

# FAB 50

IRELAND'S BEST PLACES TO STAY  
2022

# 1

## Wilderness & garden stays

### Limehouse Cottage Glenbeigh, Co Kerry

"The last person who was here said it was almost healing," says Catherine Spain. You can see why. Peering into the Coomasaharn horseshoe, this one-bedroom escape wraps taste, travel and sensitive restoration into a perfectly peaceful package. Catherine refurbished the old stone cottage with an architect and conservation builder, using lime plaster, hemp insulation, and adding tie beams and a green corrugated iron roof (a curvy new bathroom annex is also clad in corrugated iron). Clean design and hidden tech underscore the heritage feel of a pristine property through features like underfloor heating, reintroduced sash windows, and a beautiful little "glass-box living room" overlooking the landscape. Guests can look forward to bathrobes, scented candles, and a welcome hamper of Irish produce, too. It's no surprise to learn that Catherine's brother runs Lost Cottage, another beautiful Unique Homestays property, across the valley. — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** Natural materials like wood, stone, sheepskin rugs and straw seats add a rustic touch, and the kitchen was salvaged from London docklands. "I'd be fairly purist in terms of what goes into it," Catherine says.

**Insider tip:** Like the bath inside? Try the one outside — carved from stone, with its own hot water, it's just a few steps away from the cottage.

**Details:** Short stays from £995 (€1,186) to £2,095 (€2,497); week-long stays from £1,295 (€1,543) to £2,850 (€3,396); [uniquehomestays.com](http://uniquehomestays.com)

# 2

### June Blake's Garden Blessington, Co Wicklow

Immersive stays in nature are sprouting like mushrooms as we seek out soulful, Covid-safe escapes to reboot and reconnect after the pandemic. June Blake's new studio is a peachy example. "You're literally in the garden," she says of this lovely little addition to the two apartments already housed in the granite outbuildings on her five acres. The studio replaces a café she decided not to reopen after the pandemic ("I'm not a chef," she quips). In a previous life, June was a jewellery maker, however, and pops of orange furniture and her own Irish art collection play off architect Michael Kelly's plywood, Douglas fir and polished-concrete materials. A small, black kitchenette leads to large, glass doors, opening on to a private terrace and sloping meadow that will soon be popping with wild tulips. Casual visits and tours (€6) resume from April 6, but guests "have the

gardens to themselves every evening". — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** Indigenous planting and the preservation of discovered features on her land — an old cobbled road, for example — make you feel like heritage is in safe hands.

**Insider tip:** June is a keen hillwalker as well as a gardener — ask her for tips on local trails. Also, her brother, Jimi, runs Hunting Brook Gardens nearby.

**Details:** €135 a night (five-night minimum stay); [juneblake.ie](http://juneblake.ie)

# 3

### The Wild Rooms Tara Hill, Co Wexford

An eight-foot picture window overlooking the Irish Sea, contactless check-in, indoor and outdoor showers, and zippy Wi-Fi. It's not hard to see why Ben and Vanessa Wainwright's Wild Rooms are turning heads in Co Wexford. Conceived of during the pandemic, the three hillside pods also feel like a perfect fit for post-Covid escapes, providing self-contained stays that steep guests in nature without scrimping on creature comforts (think underfloor heating, heated towel racks, and wine, pizza, or yoga bookable via an app). You could work remotely at Stargazer, Sunriser and Stormchaser, as the rooms are called, but mostly people come "to tune out", they say. — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** 'Sustainable luxury' is the mantra at Tara Hill Estate, and hampers are carefully curated to include local ingredients like Tara Hill honey, Wild About Wexford chutney and Bean and Goose chocolate.

**Insider tip:** Pets are not allowed at the Wild Rooms, but are welcome at Sea Forest Lodge next door, which sleeps three, from €179 per night.

**Details:** From €249, room-only; [tarahillestate.com](http://tarahillestate.com)

# 4

### Fernhill House Hotel Clonakilty, Co Cork

In a world of chain hotels, Fernhill House stands out as a family-run treasure. It is a 27-bed hideaway based in a Georgian mansion which has been developed by four generations of O'Neills. Inspired gardens designed by Mary Reynolds range from wedding-photo-friendly areas to wilder sites, all geared to promote biodiversity, and the natural theme flows indoors through living ferns, fresh

After all we've been through, I think it's fair to say we deserve a break. And here is the best little black book the year has to offer — our list of the very best places to stay in Ireland in 2022.

By now, you'll know our Fab 50 is not a normal list. It's a selection we travel the length and breadth of the island to compile, and one that changes completely every year. It favours new openings and evolving stays rather than old reliables, and shines a light on places that are innovating — from room refurb to new menus, exciting design, sustainability and links with local communities. Some of the head-turning properties you will know; many you won't.

Covid hit Irish hospitality for six, but the pandemic also provided a once-in-a-generation chance to pivot and rethink short breaks here for the decade ahead. You'll find a new wave of wilderness stays, of gardens, terraces, and outdoor offerings, but also trends like petite resorts in West Cork and Derry, next-level lodges in Leitrim and Wexford, a 'hotel within a hotel' in Killarney, and surprises galore, from breathtaking baths to smart breakfast boxes.

The Fab 50 isn't gathered via Google. It's about painstaking research and listening to our readers. And it's in no particular order. Let us know your thoughts on social media, using the hashtag #IndoFab50.

— *Pól Ó Conghaile*



flowers (no fakes here) and William Morris prints. During Covid, creativity went into overdrive. “It was a kind of depressing time, so we wanted to do something positive,” Michael Jr says. Room refurb, new air-con systems, an art trail, and revamped menus are just some of the ideas that allowed a step-change while keeping staff busy — its wedding co-ordinator, for example, designed the label for a new garden gin (try it in a gimlet cocktail with their own Scots pine syrup). The West Cork hotel is popular for weddings, so midweek stays are the best bet for leisure stays. Either way, you’re sure to meet one of the family. — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** From solar panels to composting, and menus bursting with local and garden produce, bigger hotels could learn a lesson here.

**Insider tip:** Ask Michael Jr for a history or garden tour during your stay. Accessible garden tours are also available in a six-seater golf buggy.

**Details:** B&B from €129; [fernhillhousehotel.com](http://fernhillhousehotel.com)

## 5

### Sperrinview Glamping Cookstown, Co Tyrone

You won’t find a better setting for stargazing. Lying beneath the foot of the Sperrin Mountains, in Co Tyrone’s Dark Sky Park, five glamping pods feature special “viewing windows” angled to allow guests to take in the constellations from the comfort of their beds. Snuggled together in the unlikely setting of an old gravel pit, the triangular-shaped builds sleep five (in two doubles and one single bed), and come with small kitchenettes, Netflix, and private fire pits and BBQ areas. Premium options feature new al fresco hot tubs, added during the pandemic, and there’s a communal area with a porch and cosy seats if you feel like getting social under the stars. — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** A lack of light pollution in the area shows the night sky at its absolute darkest. The local community is working to develop it sensitively for tourism, starting with the OM Dark Sky Observatory. [omdarksky.com](http://omdarksky.com)

**Insider tip:** The ancient Beaghmore Stone Circles are literally across the road, while walking and biking trails are nearby in Davagh Forest.

**Details:** From €110 (€132); [sperrinviewglamping.com](http://sperrinviewglamping.com)

## 6

### Liss Ard Estate Skibbereen, Co Cork

“The grounds are our spa,” says Michael Johnston of Liss Ard Estate. That could be a tagline for a certain kind of post-Covid short break, one that sees off-grid yet clued-in properties providing connections with nature over a base layer of luxury. Set among 163 acres, the Victorian manor is surrounded by 12km of woodland trails, lakeside saunas, and James Turrell’s amazing sky garden — a 25-metre oval crater you enter through a tunnel to lie on stone plinths and peer up at the day or night sky. The petite resort features 26 rooms scattered across manor, mews and lakehouse (a walk or golf-cart ride away), and all have gotten no-expense-spared refurb, as has the two AA Rosette restaurant. Liss Ard was “love at first sight”, Michael says. As well as leisure stays in high season, he hopes to see remote workers check in from October to March for longer stays. “The city can give you energy, but it can also steal your energy,” he adds. Another tagline for our times. — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** They are considering devoting two rooms to artists’ residency programmes in the off-season. Chef Alexandre Petit’s Garden restaurant is inspired by the seasons, using garden produce and West-Cork flavours.

