

## Spa Day: The four best spa treatments worth travelling to in Munster

From Clare to Cork to Kenmare here are three new spa treatments in Munster



Spa glossy

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## Dr Barbara Sturm's super anti-ageing facial therapy at Dromoland Castle



Dromoland Castle

Dromoland Castle has been standing since the 1400s. We examine the darkened stone on the exterior base, awed in the knowledge these stones have held court here for centuries. Beautifully — and thoughtfully — restored, there are a multitude of dark nooks and crannies to explore. Centuries-old architecture didn't embrace the current obsession with floor-to-ceiling windows and light. The five-star hotel respects the castle's original design and embraces it.



Yes the windows are large, and the views beyond them sensational — but everything feels cosy, intimate. There are open fires in the communal sitting rooms, the cocktail bar oozes dark wood and deep sumptuous reds, lush curtains trail the floors in every room.

We savour afternoon tea at The Gallery — centuries-old portraits hang on the velvet-embossed wallpaper, chandeliers sparkle overhead. It's everything you'd expect from a five-star castle, and more. And then you step inside the newly renovated spa. You expect more of the same. It'll be dark, you anticipate, moody and atmospheric.

Instead, you enter a floodlight reception, sky lights bathing the room in natural light. You catch your breath it's such a jolt to the system, an expected breath of fresh air. Once upon a time, this spa was the hotel's games room. The plaster was pulled down and once again the original walls stand tall. It's the changing room though that leaves us marvelling.

The modern walls are painted a relaxing, and very on-trend, salmon pink beautifully complemented with copper fittings. Alongside it, one original castle wall takes centre stage, dating right back to the 15th century. The modern and the old stand side by side. It's breathtaking.

The treatments themselves in this new spa, opened just this summer, are every bit as impressive. Exclusive to Dromoland, Dr Barbara Sturm and Seabody take centre stage. The German doctor behind the vampire facial, we book into Dr Sturm's anti-ageing 75 minute facial therapy. It's a massage on my face that I've never experienced before.

It's vibrant, rejuvenating, yet so relaxing I find myself sinking into moments of deep sleep. Beginning with a double cleanse, there's a peel and steam, then a tone. Hydrochloric acid is applied, then a massage with a rich face cream. As a face mask penetrates the skin, there's an arm massage, ending with moisturiser, serum, and eye cream. The illuminating drops leave skin glowing. The treatment doesn't come cheap, at €300, but it's the ultimate in luxury experiences.

Afterwards, again the spa embraces the castle history. In the relaxation room, earphones give the option of a guided walk and mediation through the castle grounds with the historic Lady Ethel, a one time resident of the castle who created the stunning gardens. The massage beds come with remote controls to control the waves of vibration.



The blankets are embossed with the rose named after her that still stand on the castle grounds. The attention to detail is next level. The stunning kimonos provided at arrival were designed based on a portrait of Lady Ethel on the castle staircase (there are plans to sell these dressing gowns in time — we'll be first in line).

## The Art of Healing at The Park Hotel, Kenmare



Park Hotel, Kenmare

Francis and John Brennan have made a second career — and a TV show — advising struggling hoteliers. They are the experts.

So when you arrive at their five-star Park Hotel, expectations are naturally high. Two years ago, a €1m refurbishment, by acclaimed designer Bryan O'Sullivan (whose work can be seen at the Berkeley and Claridge's hotels in London) created a new reception, cocktail bar, outdoor dining terrace, drawing room and dining room. It's luxurious, yet it never feels austere. Tea and cake is served in the drawing room as we arrive. It is the most relaxing of check-ins.

We sink into it, easing our way downstairs, first to the 25m slick stainless steel pool. Muted lighting, with a steam room at one end and relaxed seating at the other, this is not your run of the mill hotel pool. And neither is the Park's Sámas spa. It's a modern space, compared to the hotel's historic hallways, standing strong since 1897. The spa has a sleek, contemporary feel. We are given a towel on arrival to freshen up.

From there we're brought to the thermal suite. It's recommended you savour an hour here — but I could have spent double that, lounging in saunas with the tropical shower and the by now famed outdoor infinity pool. It's all

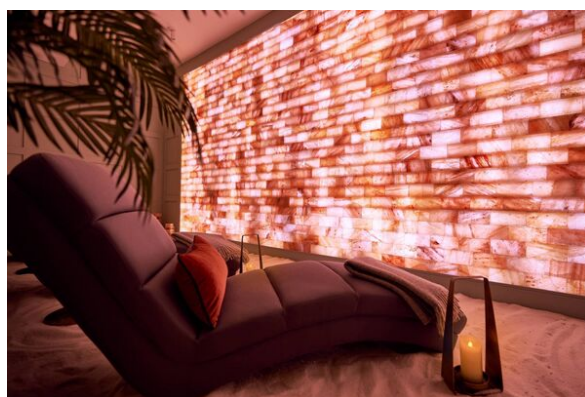


the more sumptuous on a cold rainy day, sitting in the warm water, peering out over the Kenmare forest grounds. The therapist escorts you downstairs for your treatment of choice.

