

PRESS CUTTING

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Living the life of royalty at Dromoland Castle



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"In the past, people were born royal. Nowadays, royalty comes from what you do."


John Daly experiences the newly refurbished Dromoland Castle, fresh from its €20m revamp.




Dromoland Castle Drawing Room




This observation by Gianni Versace seemed unusually appropriate cruising through the massive entrance gates of Dromoland Castle and entering a hidden domain of stately architecture, old-world courtesy and comfort from a bygone age. After all, who amongst us hasn't dreamed of being a Lord or Lady for a day? In a nation with more than its fair share of castles, Dromoland boasts, with reasonable veracity, that it has been welcoming guests since the 16th century. The ancestral home of the O'Briens, whose lineage dates back 1,000 years to Brian Boru, it has a beguiling concoction of nobility and hospitality running through its crenellated DNA. Driving across the 450-acre demesne, and through the Ron Kirby designed golf course, the imposing towers and battlements glitter in the evening sun – a sight that surely has many an awestruck Yank reaching for a pen to scratch a major 'must do' off his bucket list.

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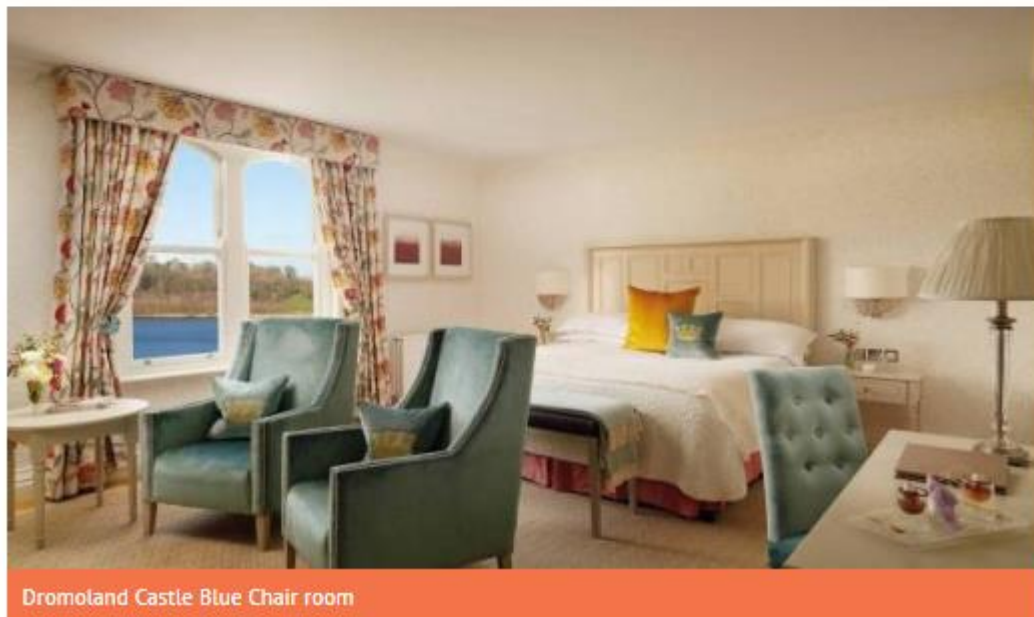
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2 MONTHS AGO 

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Dromoland Castle was described by a Continental visitor in 1837 as "a superb edifice in the castellated style... surrounded by an extensive and richly wooded demesne...." Another admirer in 1855 described as being "built entirely of dark blue limestone, and in fine chiselled workmanship". While the cost of cutting and hauling its stone, although quarried on the estate itself, was enormous in its day, the fact that little of the edifice has changed since then speaks volumes for ongoing workmanship that sustains it. After traversing a long, curving drive past the historic walled garden and the large lake, visitors behold the monumental castle itself, with its four linked castellated turrets and gothic porch.


