more how to really appreciate the small things, such as a sunny day, a truly good cup of coffee and having time to genuinely rest. With the remaining time I have left in Ireland, I look forward to continuing to make memories that keep growing my love for this country and its people.