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FEBRUARY 2022



PHOTO BY BRIAN MORRISON



Inesistible Ireland

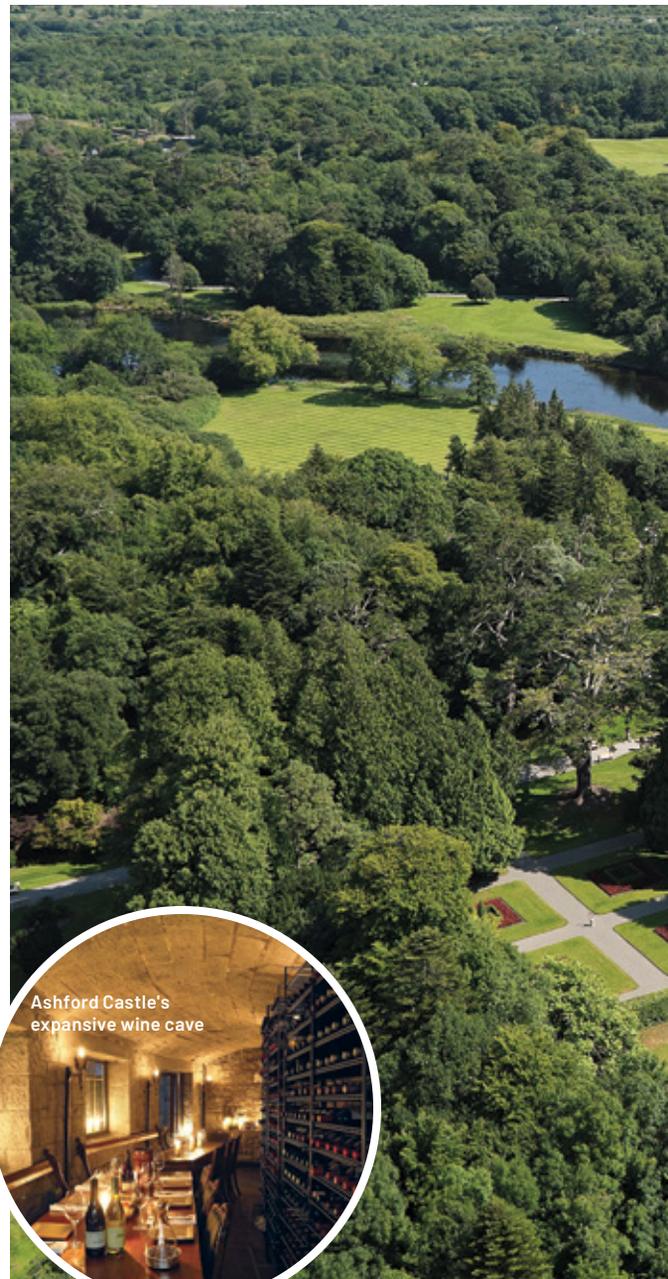
Falling In Love With The Emerald Isle Has Never Been So Tempting

BY LAURA BEAUSIRE



The Junior State Room at Ashford Castle

PHOTO BY RICHARD MORAN



Ashford Castle's expansive wine cave



IT'S ALL LONG FOR A LITTLE ESCAPE FROM

reality sometimes. Fortunately, Ireland is ready to make your dreams come true. With fairy-tale castles and secluded getaways, it's a land where you can lose track of time and throw your cares to the wind.

"Ireland has something for everyone," says Ruth Moran of Tourism Ireland. "Great food, history and culture beyond compare, and a raft of wonderful things to see and do."

Roaming Ireland, you can walk coastal paths along the Wild Atlantic Way, taste whiskey in traditional pubs, meander through ancient Celtic sites, browse shops in charming villages, golf on championship courses, embark on a literary pilgrimage or just enjoy some toe-tapping Irish music.

"Ireland's biggest asset however is its people and the warmth of the welcome that will meet everyone who visits our shores," Moran says. "From world-class cuisine to world-famous hospitality, you'll find the people here take great pride in making you feel like you've always belonged."

If you've never visited Ireland before, you might be surprised at how easy it is to get around. The island of Ireland is roughly the same size as the state of Indiana: 302 miles long and 171 miles wide.

Travelers will find a dazzling array of castles, manor houses and historic estates with luxurious accommodations, spectacular dining, swoon-worthy gardens and sumptuous spas. Here are some of Ireland's most fascinating and lavish retreats — in locations that are all within easy reach of each other.

