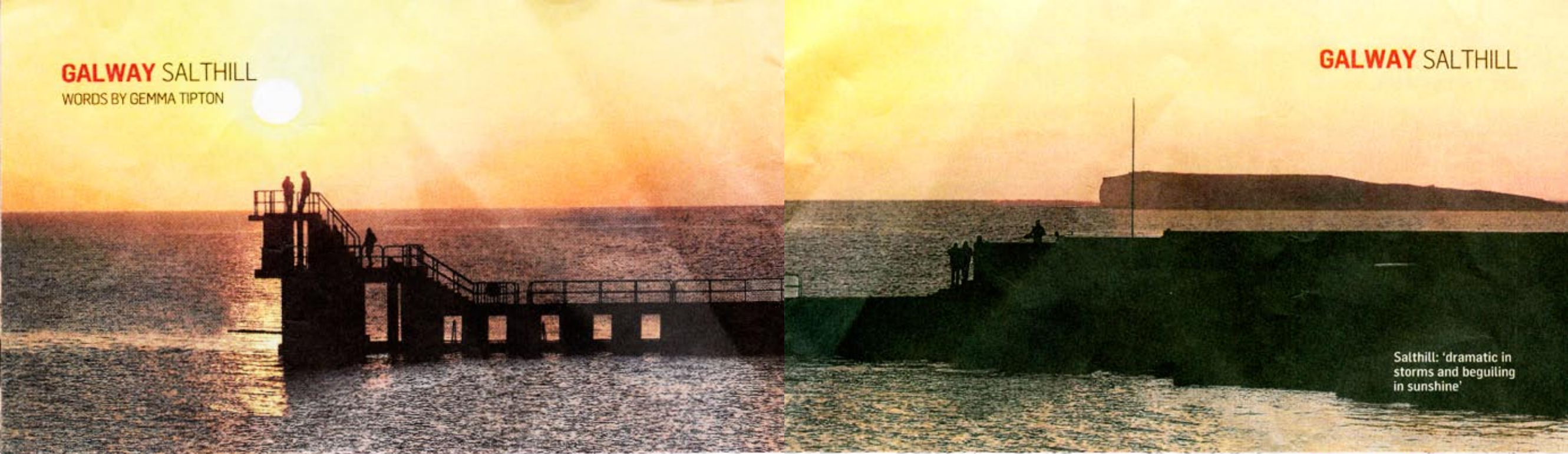


# THE IRISH TIMES

Thursday, June 17, 2010

# GALWAY





Salthill: 'dramatic in storms and beguiling in sunshine'

# On the edge of town

Galway has so much to enjoy beyond what's on offer in the heart of the city – head towards the sea for more great hotels and activities

USED TO think the Dublin-Galway road went through Clarenbridge. As far as my dad was concerned, it did, because Clarenbridge is near where the turn-off for Moran's Oyster Cottage at The Weir is, and what sane person would be within a reachable radius of Moran's and pass up the chance to stop? People have been stopping at Moran's for more than 250 years, and while originally they were fishermen and local farmers, more recent visitors have included Roger Moore, Pierce Brosnan and the emperor and empress of Japan.

"My tongue was a filling estuary," reads the poem *Oysters*, by Seamus Heaney, written for one of the Morans and now framed on a wall. Oysters are what they do best here, though there is stiff competition from their steamed local clams, chowder, other fish dishes and home-baked brown bread.

Michael Moran is the seventh generation of the family to run the place, and tells of growing up watching his father expertly

shucking shellfish. A newer room at the back now caters for even more addicts, though the old snugs at the front are still the nicest, and, on a sunny day, sitting outside at the water's edge is heaven.

Replete, we drive on towards Galway. Galway is nicknamed the City of the Tribes, after the 14 tribes who, in the 13th century, ran the place. The roundabouts skirting the city are named for these tribes, which may explain why there are so many of them. We keep on going until we get to Salthill. Like many seaside towns, Salthill reflects the architectural aspirations of every era and generation that came here to admire the view; so there's



Moran's Oyster Cottage, Kilcolgan

Victorian, Art Deco, and more modern buildings too. The sight across Galway Bay eats up your eyes, and it's one of those places that is dramatic in storms and beguiling in sunshine.

We are staying at the Salthill Hotel – right on the promenade, with fantastic views and a well-deserved reputation for friendliness and service. By our second day, they knew how I liked my morning coffee (strong and lots of it). The rooms are large, the beds comfortable, and the hotel has a leisure centre with a hydrotherapy pool and a 25m swimming pool. There's a welcoming bar with a hint of drama in the decor, plus a restaurant. But I think my favourite part of the entire stay is the home-made cakes and pastries.

After the cakes, it's time for some exercise. The Moycullen Riding Stables are about a 15-minute drive from Salthill. On the edge of the Connemara Bog, all levels of ability can enjoy trail rides on tracks that are ideal for ambling along, but also for the odd thrilling gallop. I go out

with Colm Devaney, an enviably good rider, and we swap horse stories along the way. Sandra O'Donnell runs the place, gives lessons if you want them, and also holds kids' camps. If you have a horse or pony of your own and think they could do with a break, too, Moycullen will also do holiday liveries.

Dragging myself away from the stables, I head back to Salthill – the end of an excellent day, and I still haven't made it to Galway city. Ah well, there's always tomorrow . . .

“Away from the stables, I head back to Salthill – the end of an excellent day, and I still haven't made it to Galway city”

## MAKE IT HAPPEN

- **Salthill Hotel** Offers include B&B from €99. [salthillhotel.com](http://salthillhotel.com)
- **Twelve Boutique** hotel in Barna, another good bet for out-of-the-city stays. [thetwelvehotel.ie](http://thetwelvehotel.ie)
- **Moran's Oyster Cottage** Kilcolgan, for incredible seafood. [moransoystercottage.com](http://moransoystercottage.com)
- **O'Grady's** Barna pier, award-winning seafood in a memorable setting. [ogradysonthepier.com](http://ogradysonthepier.com)
- **Moycullen Stables** Horseriding costs from €25 for a one-hour trek. [moycullenriding.com](http://moycullenriding.com)

## TRY THIS Trad on the prom

"THE TALENT here is incredible!" exclaimed the American beside me as we watched the stage, enthralled. We were at Trad on the Prom, running during the summer at the Salthill Hotel.

The room was packed with visitors from all over the world – sometimes it takes a stranger to remind you of what you're missing, right under your nose. Watching the dancers leap, the fiddle bow fly, and marvelling at the versatility, energy and brilliance of the performers, I wondered why we haven't learned what the rest of the world evidently knows – that, when it comes to traditional music, we're in a league of our own.



The Trad on the Prom ensemble includes Máirín Fahy on fiddle and vocals, together with her husband Chris Kelly on guitar. The couple had toured the world with Riverdance, and Fahy also plays with the Chieftains. They teamed up with multi-instrumentalist Yvonne

Fahy and Gerard Fahy (the Fahys are one of those wildly talented families), who was musical director of Lord of the Dance. They are joined on stage by world champion Irish dancers, including Cian Nolan, the Keaney Brothers, Claire Greaney (pictured left) and many more. If this was the world of pop music, they would all be superstars.

"We got tired of touring the world," explains Kelly. "So we decided to see if we could get the world to come to us."

This is the show's sixth year at the Salthill Hotel, and it's two hours of sheer brilliance. If you ever thought Irish music and dancing weren't sexy and cool, go – and be converted.

For tickets, at €30 each, see [tradonthe-prom.com](http://tradonthe-prom.com) or call 087-2388489.