**Insider tip:** The property opens on March 29, and seven dog-friendly rooms have ground-floor entry.

**Details:** B&B from €180-€385 in Mews rooms, and €250-€445 in the Manor House. [lissardestate.ie](http://lissardestate.ie)

### Drumhierny Woodland Hideaway Co Leitrim

It’s unusual for our Fab 50 to feature a property that hasn’t opened yet, but Drumhierny Hideaway is not a usual property. Set on 100 acres of woodland by the Shannon Blueway, it hosts 16 lodges of various styles, all with giant, glass-fronted façades that flood living areas with light (and show off the incredible views of the surrounding forest). “We didn’t want to build your standard cabins,” says owner Michelle Coghlan, who was previously general manager at Kilonan Castle. “We wanted to do something architecturally interesting.” Set to open on the June bank holiday weekend, the lodges were built using sustainable fibre cement and utilise the natural wood of the forest, with tables, bathroom cabinets and headboards all made from fallen timber. A cool communal space will have seating made from tree trunks, and each lodge has an outdoor fire pit, too. Really, the emphasis is on the wilds of the Leitrim landscape. “We had to beat our way in through the gates,” says Michelle. “But it had such potential. We really wanted to unlock the magic of it and share this beautiful place with guests.” — *NB*

**Sustainability:** For each booking made directly, a native tree will be planted on the estate.

**Insider tip:** Nip around the corner for a pint in the charming Beirnes of Battlebridge.

**Details:** Two-night breaks from €400; [drumhiernyhideaway.ie](http://drumhiernyhideaway.ie)



The sky garden  
at Liss Ard

## Cool castles & character stays

## 8

### Clonalis House Castlerea, Co Roscommon

When it comes to historical properties, Castlerea’s Clonalis House is top of the pile. This family home dates back to the High Kings of Ireland, and is currently home to the 28th generation of the O’Conor clan. There are four bedrooms in the main house (open April to September), and self-catering cottages (open all year round), but the real joy is found in the library, where you can sit by the fire among 7,000 ancient books. In January, it won the O’Flynn Group Heritage Prize, which recognises the dedication to history and preservation of old Irish architecture. “It’s a never-ending project,” says owner Carol-Anne O’Conor Nash, “but a project of love and devotion. It’s something that we’re incredibly passionate about.” — *NB*

**Sustainability:** Fires are fuelled by fallen trees from the 700-acre estate, and everything in the kitchen is composted.

**Insider tip:** The 6km Castlerea Loop weaves right through the estate and makes for a lovely woodland stroll.

**Details:** Rooms from €198; [clonalishouse.com](http://clonalishouse.com)

## 9

### Birdhill House & Gardens Clonmel, Co Tipperary

*Condé Nast Traveller* has tipped Tipperary as one of the best places in the world to visit in 2022. Birdhill House, the latest property to join the reclusive yet exclusive Hidden Ireland collection, is a real incentive to visit. The Georgian country house has been the home of Yvonne Lowndes (a designer) and Robert Deeleman (a caterer) for 20 years, but it was only last summer that they began welcoming guests via Airbnb after deciding to put their combined savoir faire into hospitality. Overlooking the Comeraghs and Knockmealdowns, Birdhill House almost has villa-like splendour and an all-season appeal, with suntrap terraces, palatial bedrooms, and inviting spaces to curl up in, including a decadent drawing room and characterful library. — *TB*

## 10

### Rockhill House Letterkenny, Co Donegal

Nestled into woodland at the end of a private driveway, Rockhill House has been brought back to its former glory as part of a multi-million-euro refurbishment project by its owners, the Molloy family. Its previous occupants, the Irish Army, left in 2009. Since they acquired it, the Molloy family have left no stone unturned in their attention to detail — when a single piece of original wallpaper was found, for example, designers used it as a template for the walls and carpets of the main hallway leading to the bedrooms. Each of the 19 bedrooms is unique, and each sumptuous in its finish. Spacious reception rooms boast a combination of antique and restored furniture, but designers were briefed to keep the feel of a family home. A wellness centre will be ready for guests in the summer, there’s a cheese cellar to sample, and The Church restaurant is a short walk from the house, making guests feel like they are leaving their chateau for dinner at the end of the driveway. — *KD*

**Sustainability:** There are plans for the development of a biodiversity centre on the estate.

**Insider tip:** Outside the majestic doors of Rockhill House lie 100 acres of woodland to explore... watch out for Irish Wolfhound Liath on your strolls.

**Details:** B&B from €229; [rockhillhouse.ie](http://rockhillhouse.ie)

## 11

### The Old Inn Crawfordsburn, Co Down

Walking down the narrow, rickety corridor, dotted with antiques and grandfather clocks, you almost feel like you’re



Ballyseede Castle



back in the 17th century. This coaching inn dates from 1614 and has maintained that sense of old-world charm and warmth. Since it was taken over by the Galgorm Collection last year, however, it's been given a new lease of life (and style). Outside, there's a Tudor façade, lattice windows, and traditional thatch roof. Inside, you're met with crackling fires, thick wooden beams, and little snugs off the main bar, which leads into the refurbished restaurant. Here, you'll find good, solid pub food — I ate a guinea fowl pie that sang with flavour, and a sticky toffee sundae I'm still dreaming about. Bedrooms are individually designed, with fun touches like four-poster beds, gold standalone tubs, and headboards made from salvaged church organs. — *NB*

**Sustainability:** The Galgorm Collection has a tree-planting scheme as part of its long-term plans to offset carbon emissions.

**Insider tip:** The Old Inn has also teamed up with the nearby Shortcross distillery, so you'll find a complimentary G&T in your room...

**Details:** Rooms from €95 (€114); [theoldinn.com](http://theoldinn.com)

## 12

### Dunbrody House Arthurstown, Co Wexford

Twenty-five years since Catherine and Kevin Dundon opened Dunbrody House to guests, it's still getting better. "I would never be able to live in a new house anymore," Catherine told me on a walk-through of Dunbrody's latest refurb, a ground-up transformation of lobby, restaurant and rooms. "I love old buildings." That shows. The reboot of the main house blurs the barriers between inside and out, creating a clean line of sight from lobby to terrace, for example. Details like Liberty fabrics, Sanderson wallpapers and Carrera marble bathrooms bring a feel of light-touch luxury to the *Downton Abbey*-like surrounds (fun fact: Catherine rewatched the series during lockdown), and you'll find original floors restored in the bedrooms. Stunning grounds continue to get the Dundons' TLC, too. "It's like sitting in a painting," she says. — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** Upcycling and restoration of furniture was prioritised in an effort to be "as natural as possible with the least amount of brand new".

**Insider tip:** Ask for the restaurant table by the magnolia, a cosy little nook that combines privacy, garden views and first-rate people-watching.

**Details:** B&B from €290; [dunbrodyhouse.com](http://dunbrodyhouse.com)

## 13

### Ballyseede Castle Tralee, Co Kerry

There's just something about a castle. Think old-school romance, ghost stories (ask about Hilda), drawing rooms filled with fireplaces and antiques, and a new intrigue thanks to TV shows like *Downton Abbey* and *The Crown*. Tralee's Ballyseede Castle celebrates 300 years in 2022. Part of the family-owned Romantic Castles of Ireland group (Cabra Castle, Markree Castle and Castle Bellingham are its sister castles), it's been securing its future, too. Recent works have seen soft refurbs of old rooms on the third floor, a new wing of 16 contemporary rooms and suites named after poets and presidents, and a light-filled new 'orangery' space, where afternoon tea and other meals are served. Its terrace has infrared heaters and an awning, too. — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** The castle has moved away from plastic bottled water as standard, offering complimentary refillable bottled water as part of its waste management.

**Insider tip:** The Coghill Suite features a four-poster bed and bath by the bay windows, with views of Slieve Mish. Oh, and ask Tim, the barman, for a ghost tour...

**Details:** Castle rooms start from €140 midweek; packages available for suites. [ballyseedeastle.com](http://ballyseedeastle.com)

## 14

### The Haven Hotel Dunmore East, Co Waterford

There are chain hotels. There are fancy hotels. And then there are family-run hotels like The Haven, whose eccentric essence couldn't be captured in a book, let alone a paragraph on a list. "It's all about the feel," owner Paul Kelly says of the 19th-century house his father first opened as a hotel in 1964. "It's not regimented or stuffy at all; that's the way we like it. I want people to feel welcome." The Haven was hit by a devastating fire in 2015, but the Kellys seized the chance to renovate. Architects proposed "an elite boutique hotel", Paul says, "but that wasn't us. We wanted to



# 15

### Glenlo Abbey

#### Galway city

Glenlo is on a gorgeous journey. Far from retreating into its shell during Covid, the Blue Book hotel seized the opportunity to build out its offering, with owners John and Marie Lally investing more than €10m since 2019 on new rooms, crisply refreshed interiors from Dublin's Millimetre Design, a new boutique spa, and Palmers Bar & Kitchen with terrace. This year, it won 'Ireland's Best Hotel' in our Reader Travel Awards, with guests hailing a sense of "being transported back in time with all the comforts of a modern hotel". The journey continues with the re-imagined walled garden set to be finished this year. More new rooms are coming, and 11 new self-catering lodges will follow in 2023. Guests can take a journey, too — literally. The Pullman Restaurant is set on board original carriages from the Orient Express. — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** The hotel has developed a new environmental policy and is [greenhospitality.ie](http://greenhospitality.ie) certified. You'll find lots of local food on the menus, too.

