

THE IRISH TIMES

A Special Report

Thursday, June 14, 2012



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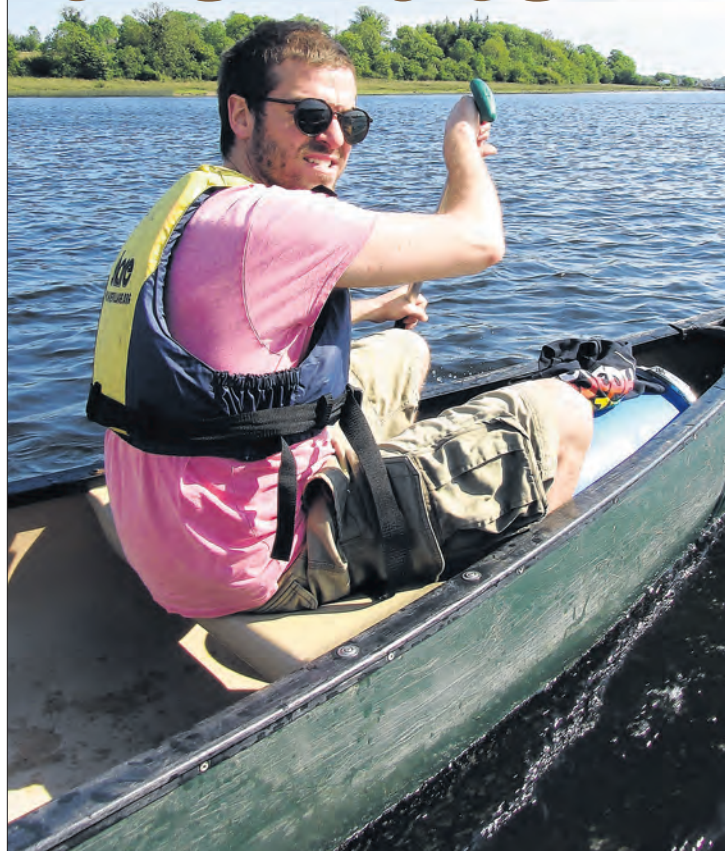
FERMANAGH LAKELANDS

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Wild about the water



Ireland's largest activity centre has 14,000-plus visitors annually, writes **Johnny Holden**

ADMITTEDLY, until recently my experience of Fermanagh had been of a place I passed through on my way to Donegal. As an avid outdoors person, much of my time has been spent in a variety of land- and water-based activities around Ireland. But more often than not, it has been in more well-known holiday destinations such as Kerry and the north west. That has all changed since my trip to Share Discovery Village. Taking just two hours by car from Dublin, Fermanagh is awash with activity, particularly for those who may not appreciate Irish weather, but still like to get wet.

That said, it is the abundance of rainfall in the area that has created the large number of lakes and rivers in the vicinity, all of which are being put to good use by the locals.

Established in 1981, Share is the largest activity centre in Ireland and has more than 14,000 visitors annually. Its enduring popularity is probably due to the sheer scale of activities available to cater for the needs of all holidaymakers – from the meek to the adventurous. Our group comprised six people, including one 11-year-old, and we were booked in for the Share canoe trail. This is a canoeing expedition in Lough Erne which finishes on the nearby Trannish Island. Here groups can stay in the “Bothy” House, a newly converted basic island dwelling and campsite.

Before we embarked on that trip though, we decided to take in a couple of activities offered on the mainland. The Share village itself is on a 60-acre site on the shores of Upper Lough Erne, which is part of the largest inland waterway in Europe. It comprises campsites, self-catering cottages, an indoor swimming pool, gym, restaurant and various other rooms used for evening activities and talks. Visitors can choose between day trips, full board or self-catering options and there are also ample conference and

Like this? Try these

Corralea Activity Centre,
Upper Lough MacNean,
Belcoo, Co Fermanagh.
(+44 (0)28 66386123)

A water-sports and activity centre that offers canoeing, water trampoline, surfing, caving, archery and much more. Self-catering accommodation available on site. Suitable for ages 7 plus. See activityireland.com

Ultimate Water Sports,
Castle Archdale Marina,
Lisnarick, Co Fermanagh
(Mob: +44 (0) 78 08 736818),
ultimaterwatersports.co.uk

Banana boating, inflatable rides, water skiing, wakeboarding, canoeing, kayak and water trampolining are just some of the activities on offer here.



wedding facilities.