We were there to try the Art of Healing ritual, so new it wasn't even on the Sámas brochure. It's billed as a 90 minute escape from the stresses of daily life — and it is all that and more. Starting with a foot bathing ritual, guided breathing relaxes your body and soothes your mind. The full body massage was so calming I found myself falling into waves of sleep. It was almost trance-like. The practice also includes Shirodhara, coming from the two Sanskrit words “shiro” (head) and “dhara” (flow), this is an Ayurvedic healing technique that involves having someone pour liquid — usually oil, milk, buttermilk, or water — onto your forehead, followed by a head massage.

Originating in India thousands of years ago, it focuses on rebalancing the life forces — or doshas — within your body and is said to balance emotions and restore inner calm. The treatment ends with singing bowl therapy, using vibrational frequencies to recalibrate and relax the body. I drift out of the room in a dream-like state to the relaxation room, over looking Kenmare Bay and the woodlands.

## The Salt Rooms at The Montenotte Hotel, Cork



The Montenotte's brand-new Salt Room.

In a first for any Cork spa, the Montenotte recently levelled up their offering with a brand-new salt room. Tucked away in the hotel's award-winning Bellevue Spa, a session relaxing in the salt room is a gorgeous addition as a post-treatment experience.

The four-star boutique hotel is no stranger to unique offerings. From its gorgeous one-of-a-kind, standalone cocktail bar, The Glasshouse, perched above the stunning sunken Victorian gardens (don't leave without trying one



of their signature cocktails!) to its inhouse cinema, and their terraced restaurant with panoramic views of Cork city, their spa was always going to be something special. A lovely touch is the treatment rooms in the Bellevue are named after significant dates within the hotel's history, with a knowing nod to its longstanding legacy. I imagine the Merchant Princes of Cork would approve.

Your treatment is bookended with two impressive rituals. You begin your spa visit with their signature grounding ritual, inhaling infused essential oils to the background aural feast of Tibetan singing bowl, and you end it with a 20-minute session in the salt room. Ann-marie the spa manager is fantastic and a fountain of knowledge about all things salt. "We're the first spa in Cork to have this — we think it's a gorgeous way to finish off your treatment." And she's right.

I'm guided into the room, it's got coarse salt underfoot, subtly-placed plants, comfortable chairs and chaises longues, and an entire wall of Himalayan salt bricks, casting a rosy, soft glow. Ann-marie explains the addition of the salt room is part of The Montenotte's ongoing elevation of its spa offerings, following a recent partnership with an Australian skincare brand. "We're the first hotel in Ireland to offer Grown Alchemist treatments and products."

The benefits of salt are well documented, with salt therapy being used for breathing and skin issues for centuries. The salt room harnesses this wisdom as small salt particles are diffused into the air, creating a microclimate reminiscent of natural salt caves. Ann-marie tells me the walls are made from over 1400 Himalayan salt bricks which they brought directly from the Himalayas in Pakistan.

The salt promises to absorb excess moisture in the lungs, effectively purifying airways, removing allergens and facilitating full, unrestricted breathing while elevating the oxygen intake. I definitely feel more conscious of my breathing while I'm in the room and concentrate on taking slow, deep, calming breaths. I feel I'm breathing easier after my time there and if the microscopic salt particles are exfoliating my skin while I chill out enjoying a mimosa, more power to them.

## The Warming Experience at Eccles Hotel, West Cork





The Eccles Hotel, Glengarriff

Google Maps identified the quickest route. Deep down we knew better than to follow the obscure directions but the automated voice spoke with such authority. Before we knew it we were driving down county lanes, grass creeping through the paths.

At one point on the road a sheep stood before us, staring us square through the windscreen. Suffice to say we were late for our treatments at the spa at Eccles. The spa staff brush off our apologies. It was no bother they assured us. We should have missed our allocated time in the hot tub, but they rescheduled the diary for us, insisting it was grand, soothing us to relax and shrug the weight of the journey away.

The Eccles Hotel stands on the waterfront in Glengarriff, a prime location with boats for Garnish and its serene seals within eyeshot. It's like stepping back in time in this 250-year-old hotel, a set from an Agatha Christie film.

The spa makes clever use of its location. Two hot tubs are located outside — you are on the road front but once you sit into the water, you are discreetly tucked away from the view of passing cars and pedestrians, discreetly hidden by the property's trees. All you can see before you are the sweeping water views. Behind, there are two seaweed baths, that can double as cold water pools. Beside them is a glass-fronted sauna. Again clever design means you are never in the eyeline of passing drivers — the sea view is yours to soak up.

The spa manager recommends 30 minutes on this blissful deck moving from the heat of the hot tub to the cool of the cold water baths, to the heat of the sauna. The glass of prosecco might have helped but the stress of the journey is forgotten as I try the Warming Experience.

Using intensive warm oils — the hotel has Voya products throughout — this new treatment aims to combat aches and release tension, as well as treating the skin, by



combining a bundle of a back, neck, facial and shoulder massage, and a scalp and hair treatment. Afterwards, the muted turquoise and blues of the relaxation room almost merge with sea views. We sit with herbal teas, restored, the stress of the journey a distant memory. Ignoring the sat nav on the return journey, we floated home, relaxed and recharged, with no sheep to face off.

- The Autumn Thermal Spa Experience includes an overnight stay with breakfast, full use of the Thermal Spa Garden with a glass of Prosecco and chocolate nibbles. From €245.

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