



Cinema costs

Consumer Choice looks at cinema admission prices, and at the scary prices consumers are charged for popcorn, drinks and other extras.

There has been no shortage of Hollywood blockbusters and high profile 3D movies in cinemas of late, and this has contributed to an increase in cinema admissions in Ireland. The first three months of 2010 revealed a year on year increase of 1.2% in cinema admissions, with 1.5 million film fans visiting Irish cinemas in the month of March alone. This will not come as a surprise to the film industry – it has always been claimed that more people visit the cinema during a downturn - and when compared with a night spent in the pub or dining out, a trip to the cinema puts far less of a strain on your finances.

Our survey: admission prices

Consumer Choice investigated whether the cost of a cinema trip is really that reasonable once the extras are added in.

Peak time in some cinemas is after a certain time, usually from 5pm or 7pm on weekdays. In Cineworld in Dublin, peak time is after 5pm Monday to Friday and all day Saturday and Sunday. In other cinemas, the peak admission prices are only charged for late evening showings on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

We noted the price of an adult ticket at peak and at off-peak time, the student price at peak time (some cinemas charge

students the same price no matter when they visit) and the OAP charge. We also noted the highest charge a child can expect to pay at the cinemas we surveyed. Prices were checked in May and June via telephone booking lines, websites and cinema visits.

Extra charges

As can be seen from the table, the price of admission at peak times has passed the €10 mark in some Dublin cinemas. If you add in other extras such as charges on credit card bookings, 'premium seats' and 3D films, the prices are raised again. Premier seats in UCI Coolock cost €1.70 over standard admission prices, while online/telephone booking fees ranged from €0.50 to €0.87 per ticket in different cinemas.

3D has been the buzzword in cinemas in the past year but, if you wish to see a film in 3D, be ready to pay a surcharge of anything from €1 (adult, Dundrum) to €2.25 (adult, Coolock). The 3D surcharge is usually lower for children. However, the surcharges add up and you may have to pay more for 3D glasses if you don't have a pair that you can recycle. In Cineworld in Dublin, adults are charged €2.10 extra for 3D films and children €1.50. If you don't already have 3D glasses they must be bought

separately for €0.80 per pair.

Food and drink

Our researcher visited a number of Dublin cinemas and checked their menu boards for details of popcorn, sweets, drinks, water and ice-cream prices. The ways 'small' portions are priced usually make the larger portions more appealing in terms of price. Consumers can trade up from a small or medium size to a large portion for very little but in doing so can potentially double the calories consumed. This makes it easy to overeat at the cinema and we would prefer to see small portions starting at a more reasonable cost.

Most cinemas offer combinations or share deals which make some items cheaper, though the portion sizes are so large that it would make more sense to buy large and share rather than buying more than one of any item. VUE in Liffey Valley offers a regular drink and regular popcorn for €9.20 – the total for the two items if paid for separately would have been €9.75. A large drink and large popcorn deal is priced at €9.85 – separately the cost would be €10.35 so the savings are not very impressive. For most of the meal deals we saw, customers saved only about €0.30 or €0.40, and none offered a saving of

AT A GLANCE

Admission prices.

Extra charges.

Special offers.

CINEMA FOOD AND DRINK PRICES (€)

| Cinema | soft drink L/R/S | popcorn L/R/S | ice-cream | pick n' mix 100g | large bag sweets | large bag chocolate sweets |
|---------------------------|------------------|----------------|------------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| VUE Liffey Valley, Dublin | 4.25/3.95/3.65 | 6.10/5.80/5.35 | Haagen Daz 100ml 3.45 | 1.90 | 3.65 | 5.00 |
| Movies@Dundrum, Dublin | 3.85/3.50/3.00 | 5.70/5.20/4.70 | Ben & Jerry 150ml 3.00 | 1.65 | 3.50 | 3.50 |
| Cineworld, Dublin | 4.40/4.00/3.50 | 6.10/5.60/5.00 | Ben & Jerry 150ml 3.85 | 1.85 | 3.40 | 3.40 |
| Savoy, Dublin | 3.70/3.20/2.60 | 5.00/4.50/4.00 | Ben & Jerry 150ml 3.85 | 1.60 | 3.20 | 3.20 |
| Screen Cinema, Dublin | 3.70/3.20/2.60 | 5.00/4.50/4.00 | Ben & Jerry 150ml 3.50 | 1.60 | 3.20 | 3.20 |

Note: L/R/S large/regular/small

much more than €1.

Feedback

We contacted the major cinema groups and asked them to explain why the prices of popcorn, sweets and drinks in their cinemas were so high. We also asked whether they offered free drink and popcorn refills, and whether customers are allowed to bring their own food and drinks into the cinema.