ASHFORD CASTLE

If an 800-year-old castle sounds like your cup of Irish tea, then you'll be delighted by the craggy grandeur of Ashford Castle. Covering 350 verdant acres of County Mayo, the estate is the former home of the Guinness family. (Yes, that Guinness.)

The Castle offers 83 splendid rooms and suites, plus a converted boathouse called Hideaway Cottage on the edge of Lough Corrib (the 68-square-mile lake is one of Ireland's largest). There are six restaurants — including one called The Dungeon and another tucked into a thatched cottage — plus a cinema, three bars and a billiard room with a cigar terrace overlooking the River Cong. And did I mention the Castle also has an adorable pair of



PHOTO COURTESY OF AERVISIONS

Beautiful Ashford Castle



Philippe Farineau, Executive Chef and Forager with Ashford Castle's wolfhounds



Enjoy a cozy dinner at The Dungeon

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE RED CARNATION HOTEL COLLECTION

resident Irish Wolfhounds?

The Spa at Ashford Castle has been named Ireland's Best Hotel Spa six years in a row by the World Spa Awards. Embellished with a Tree of Life mural and lit by seashell chandeliers, the elegant Spa offers five treatment rooms, a Hammam, eucalyptus-infused steam room, fitness suite and lake-view relaxation pool.

"As Ireland's first and only *Forbes* Five Star Hotel, Ashford Castle is truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience," says Paula Carroll, Ashford Castle's Director of Sales and Marketing. "Our spectacular surroundings, exquisite interiors, delicious cuisine, and unique local partnerships bring this corner of Ireland to life in the most beautiful way."

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Ireland's School of Falconry is located on the Castle grounds, and guests can learn to fly a Harris Hawk on one of their guided, private Hawk Walks. An expert ghillie (guide) can take anglers out on the lake to fish for salmon, brown trout and pike, and history and music-themed lake cruises are available, too. The Castle also offers clay shooting and archery ranges, horseback riding and woodland carriage tours, a nine-hole golf course, kayaking, paddle boarding and cycling. For kids, there's a LEGO Butler, personalized bedtime storybooks, a secret map to the fairy paths, tree-climbing and zip-lining. Ashford Castle even has a resident artist who is available for custom commissions.



The Spa at Adare Manor



The Gallery

ADARE MANOR PHOTOS BY JACK HARDY

ADARE MANOR

County Limerick's Adare Manor is a mid-19th-century Neo-Gothic fantasy on 840 acres, with a Michelin-starred restaurant and a top-rated golf course. The Manor offers a range of luxurious guest rooms, suites, lodges and cottages, graced with fresh flowers and Acqua di Parma bath products.

"We don't use the word magic lightly, though there isn't another word that does it justice," says Sarah Ormston, Adare Manor's Marketing Manager. "If these walls could talk, they'd tell you a tale of extravagant romance, unquenchable dreams, and lifetimes of devotion our guests experience here, and that magic is what makes Adare Manor special."

Head Chef Michael Tweedie oversees the Oak Room Restaurant, which garnered a Michelin star in 2019. His menus celebrate fresh, seasonal ingredients from Irish fields and waters, including Doonbeg crab, Dooncastle oysters, West Cork Durrus cheese, Birdhill quail and Ballyneety vegetables. Dining is also available in The Drawing Room, The Carriage House and The Tack Room, with afternoon tea served in The Gallery.

Adare Manor was named the 2020 European Golf Resort of the Year by the IAGTO (the International Association of Golf Tour Operators), and guests can tee off on the Tom Fazio-designed Golf Course at Adare Manor, which is scheduled to play host to the 2027 Ryder Cup.

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There's no shortage of amusements for active travelers here, with a luxury spa and on-site Padel Club, featuring a Sports Simulation Room, 17-meter swimming pool, sauna, steam room and fitness center. Guests can also enjoy fishing, falconry, archery, clay pigeon shooting and cycling. Horse-drawn carriage tours, horseback riding, whiskey tasting, woodland walks and picnics are all available as well.

Adare Manor's Bushcraft Adventure challenges intrepid guests aged seven and over to learn survival skills and self-rescue techniques, including fire-lighting and spear-throwing, in a course designed by Bear Grylls. The Manor's Irish Gundog Experience invites hotel guests to watch (and even take a turn at handling) expertly trained Irish Labradors who demonstrate their agility, obedience, marking and water work skills.