**Insider tip:** You can book private movie screenings in the bijou Abbey Movie Theatre, with popcorn delivered to your plush velvet seat.

**Details:** B&B from €269; [glenloabbeyhotel.ie](http://glenloabbeyhotel.ie)

keep going as a good, vibrant business." Today, you'll see that ticking over in the Victorian building, the big marquee hosting weddings and touring acts outside, a bustling summer terrace, menus featuring "pub rather than hotel prices", and jolly, jumbled interiors, with family photos, random artefacts, original fireplaces, rock posters, and laminated signs all catching the eye. The formula is hard to describe, but it feels like a home from home. — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** Planning has been secured for a subterranean wedding venue to replace the marquee, which will be built into the landscaped grass steps out front.

**Insider tip:** Room Five has a four-poster bed and bay window with super coastal views over Dunmore East.

**Details:** Doubles from €150; [thehavenhotel.com](http://thehavenhotel.com)

## 16

### Yellow Submarine Lisnalong, Co Monaghan

It's not by chance that Ollie Gibson's Yellow Submarine featured on *George Clarke's Amazing Spaces* on Channel 4 this spring. Nor that it enjoyed going on show at four St Patrick's Day parades. Sleeping up to six in bunks and a double, the off-grid glamping pod is a former lifeboat given a second life as a cheerful hideaway you'd half expect a Beate to pop out of at any moment. "Covid shut our guest house down in March of 2020, and we were at a loose end as to what to do," Ollie explains. He found the lifeboat on DoneDeal, the kids said it looked like a submarine, and a

brainwave occurred. The sub will be set on the banks of the Dromore River and available to book from May to September. It's a basic stay, with no shower, an outdoor compostable toilet, and guests should bring their own sleeping bags, but there is a small sink and double hob inside. If summer goes well, Ollie hopes more quirky quarters will follow. "We have six acres along the river, so hopefully this will be the first of many. I'm looking for the next winter project!" — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** Two solar panels power the lights and pump for the sink. When we say off-grid, we mean it.

**Insider tip:** Ollie runs guided canoe trips along the Dromore River, so that's bookable as an extra, too.

**Details:** Rentals from €100 for two; €20 extra per person (two-night minimum stay). Instagram: [@yellowsubmarineglamping](https://www.instagram.com/yellowsubmarineglamping)

## Urban legends

## 17

### The Montenotte Cork city

It's the hotel with the view — and a trove of upgrades besides. Since its refresh five years ago, The Montenotte has been a hub of Leeside luxury and creative credibility, from its panoramic restaurant, botanical terrace, and new terrace Glasshouse Bar, to its quirky sculpture garden and acclaimed artist's residency. Not one to rest on its laurels,

2022 will see The Montenotte add new "nests for guests", as design-led treehouse suites aim to mark the property as Cork's ultimate urban resort. The new "nests" and cantilevered suites, set among the trees, will be designed "with an eco-conscious and high-end consumer in mind, who is in search of an exclusive hideaway", as Ray Kelleher, the hotel's director of sales and marketing, hints. It all sounds pretty perch perfect. — *TB*

**Sustainability:** At check-out, guests receive a packet of Irish wildflower seeds to bring home and plant (mine are already in full spring flourish).

**Insider tip:** Looking for a night out? Just downhill from The Montenotte lies Cork's happening new tapas bar, Moody.

**Details:** B&B from €215; [themontenottehotel.com](http://themontenottehotel.com)

## 18

### The Dean Galway city

The Press-Up Group continues its quest for world domination with a Galway edition of its groundbreaking Dean hotels. Deans are already doing the business in Dublin and Cork, and this 101-bed hotel follows the template, with eye-catching Irish art, Sophie's rooftop restaurant, and hip rooms decked out with record players, mini Marshall amps and Smeg fridges. But there are new additions, too, including "the West of Ireland's very first Elephant & Castle" eatery, and a limestone façade alternately bush-hammered and sandblasted to provide a light-and-dark echo of the West's stone walls. The Prospect Hill hotel was set to

open this week, with more rooms, a rock 'n' roll penthouse suite (sleeping eight, with bonus standalone copper bath) and Power gym to follow. — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** The building saw the restoration and incorporation of a portion of the Galway-to-Clifden railway tunnel, originally built in the 1890s.

**Insider tip:** Book direct online for a 10pc discount.

**Details:** B&B from €140; [thedean.ie](http://thedean.ie)

## 19

### 360 Quay Stay Dungarvan, Co Waterford

Dungarvan has emerged as a tourism dynamo in Munster in recent years, and its latest accommodation brings a fresh boutique verve to the town. You can bring your dog, too. 360 Quay Stay (from the people who brought you 360 Cookhouse in the town), is Dungarvan's former youth hostel turned vibrant auberge, offering a central, room-only base for visitors to the area. Expect the feather-boa treatment inside, where a lush lobby rich in Art Deco and botanics blends with colourful rooms, varying from compact queens to family-sized spaces. Pets also get the VIP treatment — not least with goodie bags to gorge on. — *TB*

**Sustainability:** Check-in is an eco-friendly, paper-free process, as guests complete forms and check in/out from their devices.

**Insider tip:** Head to Clonea Beach for The Hot Pod, a new glass-front mobile sauna (360 Quay Stay guests can enjoy special rates).

**Details:** Rooms from €125; [360stay.ie](http://360stay.ie)





# 20

## Lagom

Kenmare, Co Kerry

The Swedish word 'lagom' translates as 'not too much, not too little, just right', and it's the philosophy behind Brendan and Liz Byrne's new restaurant and townhouse on Kenmare's Henry Street. Once you learn what it means, you'll spot the subtle theme everywhere — from a logo based on a Scots pine near Kenmare Pier, to the birch dividers in the dining room or the terroir-based takes on Brendan's menus (think local fish cooked over coals, a Sneem black pudding and mushroom raviolo, or Lagom cheesecake flavoured with seasonal rhubarb).

"We're trying to get away from stuffiness, and to make good food accessible to more people," as Liz puts it (a three-course dinner at €48 is a bargain in this town).

The 10 rooms upstairs used to be a guesthouse. Now they are decorated with sparse but comfortable schemes inspired by the beauty and plant life of the area. Here and there, guests will find carefully curated touches that breathe luxury into the layover — a clever recessed light under the banisters, Markus Jungmann ceramic mugs in the rooms or products from Skellig Soaps, for example.

The overarching aim is to "localise" and bring that lovely feeling of 'just right' to guests, they say.

Brendan and Liz first met while they were working at Sheen Falls Lodge, and Brendan has cooked at Monart and Operakällaren in Stockholm, so they bring the right notes of experience to the venture, too. Deciding to open in a town already renowned for its food, accommodation and well-heeled tourist traffic was a bold move and lifestyle change that came about for several reasons, they say — including Brendan's desire for a less corporate working life, the impact of his travels on Liz's career, and a better balance for their family. The aim is to make Lagom a new destination in Kenmare, a place people will travel to — like Paul and Marie Flynn's Tannery in Dungarvan.

Lagom doesn't have a direct translation, but means "a lifestyle that is rooted in balance, living in harmony with your surroundings," they say. When I ask for a summary, they give two words — "elevated simplicity". — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** The restaurant takes an ultra-local, seasonal approach, supporting nearby producers and suppliers.

**Insider tip:** Lagom also does a three-course Sunday lunch with house-baked breads from €28pp.

**Details:** B&B from €130-€150; [lagomkenmare.com](http://lagomkenmare.com)



PICTURES: LYNDA KENNY

## The Grafton

Dublin city

It can be tough to find a good family room in a hotel. For the most part, you're left with a rickety foldaway bed or something that pulls out of a sofa. Which is why Dublin's newly refurbished The Grafton Hotel is a game changer. Its family rooms can sleep up to six, with either one or two bunk beds in addition to a lovely king, with plenty of space for the kids to run around, too. And they're not lacking in style, with nautical lights and big leather armchairs. But it's not just for kids — the regular rooms are spacious and chic, some with their own little terraces for a morning coffee or afternoon sundowner. — *NB & Stella Forte*

**Sustainability:** There's a high-tech water system in place that alerts maintenance to any leaks, to prevent water wastage.

