

Cruise & Fish Ireland 03

FISHING and cruising on Ireland's River Shannon or Erne is a brilliant holiday idea. Apart from sailing on the relatively quiet and beautiful rivers system and through a chain of awesome lakes, this is a rare opportunity to explore backwaters brimming with fish where you can pre-bait, safe in the knowledge that nobody else will be on the peg in the morning!

But it takes planning otherwise you will end up dashing here, there and all over the place. Choose your fishing first. For instance bream, roach and hybrids, will be found along the entire Shannon-Erne Waterway from Killaloe in the south right up to Belleek on the most northerly section of the Erne.

When it comes to tench, they are more likely to be caught in numbers from Lanesborough, downstream to towards Limerick, and it's much the same when it comes to getting the biggest pike.

Where do you start?

The Shannon-Erne Waterway is Europe's longest navigable leisure waterway at 570 kilometres and there are about 20 cruise hire companies with harbours all along its length.

On the Shannon, the best known are Killaloe, Lough Derg, Banagher, Athlone and Carrick-on-Shannon; while on the Erne there are several around Enniskillen Town and on Lower Lough Erne



Choose your boat carefully.

It is essential to have an after-deck (that's the open space at the back) so that you can enjoy a bit of fun fishing and use the open space for storing the tackle boxes.

Ensure the cabins provide a single berth for everyone it's a lads-only fishing trip and the number one priority is to upgrade the towed boat - called a tender - to one that is at least 12ft long.

The extra boat is absolutely essential for carrying angler and tackle to the shore for fishing, for pre-baiting of an evening and even for fishing from - so organise it at the time of booking.

Carrick Craft – one of the best known cruise companies - provide them at no extra charge for anglers and they also provide complimentary plug-in bait fridge, supplied with an extension cable means it can be left outside on the deck of the boat and takes at least a gallon of maggots.

What about bait?

Bait should also come into your holiday planning because Irish Angling Services have bait stockists throughout Ireland and several are within easy reach of the Shannon and Erne. The best idea is to get a bait order form and compare it with a map of the area you intend to cruise-and-fish.

Worms are not a problem and a top catching bait anyway - do remember to pack them in damp shredded newspaper - and the obvious choices are corn, meat, pellet, hemp and bread.

Don't forget to order a couple of sacks of brown crumb at the bait stockist nearest to the marina, so that you can collect it before sailing off into the sunset.

Who does the washing up?

Unlike being land-based for a fishing holiday, a stag party afloat needs careful thought so that each person has daily responsibilities such as (in order of priority): looking after the bait and tackle storage; ensuring the beer stocks are up to the mark; food and milk; keeping the boat tidy and nominating a captain for the day.



Sailing is part of the trip.

There are no electric plugs in the *Fields of Athenry*, or anywhere else on the Shannon-erne, so the boats run on batteries and that means they have to be sailed at some time during the day to keep them charged.

It's another reasons for careful planning and some thought as to where and when the actual fishing should be done.

My suggestion would be to arrive at a chosen destination by about 2pm and sort out the number of swims needed by plumbing the depth - the rowing boat is ideal for this purpose. The Shannon and Erne systems are rarely busy with cruisers, but it is still wise to choose spots away from the main navigable channels.

Pre-bait after marking the spots with pike float or plastic bottles and then fish in to dark for the best sport of the day.

Get up early the next morning and have a serious session then pack up mid-morning go for a sail. You might even take turns, with two staying on the bank for a full days bream bashing while the other two charge the batteries and do the shopping!

Appeared in Angler's Mail

Book your next Irish angling holiday with the specialists – 0151 342 4744

active irishangling.com