LOUGH ESKE CASTLE

Built in 1861, County Donegal's Lough Eske Castle has the warmth and charm of a friendly country estate, with an award-winning, organic spa. Guests have a choice of 97 plush rooms and suites, plus a private hideaway called Lake Lodge. Given its picture-perfect setting on the shores of Lough Eske, it's no surprise that this pet-friendly castle is also a popular wedding venue.

The Father Browne Bar pays tribute to Father Frank Browne, a Jesuit priest and one of Ireland's most famous photographers who gained acclaim for his images of the Titanic.

The elegant Cedars Restaurant menu showcases fresh, local ingredients and the bistro-style menu of the Gallery Bar and Lobby Lounge includes grass-fed Irish Hereford and Angus beef steaks, crispy West Coast Cod fillet fish and chips and homemade sticky toffee pudding with vanilla bean ice cream.

The Father Browne Bar pays tribute to Father Frank Browne, a Jesuit priest and one of Ireland's most famous photographers who gained acclaim for his images of the Titanic. The bar is beautifully decorated with over 200 remastered, black-and-white photos by Browne. Guests can settle in for a cozy meal — try the Lough Eske Seafood and Dillisk (a local variety of red seaweed) chowder — paired with a Kinnegar farmhouse beer from Donegal.

Activities on-site and nearby including fishing on Lough Eske, cycling, golf, surfing, horseback riding, and sea stack climbing (scaling natural rock towers surrounded by the sea) with local outfitters. Guests can venture out to visit St. John's Point Lighthouse in Donegal Bay, explore some of Europe's tallest sea cliffs at Sliabh Liag, shop for handwoven tweeds in Donegal Town or meet contemporary artisans at their workshops in the Donegal Craft Village.



Father Browne Bar



The Relaxation Room at the Spa



BALLYFIN

Arriving at Ballyfin is like stepping out of a time machine and into a gentler world. The meticulously restored 1820s-era mansion is set within 614 walled acres in County Laois. It's an ultra-private and secluded retreat with an enchanted landscape that includes a lake, woods, gardens, follies and grottos for guests to explore.

There's an eight-acre kitchen garden, where Chef Sam Moody invites guests to join him on a hunt for wild ingredients, including garlic and mushrooms, on the estate grounds as part of Ballyfin's new Forage to Fork program. A resident beekeeper supplies the hotel with honey.

Along with an 80-foot-long, 5,000-volume library that's warmed by log fires, Ballyfin's interiors feature a lavish collection of antiques and artwork that might make you feel like you've stumbled onto a movie set.

Guests can also enjoy an indoor swimming pool, vitality pool, sauna, fitness room, seaweed baths, and treatment rooms for massages. On-site activities include whiskey or wine tastings, clay pigeon shooting, archery, horseback riding, guided horse and carriage tours, falconry, picnics, fishing,

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boating, or cycling. Butlers can also provide maps for walks through the unspoiled forests and glens of the nearby Slieve Bloom Mountains.

"Ballyfin is special for several reasons, but its core is the perfect blend of exclusivity, quality, and charm," says Peter White, Ballyfin's General Manager. "An exclusive estate only accessible by the guests staying with us. The quality of the restoration that brought a house of almost 200 years back to be better than the day it was built, filled with some of the most refined interiors, furnishings, and art. The charm of Irish people who work here creates an exquisite retreat away from the world in a relaxed and beautiful environment."



Chef Sam Moody



Plenty of reading choices at the 5,000 volume library





Learn about falconry



Sample tarot-card-inspired cocktails

PHOTO BY JACK HARDY

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DROMOLAND CASTLE

DROMOLAND CASTLE

In County Clare, Dromoland Castle traces its heritage back to 1014 when an early structure stood on this site. Construction of the current castle began in the 16th century and it opened to guests in the 1960s. After a \$20 million makeover in 2019, Dromoland now offers 97 lavish rooms and suites — some with canopied beds.

The Castle's three restaurants feature fresh Irish cheese, meat, seafood and produce. If you prefer an al fresco feast to enjoy on the 450-acre estate, the chef will be glad to pack you a champagne picnic. Afternoon Tea includes fresh-baked scones with homemade jam and clotted cream, and the Cocktail Bar serves Irish gin and whiskey along with a selection of tarot-card-inspired cocktails. The Castle's resident genealogist is ready to help guests trace their Irish roots.