**Insider tip:** Ask for a room on a higher level to make the most of the neighbourhood views and avoid the noise around South William Street.

**Details:** Rooms from €134, family room sleeping six from €269; [thegrafton.ie](http://thegrafton.ie)

# 22

## Point A Hotel

Dublin city

We all love a good budget hotel. Even more so when the bargain prices come with a hefty dash of style and personality. Point A is a new addition to Parnell Street, with great views over the rooftops of the northside from the stairwells (and some of the rooms). Bedrooms are compact without being pokey, with fun little pops of colour, including clever fold-out desks and button-studded headboards. You can even adjust the colour of the room with a nifty mood-lighting switch. Downstairs, the lobby bar has become a bit of a co-working space, with people tapping away on laptops on the armchairs. If you want to avoid the street noise, ask for a courtyard room. — *NB*

**Sustainability:** There's not much to shout about yet, but the Paul Costelloe toiletries in the bathrooms are full-sized and refillable, rather than single-use mini bottles.

**Insider tip:** You'll find Dublin's best sandwiches at the nearby 147 Deli, a five-minute walk up Parnell Street.

**Details:** Rooms from €90; [pointahotels.com](http://pointahotels.com)

# 23

## The Westbury

Dublin city

The Doyle Collection doesn't stand still. Latest case in point? Its new terrace suites at The Westbury — a hotel that opened in the early 1980s, but with sensitive upgrades, combining old-school and Art-Deco glamour, feels a world away from the homogeneous hipster havens that seem to be taking over our cities. The terrace suites are on the fifth floor, with rooftop views to the west of the city. Outdoor areas include heaters and blankets for cosying up under, and inside you'll find separate sleeping and sitting areas, marble bathrooms, and roll-top tubs with their own TVs. We did feel the muted, grey-forward palette was a little corporate, however. — *PÓC & Rachel Dugan*

**Sustainability:** The Doyle Collection's Irish hotels use 100pc renewable electricity, and The Westbury is Gold-certified by [green-tourism.com](http://green-tourism.com).

**Insider tip:** Leave time for afternoon tea or a pre-dinner drink in The Westbury's first-floor Gallery, bagging a window seat if at all possible. It's gorgeous.

**Details:** B&B rates from €300 approximately; terrace suites from €768. [doylecollection.com](http://doylecollection.com)



PICTURE: ANDREW BRADLEY

# 24

## The Imperial

Cork city

Cork's hotel scene has been on the rise over the past year thanks to several new openings and refurbishments, but it's one of the city's most historic properties that continues to reinvent itself. As you walk into its fresh teal lobby dripping with chandeliers, The Imperial has the swagger of a grand dame diva enjoying a late career revival. Rooms have a classic elegance, and those peering out upon the leafy South Mall offer just a hint of Park Avenue living. Dining options like Lafayette's café and Thyme are razzle-dazzle-rich Art-Deco spaces, while the new cocktail bar, Sketch, is an oh-so-Instagrammable addition. 2022 will see the hotel continuing to innovate as it launches a new room category, featuring a hot tub and panoramic views of Cork city and its landmarks. — *TB*

**Sustainability:** Individual plastic toiletries have been ditched for dispensers filled with products from vegan and cruelty-free Irish brand Field Day.

**Insider tip:** Pop across the Lee to St George's Quay for a Palaeontologist feast at one of Cork's favourite food spots, Izz Café.

**Details:** B&B from €149; [imperialhotels.com](http://imperialhotels.com)

# 25

## The Westin

Dublin city

If it's been a minute since you last popped into The Westin, you likely won't recognise it. The lobby of this five-star, once overwhelmed with dark wood, has been opened up and is a much lighter, luxurious introduction to the hotel,

complete with a subtle white tea signature scent in the air. First-floor bedrooms have also been refurbished, with a serene new palette providing little nods to the Irish landscape — the carpets mimic the colourway of the Atlantic, with sandy shores giving way to deep oceanic blues. There are Irish artists on the walls, and each bed features "10 layers of heaven", with a little vial of lavender oil next to your pillow to aid the perfect night's sleep. — *NB*

**Sustainability:** Shocking that it isn't a more common sight at this stage, but each room has a recycling bin.

**Insider tip:** The elegant Atrium space is one of the best spots for a swish drink in the city, but if you can tear yourself away for a pint, nip over the road to one of Dublin's best pubs, The Palace Bar.

**Details:** Rooms from €320; [thewestinhoteldublin.com](http://thewestinhoteldublin.com)

# 26

## Arthaus Hotel

Dublin city

In what was previously the Travelodge on Mercer Street, the Arthaus Hotel has taken a bland building and turned it into a celebration of colour and art. Two artists, Fran Halpin and Deirdre McClorey, were commissioned to create numerous installations throughout the hotel, inspired by the revolutionary 19th-century Irish female artists Maimie Jellett and Mary Swanzy, both of whom were born nearby. Upstairs, rooms are vibrant but subtle, with padded velvet headboards hung over mirrored backdrops, and curved walnut wardrobes and cabinets. It's a fabulous addition to Dublin's hotel scene. — *NB*

**Sustainability:** The full-sized toiletries in the rooms are from Irish company Field Day, which offers vegan and cruelty-free products, with bottles made from recycled plastic.

**Insider tip:** No matter which floor you're staying on, have a walk up the stairs to see the art that's displayed on each level.

**Details:** Rooms from €129; [arthausdublin.ie](http://arthausdublin.ie)



**Small — but perfectly formed**

**27**

**Pax House  
Dingle, Co Kerry**

"Whenever a person comes through the door, there is a story." So says John O'Farrell, the personable proprietor, host, chef, curator... and just about everything else at this gorgeous guest house. Named 'Ireland's Best B&B' in our Reader Travel Awards this year, this is a luxurious 16-bed stay with all the warmth and welcome of a home (within minutes of arriving, I was offered fresh milk for my room and a lift into town). A bright living room, carefully decorated with John's books, plants and objets d'art, has floor-to-ceiling glass sliders opening on to a terrace overlooking Dingle Bay. Rooms similarly feature calm whites and creams, with two large new additions opening on to their own patios, and little luxuries like Voya bathroom products, or binoculars left about for birdwatching, are dotted throughout. Breakfast starts with a tiered tray of fresh fruit and treats, with hot dishes cooked to order, and there's a wine list and cheese plates for evening snacks. "The kind of people who come here aren't rushing around," as John says. I want to be one. — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** Little touches like refillable water bottles in rooms and local breakfast ingredients show a thoughtfulness throughout in this area.

**Insider tip:** Pay extra for a sea-view room — it's worth it. Guests should note that Pax House is mainly an adults-only stay, but children over 12 are welcome.

**Details:** B&B from €125 to €280; [pax-house.com](http://pax-house.com)

**28**

**Corrib House  
Co Galway**

Ireland's period townhouses can offer a true lost-in-time allure, and Corrib House is a magical example. This heritage-listed house dates from the 1800s, but it's only in the last decade, thanks to owners David and Victoria Bohan, that it's been enjoying its most recent reincarnation as a very becoming inn. The property offers five sympathetically appointed rooms, where characterful original features are paired with a mix of antique and salvaged furniture, giving a prim and polished luxury — without that overly curated feel so pervasive nowadays. Come evening, sink into a gorgeous sleigh bed, or take a soak in an en-suite claw tub to the soundtrack of the Corrib gushing through the salmon weir outside. Breakfast at Corrib House's Tea Rooms, a popular local brunch spot, is a highlight: expect dishes like locally fuelled veggie grills and brioche French toast with whipped mascarpone. — *TB*

**Sustainability:** Corrib House's kitchen maintains a zero-waste policy and supports a trove of local suppliers — many, like Colleran's butchers and Le Petit Délice bakery, are within walking distance.

**Insider tip:** If you'd like to experience the city on a plate, join Sheena Dignam and Gosia Letowska for a Galway food tour across the city. [galwayfoodtours.com](http://galwayfoodtours.com)

**Details:** Rooms from €150; [corribhouse.com](http://corribhouse.com)



PICTURES: LORCAN DOHERTY

**29**

**Bancran School  
Draperstown, Co Derry**

"It's like a small wee village," says Chris Collins of Bancran School, a unique glamping resort in the Sperrins. "It's completely unexpected when you come in from the road."