Barely parked beneath the imposing facade, new arrivals immediately encounter what will become one of their lasting memories of this startling place – its people. All of the staff, and the castle apparently employs 400, are of that Irish ilk so rare to find nowadays – mature and solicitous, yet with an easy familiarity combined with subtle efficiency. From the moment you hand over the car keys to the valet parking and the doorman escorts you to your room, the feeling is akin to being a regular guest they see every year. This is warmth of an old fashioned kind – and one which the global hospitality industry would pay multiple noughts to duplicate, were such a magic possible to purchase.






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Dromoland has recently completed a major €20m renovation project, with input from the Irish Georgian Society, to update the property's infrastructure while maintaining its historic look. The refurbishments took over a year, and incorporated guest rooms, bathrooms, dining and lounge areas, public spaces, spa and indoor pool. "Even in the lean times we have always spent €1m or more annually on capital expenditure," says managing director Mark Nolan. "While this recent focus has been on our public areas, plus the spa and bedrooms, we have also made major improvements to those unseen, but very important fixtures, under the floorboards." In tandem with installing more modern pipework and plumbing, the overhaul also included re-pointing much of the brickwork, a new water treatment system, air conditioning units, new golf carts and pathways, and the myriad structural details that make the experience of staying in a castle dating back to the 16th century such a pleasure.

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dromolandcastlehotel 450-acres for you to explore. Make like a royal and schedule some archery, clay shooting or falconry.. Which of our estate activities is your favourite? . #mydromoland #countryliving

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4 WEEKS AGO 

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Immersing oneself in a gilded world of Waterford Crystal chandeliers, hand-woven Venetian silk wall coverings, ancestral oil paintings, hunting mounts and glorious stained glass creates an effect of marvelling at something new on every turn, yet mixed with an effortless gentility where it is not at all out of order to doze off in front of a blazing fire at 4pm – which is exactly what yours truly did to pass away a misty afternoon.

Arising from my slumber, and after a hearty afternoon tea, I sallied forth for a Hawk Walk, an activity apparently as popular in the 16th century as golf is today. Under the watchful eye of the resident handler, a mine of information about these mesmerising birds of prey, falcons, hawks and owls were encouraged to perch on my wrist – another lordly pursuit that doesn't happen every day. That evening, after an extended hour lazing in the open-air hot tub beneath a starry sky, we repaired to the atmospheric octagonal Cocktail Bar that once served as Lord Inchiquin's study, followed by an evening of chat and laughter in the Earl of Thomond restaurant, gazed down upon by the portraits of long gone aristocrats.



Dromoland Castle Hallway

Early next morning, greeted by a glorious sunrise, I strolled about the demesne, only to find myself pushing open the arched doorway to the castle's Walled Garden. Truly a wonderland enclosed by beautiful old stonewalls and

within which offered an old path system with a horizontal maze, water-features and a free-standing Victorian-style glasshouse. Populated with many unusual and tender plants that thrive in the area's unique micro climate, that solitary stroll in the rays of an early sun will stay with me for many a season. The experience was made even more evocative when I noticed the words of Christina Rossetti's poem, 'Remember', carved on a tablet by the entrance.

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"Remember me when I am gone away, gone far away into the silent land/ When you can no more hold me by the hand, nor I half turn to go yet turning stay/ For if the darkness and corruption leave a vestige of the thoughts that once I had/ Better by far you should forget and smile than that you should remember and be sad."

After a magical few days in Dromoland's otherworldly space, it seemed a fitting sentiment to carry with us until the next time we get to play Lord and Lady of the manor.

ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS

Enjoy a Taste of Ireland From €544. The package includes a six-course tasting menu in The Earl of Thomond Restaurant created by the Executive Chef, with wine pairings per course chosen by the sommelier. Overnight accommodation and full Irish breakfast included.

Also, avail of Dromoland's Escape for a Break - from €189 a night. Stay three nights and receive a 30% discount www.dromoland.ie