The only cinema that responded to our queries was VUE (VUE has a cinema in Liffey Valley Shopping Centre in Dublin). They said: "It is a generally well-reported fact that the majority of the money taken at the box office goes to the film maker/distributor; therefore, in order to make cinemas a viable business all cinemas charge premium prices for the food and drinks sold. The alternative is to charge a higher price for tickets which would restrict more people from enjoying the cinema." However, it was pointed out that there are a variety of meal combos and special offers available for customers. The cinema allows customers to bring their own food and drink into the auditoriums with the exception of hot foods, foods purchased from other restaurants or alcohol. However, they do not offer free refills of retail items once purchased.

Avoid the extras

Weekend nights are usually the busiest time for a cinema and therefore they are the most expensive time to purchase tickets. Most cinemas show films during the day at a lower cost. The added bonus is that cinemas are much quieter at these times and you can choose your own seat. Also, always look out for special offers at your local cinema – most offer cheaper off-peak tickets and reductions for mother and baby, students and seniors. The Eye Cinema in Galway has a 'Student Ruby Tuesday' for screenings before 8.30pm on Tuesdays for which they charge only €4.00 while the Gate Multiplex Cinema in Cork shows early

CINEMA ADMISSION PRICES (€)

| | online/phone booking fee per ticket | peak (adult) | off-peak (adult) | child | peak (student) | OAP |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|------------------|-------|----------------|-----------|
| DUBLIN | | | | | | |
| Liffey Valley ¹ | 0.70 | 9.55-10.60 | 7.95-9.55 | 7.95 | 8.10-9.00 | 7.15-7.95 |
| Cineworld | 0.55 | 10.50 | 6.40-8.30 | 6.60 | 8.40 | 7.00 |
| Swan | 0.50 | 9.00 | 5.00-7.00 | 6.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 |
| Movies@Dundrum | 0.80 | 9.90 | 5.50-8.00 | 6.00 | 7.90 | 7.50 |
| Coolock UCI | 0.87 | 9.80 | 7.80 | 6.70 | 7.00 | 6.50 |
| Savoy | 0.50 | 9.00 | 7.00 | 6.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 |
| Lighthouse | 0.50 | 9.00 | 7.50-9.00 | 6.00 | 7.50 | 6.00-7.50 |
| Ormonde, Stillorgan | 0.80 | 8.75 | 4.50-7.00 | 5.50 | 7.00 | 6.00 |
| CORK | | | | | | |
| Omniplex | 0.50 | 9.00 | 5.00-7.00 | 6.00 | 6.50 | 6.50 |
| Gate Multiplex | 0.50 | 8.00 | 5.50 | 5.50 | 7.00 | 5.00-7.00 |
| ATHLONE | | | | | | |
| IMC | 0.75 | 8.50 | 6.50 | 5.50 | 6.00 | 6.00 |
| LIMERICK | | | | | | |
| Storm, Castletroy | 0.87 | 9.80 | 7.80 | 6.70 | 7.75 | 6.50 |
| GALWAY | | | | | | |
| Eye | 0.50 | 7.50-9.50 | 5.00-7.50 | 6.00 | 7.00 | 6.00 |

Note: ¹ Super saver available for teens 25% off Mon-Thurs. Saver and super saver tickets available at off-peak times.

morning films at 11.00/11.30am for only €4.00.

Some cinemas provide their regular customers with special offers and discounts. Cineworld in Dublin has a card which allows customers to watch unlimited films for €19.99 a month. You can only avail of this offer by committing

to a twelve month subscription period. VUE in Liffey Valley, Dublin, regularly gives customers €2 discount vouchers to redeem against their next visit to the cinema.

Check your cinema's website, or look for posters or flyers in the cinema with details of current offers.

Report by
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choice comment

It's becoming more and more expensive to enjoy a trip to the cinema, and by the time all the extras are added in, you may end up wishing you had waited for the film to be released for rental! The prices of cinema snacks are spiralling and it is no wonder that many people stock up on treats from the supermarket beforehand. If cinemas charged fairer prices, they would still make a profit as people would be more inclined to buy in the cinema instead of stocking up in advance. If you do buy popcorn and drinks in the cinema, products are priced to encourage customers to choose the larger portions. People are not given a choice to consume less - the portions on offer start large and become even larger. We would prefer to see smaller portions of popcorn and drinks made available, and a wider range of options to choose from, including fruit and air-popped popcorn. The traditional foods sold in cinemas are often high in fat, sugar and salt, and most cinema-goers don't realise how many calories they are consuming in the buckets of buttered or sweet popcorn they buy and in the cinema-sized fizzy drinks.