He and his wife Aileen were inspired by their own globetrotting adventures to bring glamping into their backyard, beginning with a simple Airbnb room rental and growing over time to add The Loft, The Black Shack, The Pod and their newest addition, The Hen House. But this isn't just any old backyard. The couple's home is the old Bancran schoolhouse, which they bought after it had lain derelict for over 30 years. After refurbishing the historic building, set just outside Draperstown in Co Derry, Chris and Aileen have added four totally different glamping huts overlooking the Sperrin Mountains.

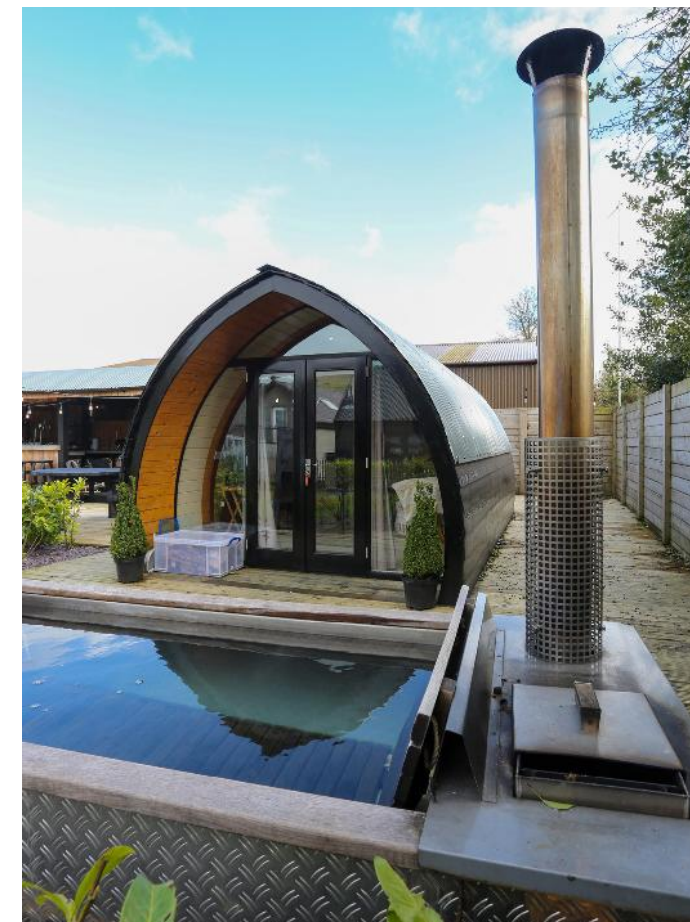
"If we were away on a budget, what type of things would we like?" That's the guiding principle for these "luxury lodgings in the Sperrins", as they are dubbed — all of which are distinctly decorated with much of the materials salvaged. Quirky details, from custom-made pallet beds to sliding doors or a cast iron outdoor bath, add to the drama and delight of each. "Organic growth is definitely how I would explain it," Chris says, describing how money made from one Tiny House-style stay went into the next. "In a funny way, it's part of the charm."

The couple have also built a communal area, the Gin Tin, in the garden, with Weber barbecue facilities, Ooni pizza oven and board games. In summer, there are games like swing ball and archery on the lawn, and winter sees guests cosy up with their stoves and hot tubs (there's a home gym, too, and a wood-burning sauna planned this year). Bancran School isn't the place for stag or hen parties or boozy group sessions, however — lights are generally out by 10.30pm, Chris says, and families are welcome. "The beauty is that you can pull the blinds and it is pretty private; if you don't want to mingle you can sit with your own fire... we have a sign up that says 'Good Vibes', and you get that back. It's a really nice atmosphere." — *KD & PÓC*

**Sustainability:** Bancran School operates a paperless system, from booking to completion of stay, and has eliminated single-use plastics in its business.

**Insider tip:** Guests can enjoy their own personal hot tub. They are all different — one a wood-burning tub from Swedish company Hikki, for example. Wood is provided, too.

**Details:** From £100 (€119) to £130 (€155) per night. Instagram: [@bancranschool](https://www.instagram.com/bancranschool)



**30**

**Benwiskin Mountain Lodge  
Co Sligo**

Self-catering rentals can be a little soulless. Benwiskin Mountain Lodge is anything but. With stylish hanging bulbs and Aztec throws on the beds, this place feels like a home belonging to your coolest friend, which makes sense, as it belongs to a designer, her partner and their young family. That means the house is filled with the kind of things you'll actually need, like a decent coffee maker and toys in the kids' room. As it's been in the family for gen-

erations, there are cool elements retained from the original farmhouse, like a restored 1950s Formica kitchen table and a mid-century daybed salvaged from the old cottage. But the real show-stopper is the giant window in the living room, framing the nearby Benwiskin Mountain. — *NB*

**Sustainability:** They're currently planting a wildflower meadow garden filled with native plants.

**Insider tip:** Head out to hike the nearby Gleniff Horseshoe, a gorgeous 10km loop.

**Details:** From €180 per night plus fees; [airbnb.com/h/benwiskinmountainlodge](http://airbnb.com/h/benwiskinmountainlodge)

PICTURE: RUTH CONNOLLY



Dandruff?

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# 31

## Thistledown Lodge

Fethard-on-Sea, Co Wexford

It's quite a change, moving from Dubai to Fethard-on-Sea. But that was the point for Enda Mac Mullan and Martin Matousek, who saw in the pandemic a chance to swap high-flying careers in retail for a boutique B&B close to the very edge of Wexford's Hook Peninsula.

"Dubai isn't a 'forever' kind of place anyway, and we were kind of tired, in stressful jobs," Enda says. "We were sick of cities and with Covid, and the way life has changed, it was kind of a no-brainer... It was like, let's just do it!"

After lots of searching, the couple bought a former holiday home on the Hook and have flipped it into a two-room stay, where muted tones, restrained luxury and Enda's upcycled artworks breathe new life into a traditional way of holidaying in Ireland. The rooms (named Carnivan and Baginbun, after local beaches) come with wine coolers, walk-in showers, Netflix and 540-thread-count Egyptian-cotton sheets, but are never in your face; the idea is to avoid austere design and carry a welcoming, 'cottagey' vibe through a restful, textured space. Breakfast menus are light touch, but don't worry, the full Irish is there too — along with a vegetarian version.

Enda's own parents had a holiday home in Co Wexford, a bungalow in Cahore, and he spent many summer holidays in the county as a kid ("a bit of my heart was there"). Thistledown Lodge opened last October, the couple are gearing up for their first full season, and future plans range from garden developments to adding extra accommodation and developing the three- and seven-night fitness and health holidays led by Martin.

"We knew what we liked; we knew what worked and didn't work for us," he says. "That was our inspiration for creating a space that we would like to stay in." — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** Creative upcycling adds interest and style throughout, from reused picture frames to a coffee table made from part of an old airplane engine.

**Insider tip:** If you like your baths, pay the €20 extra for Baginbun — the room has a standalone tub and luxury bathrobes.

**Details:** B&B from €100-€140; [thistledownlodge.com](http://thistledownlodge.com)



PICTURE: PATRICK BROWNE



# 32

## Twig & Heather Cottage

Inishowen Peninsula, Co Donegal

This one-bedroom cottage for two is quite something, offering a unique sense of being away from it all just 15 minutes from Buncrana. Choice interiors are part of the charm, with a mix of antique and oriental furniture, books, and photographic images by aurora borealis chaser Adam Rory Porter — if you can drag yourself away from the mesmerising views from the kitchen, that is. This season, host Andrea Shaw has lined up all sorts of little extras to enjoy. Sharon Porter of Solas Ireland, a qualified hiking guide, just happens to live on the same laneway leading down to the lovely Port Bán beach, for example, and you can arrange to explore Fort Dunree by sunset with her (€15). Or why not push your holiday into a whole new sphere by taking a bog safari or enjoying a hiking tour of the Mamore Gap or in the Urris Hills (€42, [solasireland.com](http://solasireland.com)). — *Bairbre Power*

**Sustainability:** If your limbs are aching after a tour, Andrea can arrange to have locally foraged seaweed delivered for a relaxing soak in the tub.

**Insider tip:** Tuck into local seafood at Nancy's Barn in Ballyliffin, and watch out for a new local food van at weekends.