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“What really sets us apart is the people here,” says Mark Nolan, Dromoland Castle’s General Manager. “Each member of our staff is so warm and genuinely wants to make each stay memorable and special.”

Along with tennis courts, a swimming pool, and an indulgent spa, the Castle offers falconry (including walks with its own resident owls, falcons and hawks), archery, clay shooting, cycling, horseback riding or trout fishing and boating on Dromoland Lough. Special castle experiences include an Irish coffee-making class and garden tours with the Head Gardener. Kids who stay at Dromoland enjoy junior robes and slippers, pony and trap rides, go karts, and a daily Children’s Club during holidays and school breaks. The Castle is especially popular among golfers, with a championship parkland course and The Academy practice facility and golf school. Dromoland’s staff can even arrange for golfers to fly to other nearby courses by helicopter.

Nearby attractions include Bunratty Castle, an authentic 15th-century fortress, and the Burren and Cliffs of Moher UNESCO Global Geopark, with towering sea cliffs, underground caves, limestone hills and a rich abundance of fossils. The Burren Food Trail highlights 22 local culinary hotspots, including The Burren Smokehouse, producers of smoked salmon. Feel like a city break? Limerick and Galway, both historic cities with vibrant food and cultural scenes, are only a short drive away.



THE SHELBOURNE

Founded in 1824, The Shelbourne is a grand Dublin institution overlooking St. Stephen's Green, the historic, 22-acre park in the heart of the city. Presidents, princes and poets have stayed here over the years, and the famous Horseshoe Bar, The Lord Mayor's Lounge, The Saddle Room, 1824 Bar, and No. 27 The Shelbourne Bar still buzz with locals and visitors alike.

"The Shelbourne's history is incredible," says Yvonne Donohue, the hotel's Director of Sales and Marketing. "From the drafting of the Irish Constitution in room 112 in 1922, to visits from movie stars such as James Cagney, John Wayne, Laurel and Hardy, Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, Rita Hayworth, and Grace Kelly, to being today's national rugby team's hotel of choice in the city, The Shelbourne Hotel has always reflected what was happening in the Dublin of its day."

The hotel offers 265 sophisticated rooms and



"The Shelbourne Hotel has always reflected what was happening in the Dublin of its day."



suites, plus a spa, salon, and health club. The Shelbourne even provides a Genealogy Butler Service to help guests research their Irish roots. Nearby city attractions include Trinity College, Guinness Storehouse, Dublin Castle, Temple Bar, St. Patrick's Cathedral, shopping on Grafton Street, and EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum.

PHOTOS BY BARRY MURPHY

CASHEL PALACE

Next month, the freshly refurbished Cashel Palace is slated to re-open in County Tipperary. The 18th-Century Palladian manor rests at the foot of the Rock of Cashel, the legendary seat of the kings of Munster, where an important group of medieval buildings still stands. In the 1960s, the grand home was transformed into a luxury hotel, and when it re-opens in 2022, Cashel Palace will offer 33 bedrooms



The Spa at Cashel Palace

The Palace proprietors also own Coolmore Stud Farm, one of the largest thoroughbred breeding operations in the world, and the hotel offers a top-notch Equine Concierge to organize riding adventures.



Horse riding adventure

and nine spectacular suites, The Bishop's Buttery restaurant, Guinness Bar, and a spa with an indoor-outdoor pool and seaweed baths.

The Palace proprietors also own Coolmore Stud Farm, one of the largest thoroughbred breeding operations in the world, and the hotel offers a top-notch Equine Concierge to organize riding adventures or exclusive behind-the-scenes tours for guests.

Fishing, golf, hiking, kayaking and cycling are also available on-site or nearby, and the Palace can arrange local culinary tours including a visit with the makers of Cashel Blue Cheese and a stop at Tipperary Boutique Distillery to try a taste of Irish Single Malt.

“We are at the crossroads of Ireland where you can base yourself for several days and easily reach all other parts of the country plus explore the magical surroundings of County Tipperary,” says Adriaan Bartels, Cashel Palace’s General Manager.

No matter where you decide to stay or play, Ireland’s time-traveling luxury and storybook charm are certainly hard to resist. ○



Cashel Blue Cheese