



THE LOVE IRELAND GUIDE №
005

Pub Etiquette

THE UNWRITTEN RULES OF AN IRISH BAR



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№ 005 — Pub Etiquette

The unwritten rules every regular follows without thinking

The Love Ireland Guide № 005: Irish Pub Etiquette

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Welcome

Walk into an Irish pub for the first time and nobody hands you a rulebook – but there is one, unwritten, and every regular in the room is following it without thinking.

“Get it right and you'll be treated like you've been coming for years.”

This is Guide № 005: the round system, ordering at the bar, tipping (or the lack of it), the snug, the right way to say sláinte, and what happens when you hear the call for "time."

01

The Round System

This is the single most important custom in any Irish pub, and the one visitors get wrong most often. If you are drinking with a group, drinks are bought in rounds: one person buys for everyone at the table, and over the course of the evening, everyone takes their turn.

A person who consistently “forgets” their round is noticed fast.

The system works on memory and trust, not a ledger. Irish pub culture even has a name for someone who skips their turn — a mean round — and it is not a compliment. If you can only stay for one drink, say so up front rather than accepting a round you cannot return.

02

Order at the Bar

In most traditional Irish pubs, you order and pay at the bar — you do not wait for table service, and pulling up a chair without ordering first will not get you noticed.

Walk up, wait your turn (there is rarely an obvious queue, just an understood order of who arrived first), and order directly from whoever is behind the bar. Some larger, more tourist-facing pubs in Dublin and other cities have introduced table service, but it remains the exception, not the rule.

03

Tipping: The Short Answer Is No

Unlike the United States, tipping a bartender for pulling a pint is not expected in Ireland, and offering cash on top of the price will usually get a puzzled look rather than thanks.

“*And one for yourself*” — a gesture, not an obligation.

The traditional alternative, still alive in proper local pubs, is offering to buy the bartender a drink of their own. They may take it there and then, save it for later, or decline with thanks — all three are normal, and nobody will think less of you for skipping the gesture entirely.

04 The Snug

Older pubs, especially ones dating to the 19th century, often have a small enclosed booth near the bar known as the snug – originally built with its own hatch to the bar so occupants could order a drink without being seen from the main room.

Historically, the snug was where women could drink respectably at a time when the main bar was a male-only space, and where clergy, gossiping neighbours, or anyone wanting a quiet conversation could sit unobserved. Snugs are prized seating today precisely because so few of them survive – if you find an empty one, take it.

05

Sláinte, and How to Say It

“Sláinte” (roughly SLAWN-cha) is the standard toast, literally meaning “health” in Irish — the equivalent of “cheers.” Raise your glass, make eye contact if you can, and say it before the first drink of the evening or whenever a round arrives.

You will also hear “sláinte mhaith” (SLAWN-cha WAH) — “good health” — as a slightly fuller version. Nobody will correct your pronunciation, but making the effort is always noticed.

06

Last Orders and “Time”

Closing time is announced, not assumed. Bar staff will call “time” or ring a bell to signal last orders — giving one final chance to buy before the bar closes for drink sales, though patrons already served are typically given reasonable time to finish up rather than rushed out.

Trying to order after time has been called is one of the few things that will genuinely irritate bar staff.

If you hear the call, make your move immediately or accept that the evening is winding down.

07

Myths Worth Retiring

“You have to drink Guinness.” Nobody expects it. Order whatever you actually want — pubs are as much a social space as a drinking one.

“It’s rude to leave before your round.” It is rude to accept a round and then leave before buying yours — but saying upfront that you can only stay for one drink is completely normal.

“Strangers won’t talk to you.” The opposite is usually true. Striking up conversation with whoever is next to you at the bar is normal and often welcomed.

08

A Short Glossary

The round – One person buys for the whole table; everyone takes a turn over the course of the evening.

The snug – A small enclosed booth near the bar, historically used for private or discreet drinking.

Sláinte – The standard Irish toast, meaning “health” – roughly SLAWN-cha.

“And one for yourself” – An offer to buy the bartender their own drink, as thanks rather than a tip.

“Time” – The call or bell signalling last orders before the bar closes for drink sales.

09

Frequently Asked Questions

Do you have to buy a round if you're only having one drink?

No – just say so before the round starts. “I’m only stopping for one, don’t count me in” is completely normal.

Is it okay to sit at the bar alone?

Yes, and it is one of the easiest ways to fall into conversation with locals.

What does “and one for yourself” actually mean?

An offer to buy the bartender their own drink as thanks for good service – they may take it, save it, or decline, and all three are normal.

Do you tip in Irish pubs?

Not in the way North Americans expect – rounding up or “and one for yourself” is the closer local equivalent.

What should I say when a round arrives?

“Sláinte” – raise your glass, make eye contact if you can, and say it before the first sip.

One Million Irish Hearts

Every year, this community grows a little closer to a real milestone: **one million people who love Ireland**, joined together by St. Patrick's Day 2027.

Help fill the map

Our live interactive map of Ireland fills in, heart by heart, as more people join the free Love Ireland newsletter.

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GUIDE № 006 — COMING SOON

Sources: Irish pub customs and the round system, the history of the snug, and Irish toasting conventions per established public record and widely documented Irish cultural practice.