**Details:** From €150 per night (three-night minimum stay); [twigandheather.com](http://twigandheather.com)

# 33

## The Old Post Office

Kilmacthomas, Co Waterford

Rosemary Brown's family have been the masters of The Old Post Office in Kilmacthomas since the 1830s. Today, however, this historic Déise delight is less airmail and more, well, Airbnb. Following a labour-of-love transformation, the property has been reborn as a five-bed rental bursting with period character and local touches (think Victorian tiles in the hallway and willow pattern china). It's proving popular with multigenerational groups, Rosemary says: "They come with their children, their parents, their dogs and, of course, their bikes!" That's a reference to the Waterford Greenway, which sits just a few gear switches from the door. Seeking a smaller bolthole? The house also features a one-bed studio in the original post-office floor. — *TB*

**Sustainability:** Rosemary offers the adjacent field plot for use as the local community garden, which, in turn, produces fresh veggies.

**Insider tip:** O'Reilly's traditional butchers, across the road, is a great spot to stock up on your roast and all the trimmings.

**Details:** House from €280 per night (four-night minimum stay), studio (two-night minimum stay) from €80; [airbnb.com](http://airbnb.com)

## Four-stars & family stays

# 34

## Haslem Hotel

Lisburn, Co Antrim

From Beannchor, the crowd that brought you Belfast's Bullitt and Merchant hotels, comes the Haslem, a design-led hotel set on Lisburn Square. The décor is pretty simple, with bursts of colour coming from the cool Leo Boyd prints in every room, some of which depict the swimming pool that used to stand on this very courtyard (with an unexplained Godzilla frolicking in the water). The bright-and-airy bar-and-restaurant space is casually stylish, with sleek tiled floors, industrial ceilings, and comfy leather banquettes. The new *Game of Thrones* Studio Tour is just 20 minutes away, near Banbridge, too. — *NB*

**Sustainability:** Instead of using paper, there are digital guest directories and hotel guides in every room.

**Insider tip:** There's a new artisan market held every Sunday in Lisburn Square, where you can pick up delicious cheese from Ballylisk of Armagh or a little treat from Granny Shaws Fudge Factory.

**Details:** Rooms from £59 (€70); [haslemhotel.com](http://haslemhotel.com)

# 35

## Glenroyal Hotel

Maynooth, Co Kildare

It's always great to see a hotel that serves the community as much as it does its guests. On the day I visit the Glenroyal Hotel, their Shoda Market Café is filled with locals catching up over avocado toast and buttermilk pancakes. In the summertime, the Shoda vintage truck serves up coffee and tacos, too. When it comes to the rooms, the newly refurbished spaces are rather swish, and kids are well-catered for — you can book a teepee for the bedrooms, and Lenny the Lion will deliver milk and cookies at bedtime. — *NB*

**Sustainability:** The drinking water in the rooms comes in glass bottles rather than plastic, which, by now, should be standard everywhere.

**Insider tip:** The hotel is right on the Grand Canal Greenway, and there are bike racks at the entrance, so bring the bicycles and head out for a spin.

**Details:** Rooms from €139; [glenroyal.ie](http://glenroyal.ie)

# 36

## Hotel67

Killarney, Co Kerry

Think 'hotel within a hotel' and larger US resorts may spring to mind — places with separate floors and staff set aside for select customers or design concepts. Hotel67 is a surprising take on the concept in Killarney's popular Gleneagle Hotel, flipping a wing of old guest rooms that had been used as office and storage space for decades. The building dates from 1967, and the hotel leans into that (and the Gleneagle's concert and ballroom tradition) with rock posters from the era, a special Spotify playlist, moody lighting, and 24 rooms offering urbane, space-savvy designs, with exposed steel and pipework, reclaimed brick, and breakfast boxes delivered in the morning (book a mountain-view room for the best vistas). Part of a broader, €7.2m refurb that saw the Gleneagle become a four-star during the pandemic, it's a bold, stripped-back offering that blows open our sense of what a Killarney hotel room can be... and the pool, restaurants and entertainment of the wider resort are right downstairs, too. — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** For 60 years, the Gleneagle Group has supported a wide range of sporting clubs and cultural groups in the community.

**Insider tip:** The refurb has also created seven accessible rooms, and there are wheelchair-accessible lifts to the Backstage Bar and OD's restaurant.

**Details:** B&B from €109-€195; [hotel67.ie](http://hotel67.ie)

# 37

## Ocean Sands Hotel

Enniscrone, Co Sligo

It can be trite to talk about the knack of a good welcome, but at Enniscrone's Ocean Sands Hotel, you can feel genuine warmth from the moment you enter. This is the kind of place where departing guests book their next stay when they check out, and I saw several heart-warming reunions between guests and staff when I was there. This year, the hotel was bumped up to four-star status, and they've got a new head chef in the kitchen. Marcin Szczodrowski worked in Sligo's Eala Bhán for 14 years, and his brand of simple-but-elegant food has elevated the restaurant hugely — he has plans to launch a fine-dining menu one night a week, too. A new spa is due to open in April, with seaweed baths, thermal suite and a salt room to boot. — *NB*

**Sustainability:** The treats in each room come from Noo Chocolates, made just up the road in Ballina.

**Insider tip:** Kilcullen's Seaweed Baths are around the corner and gloriously old school — there's a cute coffee truck right by it, too. [kilcullenseaweedbaths.net](http://kilcullenseaweedbaths.net)

**Details:** Rooms from €119; [theoceansandshotel.ie](http://theoceansandshotel.ie)

# 38

## Castlemartyr Resort

Castlemartyr, Co Cork

East Cork has almost become the new West Cork thanks to its trending food scene, hot music venues and destination properties like Castlemartyr Resort. And following a takeover by the owners of Sheen Falls Lodge last year, the five-star woodland estate is now in the midst of a makeover. A redesign is set to give the hotel a seamless new flow, while bedrooms are undergoing a luxurious refurb. The hotel will also see its historic Bell Tower restaurant put out to pasture — it's to be replaced by the new Canopy dining experience, where head chef Kevin Burke will curate a locally inspired menu dubbed 'Irish nua'. "It's a very exciting time, and we're looking forward to welcoming guests to the resort to experience our five-star Cork welcome," general manager Brendan Comerford tells us. — *TB*



**Sustainability:** The resort has announced a new partnership with the reforestation non-profit One Tree Planted, where guests will have the option to plant a tree as part of the booking process.  
**Insider tip:** Sync up your stay with an upcoming gig at Sea Church, the new live music star in nearby Ballycotton.  
**Details:** Rooms from €239; [castlemartyrresort.ie](#)

## 39

### Doolin Inn Doolin, Co Clare

Anthony Moloney was just nine years old when the sod was turned on this Doolin doozy. What was a hostel in 1986 has since evolved into a 22-bed country house and restaurant he and his wife, Deirdre, run with tireless energy, creativity and commitment to their community. This couple understand the importance of innovation and reinvestment in hospitality, and during Covid was no different. They seized the opportunity to open a new restaurant, under chef Tomás Walsh, with a firm focus on local goodies — from ‘Big Burren Breakfasts’ that see tiered trays full of treats replace pre-pandemic buffets, to dinner and brunch menus stacked with local cheese, meats and seafood (“We’ve got the best produce in the world,” Anthony says, “so why not use it?”). In a staffing crisis, their #LifeInDoolin recruitment campaign is another reason they fit into our Fab 50 — offering year-round wages, affordable housing with discounted rent, staff meals, training and career progression paths as they recruit hospitality stars of the future. — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** Doolin Inn is a member of the award-winning Burren Ecotourism Network. It also actively supports local business — a new terrace coffee dock featuring Anam coffee is next on the list for development.

**Insider tip:** Heading out on a hike? Packed lunches can be pre-ordered from €8.50pp, or there’s an artisan picnic available from €22.50pp.

**Details:** B&B from €130-€200; [doolininn.ie](#)



PICTURE: DOMINICK WALSH

## 40

### Palmer Lodge, The K Club Straffan, Co Kildare

The K Club is another legendary resort getting upgraded by a new owner, with room refurb, a spiffy refresh of its clubhouse, and a new restaurant, South, just some of the recent revamps. Palmer Lodge is a self-catering option that sees one of the original gate lodges on the Straffan estate restored to an elegant, contemporary-styled four-bed, offering guests both privacy and the run of the resort. As with many posh golf resorts, the challenge is to bring the K Club from a jacket-and-tie era toward lighter-touch luxury and a more family-friendly offering in the post-Covid era — these changes, along with a new push on activities like paddle boarding, Segway tours and a Junior Einsteins Science Club, are moving it in the right direction. — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** As part of golf-course upgrades at the K Club, 500 trees were planted in 2021, with 100 to follow over each of the next five years.

**Insider tip:** Push the boat out even further with a stay at Straffan House, an opulent 10-bed stay with its own private pool, cinema... and €20,000-a-night price tag.

**Details:** Rates at Palmer Lodge range from €600-€1,000 a night (three-night minimum stay); [kclub.ie](#)

## 41

### Lawlor’s of Naas Co Kildare

“You won’t have seen anything like this,” Mercedes Bag-nall of Lawlor’s tells me before I visit. I wonder what she means. The town-centre hotel has been welcoming guests since 1913, and the old lobby, bar and rooms are homely, as you’d expect. But when we step through to a palatial new extension, it all becomes apparent. Seventy-four rooms are being added in a massive development that also features a new ballroom, bars and mezzanine. The vast, marble-heavy

lobby is crammed with owner Jack Tierney’s antiques, from a reception desk salvaged from the Berkeley Court Hotel to a huge stone fireplace from a French château, and a voluminous vase from The Savoy. The space feels at once baffling and brilliant, with its centrepiece a circular dining bar sweeping from floor to ceiling. How it gels with the old-school hotel remains to be seen once it opens, but yes, I can confirm that I’ve never seen anything like it. — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** The scale of salvaging is breathtaking. The Courtroom is a meeting room with actual 19th-century courtroom furniture, for example.

**Insider tip:** A ‘Kildare and Wicklow Explorer’ package has two nights’ B&B, one dinner and discounts at Russborough House, The National Stud and more from €258.

**Details:** B&B from €89; [lawlors.ie](#)

## 42

### Tulfarris Hotel & Golf Resort Blessington, Co Wicklow

Previously owned by an Earl of Kildare, and rugby legend Karl Mullen, this four-star resort has taken a big step forward thanks to a €7.4m investment by Ireland’s Prem Group. Some well-judged additions and TLC have taken it from Nama to a new era of golf, weddings, and leisure breaks — rooms in the 18th-century manor are restored in heritage style (it can be booked by groups), for example, with balcony rooms pick of the bunch in the hotel itself. There’s a new ballroom for events and weddings, a revamped bar and terrace serving up al fresco pizza, and an Airstream trailer in summer. Fia Rua restaurant is the standout space, a bistro-style room gorgeously designed by Julie Goggin to take advantage of views over the 18th green, with curving brown leather banquettes centring around a large olive tree. It’s name isn’t as widely known as other resorts, but this reboot, and the developing Blessington Greenway, will surely start turning heads. — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** Wall-mounted Paul Costelloe bathroom products replace mini toiletries, and Fia Rua sources local ingredients where possible.

**Insider tip:** If you book direct, the hotel will give you a complimentary glass of Prosecco and a €10-a-night reduction.  
**Details:** A ‘Stay, Play and Dine’ package, bundling accommodation, golf and dinner, starts from €109pp midweek; [tulfarrisshotel.com](#)

### By the water

## 43

### Collanmore Island Lodge Clew Bay, Co Mayo

Ever dreamed of a stay on your own private island? Decades ago, John Lennon and Yoko Ono bought Dorinish in Clew Bay — and you can follow in their footsteps (for two nights, anyway) by booking Collanmore Island Lodge. Set on another island in the heart of the bay, up to 22 guests can be whisked by rib from Rosmoney Pier to stay at the pods or garden-view or sea-view dorms, and activities like sea kayaking and stand-up paddle boarding can be arranged, along with entertainment options like trad music or murder-mystery nights. Families, hen parties, and members of the Connacht rugby team have stayed, and the Lodge also has its own bar based on Matt Molloy’s in Westport (it’s BYO — but you can order a keg). Owner Ciaran Collins, whose family previously lived here, used the pandemic as an opportunity to work on several upgrades, including moving a nine-person hot tub to a sea-view perch, alongside a sauna. “I consider it the best view in the world,” he says. When the weather’s good, “you’d have to be pinching yourself to think it’s not the Caribbean”, he adds. Oh, and did we mention the private beach? — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** The lodge is A-rated, with solar-powered hot water and a heat-recovery system.

**Insider tip:** You can arrange catering, or takeaways can be dropped over from the mainland from around €14pp.

**Details:** Two nights from €2,500 midweek and €2,900 at weekends; [collanmoreislandlodge.com](#)

# 44

### Blackberry Lodge Dromquinna, Co Kerry

By now, you’d permit the Brennan brothers a little rest on their laurels. But no. During the pandemic they got busy refurbishing The Park Hotel, as well as buying and revamping The Lansdowne, a rebooted townhouse hotel across the road. Now comes Blackberry Lodge, a luxury self-catering conversion of a former farmhouse on the waterside campus of Dromquinna, just outside Kenmare. John Brennan and wife Gwen have been developing this lovely oasis since 2011, and guests can already choose between glamping tents, Potting Sheds (old buildings in which many of the estate trees were nourished that have now been transformed into luxury stays), and The Bolthole, another self-catering stay, sleeping six. A new courtyard area where people can gather in booths around a fire pit has been added by the games room, and Shutters, a casual restaurant doing oak-fired pizza, opens in May. It’s a tasty addition to The Boathouse bistro.

Blackberry Lodge is big — a 5,500-sq ft rental sleeping up to 12 in six bedrooms. It looks out over the kitchen gardens and Kenmare Bay, and is perfectly teed up for family reunions or larger groups seeking to reconnect after two years

of Zoom calls and missed occasions (surprisingly, there aren’t many rentals of this size around Kenmare). Furnished with a mix of antiques and contemporary pieces, it has a large kitchen and dining area, and several patios, where people can mingle. Bordered by the Victorian Water Garden and Little Wood, there is some sense of seclusion within the petite resort, though it is not completely set apart from the other offerings.

Set on 40 acres of waterside parkland, Dromquinna has evolved cleverly and thoughtfully in the years since it first brought Blue Book glamping to Kenmare, and though the 19th-century manor itself has never opened to leisure guests (it’s for weddings and events only), the campus is getting harder and harder to leave. Next up? Four courtyard mews residences are already underway. — *PÓC*

**Sustainability:** There’s a project in place to ensure the future planting of trees on Dromquinna’s estate, and 75pc of the menu produce comes from “small independent operators within a 10-mile radius”, they say.

**Insider tip:** Don’t want to rent all six bedrooms? Ground-floor-only options are available at a reduced rate. Private catering can also be organised.

**Details:** Four-day stays at Blackberry Lodge from €2,500. [dromquinnamanor.com](#)

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# 45

## Haddington House Dún Laoghaire, Co Dublin

Every so often, a hotel fills a gap you didn't even realise was there. Set within four Victorian townhouses in Dún Laoghaire, Haddington House is a seaside stay perfectly combining tasteful heritage features and sleek, enviable style. The bedroom décor is outstanding — think William Morris wallpaper and matching lampshades, rotary telephones, and cast-iron radiators, as well as dreamy sea views. The minibar tempts with Bean and Goose chocolate and pre-made tipples from Craft Cocktails. Downstairs, the sprawling parlour bar is at once vibrant and serene, with cosy armchairs and an expert cocktail menu. My whiskey royale really did smell like the Amalfi Coast, just as the mixologist promised. In Oliveto restaurant, there's an Italian flavour but strong Irish ingredients (Killary Fjord mussels with a zingy pancetta sauce, and home-made focaccia as soft as a pillow, for example.) Heaven. — *NB*

**Sustainability:** Sourcing from Irish suppliers is stellar, and they minimise food waste by using 'wonky' veg in the restaurant — a nice touch.

**Insider tip:** Bring your togs! In the rooms, you'll find a straw bag with beach towels and a hot-water bottle to take to the nearby Forty Foot for a dip.

**Details:** Rooms from €165; [haddingtonhouse.ie](http://haddingtonhouse.ie)

# 46

## Ballyliffin Townhouse & Spa Inishowen Peninsula, Co Donegal

You'd never know what a gem this was unless you stepped inside. Run by Cathal and Jackie Doherty and their family, the townhouse has been completely refurbished during the pandemic, with a new spa in the basement level. With the Urris Hills and stunning Pollan Beach visible from the hotel, this is an ideal spot for nature lovers and adventurers wanting to explore the many attractions of the Inishowen Peninsula. The feeling of the Dohertys' hotel is of a home from home, where you can come in after a long day's hiking or wild swimming and chill in the hot tub overlooking the dramatic Pollan Beach. The Tess Rose Ocean Spa provides seaweed baths for couples, a relaxation hydro bath, and eight treatment rooms, as well as infrared saunas... the spa suite can also be booked by private groups. — *KD*

**Sustainability:** The spa uses Voya organic products, with the relaxation area inspired by the dramatic seascapes Ballyliffin is famous for.

**Insider tip:** Tullagh Strand and the Urris Loop Trail are fabulous options for hikers and walkers, both within a short drive of Ballyliffin.

**Details:** B&B from €150 in high season. [ballyliffintownhouse.ie](http://ballyliffintownhouse.ie)

# 47

## Killaloe Hotel & Spa Killaloe, Co Clare

Here's a boutique stay to match the boutique feel of Killaloe and Ballina. Recently reopened under new ownership and management, the 35-bed brings a neat blend of country luxe and waterside wow factor, with a bar terrace looking out over Kincora Harbour. Dark floorboards, duck-egg-blue panelling, a breakaway library space, and garden dining in summer are all selling points, but the real reason to travel is the brand new Sionna Spa. Named after the river goddess flowing by via Lough Derg, it fills a smart niche in the area — a lovely, atmospheric suite of treatment rooms, Himalayan salt chamber and sauna, where luxury is implied rather than overstated. From 50-minute treatments (€79) to the full-on signature Boru Body Banquet (€199), the focus is on Kerstin Florian products and "results-driven therapies", spa manager Eimear McCarthy explains, with ample time to chat with therapists and receive follow-through advice to take home. — *PÓC*



PICTURE: HELEN CASSIDY/AUCTIONEERS

# 50

## Lissadell on the Sea Ballinfull, Co Sligo

When it comes to jaw-dropping views, Lissadell on the Sea is pretty much unbeatable. The two-bed cottage is positioned right on the sands of Lissadell Beach, with waves all but reaching the patio when the tide is in. This corner of Sligo has always been particularly magical — Leonard Cohen called it one of his favourite places in the world when he played here back in 2010. Streedagh and Mullaghmore beaches are short spins away, and the iconic Benbulbin mountain is visible in the near distance. But sleeping just feet away from the sea is even more special. Three newly renovated cottages are available to rent on the estate, all kitted out with the highest-spec gear, like Lacanche ovens, giant bathtubs, and heated bathroom mirrors. But it's the seaside cottage that really stole my heart. It has a tiny top-floor room the size of an armchair, where you can sit and watch the waves roll in. There are Victorian brass beds, a breakfast patio with Kilkenny limestone flagstones, views over Drumcliff Bay and Irish art from the Lissadell collection. An added bonus? All guests are given a private tour of Lissadell House (currently closed to visitors). This is the childhood home of Constance Markievicz, whose name is even graffitied into one of the windows, and her sister, Eva Gore-Booth. WB Yeats visited in the 1890s, too. — *NB*

**Sustainability:** Each cottage has a compost bin, which is then used on the estate's beautiful gardens.

**Insider tip:** There's a great market held every Saturday in the nearby Rathcormac.

**Details:** From €2,000 for four nights; [fivestarie/self-catering/lissadell-on-the-sea](http://fivestarie/self-catering/lissadell-on-the-sea)

**Sustainability:** The hotel works with lots of local businesses, from Wilde Irish Chocolates to a new, signature Sionna Spa scent being developed with hand-poured, small-batch candlemaker The Irish Chandler.

**Insider tip:** Book a room that faces the water, or better still, one of two new terrace rooms right next to the spa.

**Details:** B&B from €89 midweek. [killaloehotel.ie](http://killaloehotel.ie)

including the wheelchair and buggy-friendly Sand Dune Trail.

**Details:** From €65 a night for a pod sleeping four; [wildatlanticcamp.ie](http://wildatlanticcamp.ie)

# 49

## Killyhevlin Hotel & Lodges Co Fermanagh

This family-owned four-star in Fermanagh has introduced several stunning timber-clad lodges by the water, with a recent £1.5m (€1.78m) investment adding a further six Woodland Lodges with private hot tubs. Families will love the swimming pool, there's a spa for pampering, and decent food options, as well as a new padel tennis court and playground — but relaxing in 37C waters outside the lodge was a highlight of a review visit. Large windows on two sides give 270-degree views of the landscape, interiors are by Northern-Irish designer Raymond Kelly, and there are fully equipped kitchens and mod cons if you want to self-cater. — *PÓC & Gareth Morgan*

**Sustainability:** The lodges are low in energy demand and designed for a 100-year lifespan.

**Insider tip:** There are lots of supermarkets nearby for self-caterers (and prices on beer and wine can be cheaper than in the Republic of Ireland).

**Details:** Lodges from £212.50 (€251.30) per night (with a two-night minimum stay). [killyhevlin.com](http://killyhevlin.com)

# 48

## Wild Atlantic Camp Creeslough, Co Donegal

Overlooking Sheephaven Bay, Wild Atlantic Camp was named 'Ireland's Best Campsite' in our Reader Travel Awards this year, with guests citing its super-friendly staff and excellent facilities as a big draw for families. You can stay in glamping villas, pods, bell tents or cabins, and there are tent and touring pitches, too. Last April, Wild Atlantic Camp's owners opened The Coffee Pod, which is already proving hugely popular with guests, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. This is in addition to its Happy Camper café, which serves breakfast and brunch. It's a great base for nearby Glenveagh National Park, Horn Head, Dunfanaghy, or just to chill out on site. — *KD*

**Sustainability:** The family-run camping and glamping site has a strong community ethos. Guests get labelled recycling rubbish bags to dispose of on site, for example.

**Insider tip:** Nearby Ards Forest Park has several trails,

## Pól Ó Conghaile

# 10 trends to watch on your staycation

**T**ravelling the island to compile our Fab 50 gave us a unique sense of how Irish stays are changing as we emerge from Covid. Here are a few fun trends to watch.

**1. Homes away from home:** Many of us upgraded our homes during lockdown, and hotels and guesthouses are reflecting that as they refurb. Good coffee, Netflix, wine coolers, quality baths and showers and fresh milk in rooms are all touches that add both luxury and home comforts. In Co Donegal's Rockhill House, designers were even briefed to keep the feel of a family home.

**2. Breakfast trays:** Breakfast buffets were a casualty of Covid. Some are bringing them back; others finding creative ways to elevate morning meals. Afternoon tea-style tiered trays stacked with scones, smoothies, fruits and granolas at Pax House and Doolin Inn, for example, add a little theatre while controlling portions and allowing for day-to-day variation. "Breakfast has become such a luxury," says Doolin Inn's Anthony Moloney. "It's a real treat."

**3. Adults only:** We all love kids. But sometimes parents need a night away, and a small but growing number of properties (Wexford's Wild Rooms, for example) are catering for that. Others, like Pax House, Clonalis House and Haddington House, cater for older children.

**4. Hotels-within-hotels:** Creating smaller branded stays or exclusive floors within larger resorts has been relatively rare in Ireland. That could change, with larger properties like Carton House and Tulfarris pitching their old manors as hotels-within-hotels, and the Gleneagle's new Hotel67 breathing new life into an unused section of its resort.

**5. Upcycling the ante:** Headboards made from church organs at the Old Inn in Crawfordsburn. A coffee table made from part of an airplane engine, itself rescued from a retail display, in Thistledown Lodge, Co Wexford. Upcycling is going up a gear, and given how costs are rising across the board, that makes as much economic as environmental sense. "It's great not throwing things out," as Catherine Dundon of Dunbrody House puts it.

**6. Petite resorts:** Done with sprawling, impersonal resorts? Scale down with more intimate, individual hideaways like Bancran School, Dromquinna or Liss Ard. These thoughtfully-curated oases reflect the imaginations and ethos of their owners, with private and communal areas, often bathed in nature.

**7. Next-level lodges:** Forest stays like Center Parcs and Cabu by the Lakes, combined with a growing trend for immersions in nature, have propelled Irish lodges to a whole new level. From hangouts with hot tubs at Killyhevlin to Drumhierny Woodland Hideaway (where many fittings are made from fallen timber), rustic living never felt so fancy.

**8. State of the art:** The use of local and Irish art to elevate bedrooms, hallways and public areas is booming. From curated contemporary artists in Press-Up hotels like The Dean to works at Arthaus in Dublin paying tribute to Mainie Jellett and Mary Swanzy, or smaller stays like Lagom commissioning local artists, it adds colour, a sense of place, and supports our creative community.

**9. Terrific terraces:** Pandemic lockdowns and the boom in outdoor living has bumped terraces up a gear, from big plays like The Montenegro's €1m rooftop bar to small stays such as the patio in June Blake's garden.

**10. Sustainability slips:** Sustainability is central to our Fab 50, but we're finding a surprising number of stays have let standards slip — from mini-toiletries to a basic lack of recycling or Green Teams. Covid can be blamed, but with costs rising, the race for renewables and more sustainable stays is more urgent than ever. Let's get back on track!

**'Many of us upgraded our homes during lockdown, and hotels are reflecting that in refurbs'**