Everywhere you look, however, all you can see and feel is energy. The centre has everything it needs to keep people occupied – archery, canoeing, windsurfing, combat corps (this might appeal to people who like paintball. The tactical team based combat game is safe but, unlike paintball, is completely painless), raft building, mountain biking, the list goes on and on.

We were blessed with a glorious day of sunshine so outdoor pursuits were top priority. We started with some rock climbing: a good test of endurance and a must if you've never tried it before. Despite being safely tied in and with little or no danger whatsoever, some people still get very nervous when they have no ground beneath their feet. At Share, the phenomenon is known as "Elvis Legs". This activity took about one hour for six people.

After the 11-year-old put the rest of us to shame, we called into the restaurant for some lunch. Share's in-house catering team offer menus to suit all ages, budgets and tastes. The dining room seats 250 people and meals are provided on a self-service basis.

After lunch, we decided to go out on a banana boat. This was something most of the group had either never done, or last did when they were two decades younger. Banana boating is great fun but may not be for everyone. Kids and the adventurous will love it. Others may prefer water-based activities that don't guarantee you'll end up in the lake. But having a natural resource such as Lough Erne is what makes Share Village so special: boating, jet-skiing, sailing, fishing, swimming, boarding, etc are all options so that no one should feel left out.

As dusk approached, it was time to start making our way out to Trannish Island to set up camp for the night in the "Bothy". Due to the presence of an American in the group, much of the conversation at this point was dominated by the difference between a canoe and a kayak (it seems we Europeans have it the wrong way around).

We put three to each open canoe along with all the supplies we would need for one night (and then some). While food and supplies are available on the mainland, once you're out on the island you're on

your own. So everything from toilet paper to drinking water, candles to all food and cooking utensils should be brought. Plans are in place to power the house in the near future, but for now it's candles or torches.

Depending on the experience and strength of your group, a canoe trip out from the village to the island should take between one to two hours. However, most canoe groups would partake in longer two- to three-day trips, which take in more of the lake and end on the island.

Those who want to see the beauty of Lough Erne without the effort of canoeing can take the Share *Inishcruiser*. Public, private and special tours are available on the 57-seat cruiser with open-air viewing deck and bar and catering facilities.

Inside the bothy you will find cooking and sleeping areas, along with a wood-burning stove. You may not be outside in a tent, but you're still roughing it. Bedding and sheets need to be brought (a sleeping mat would be a very good investment as you will be lying on wooden floors). There are also two compost toilets, shower facilities, and a charcoal barbeque grill.



The canoeing expedition in Lough Erne finishes out on Trannish Island. Here groups can stay in the 'Bothy' House (above), a newly converted basic dwelling and campsite

Island hopping

Trannish is only one of a whopping 154 islands on Lough Erne and other ones worth visiting include Devenish and Boa.

Devenish, on Lower Lough Erne, has one of the finest round towers in Ireland. You can also see the walls of the Oratory of Saint Molaise who established the monastery in the 6th century.

In July and August pick-up for Devenish Island Ferry Service is at Trory Point from Thursday to Monday at 10am, 1pm, 3pm and 5pm. Price for adults is £3 (€3.70) and children is €2 (€2.50).

Boa Island, is the largest Island on Lough Erne but is connected to the mainland by the A47 road via bridges leading west toward Castle Caldwell and east toward Kesh. The megalithic carved stones in Caldragh graveyard are worth a visit.



A totem pole on Trannish island on Lough Erne

It's what you find all around though, that's really special. Visitors get to enjoy something only the wealthy and privileged usually experience: staying on your own private island. Charlie Haughey, eat your heart out!

Co-owned by Share Village and a local farmer, visitors are free to roam around most of the island and swim by its shores. We swam at sundown which was pretty magical. However, if you do decide to get wet, be prepared for some curious cattle to follow your pursuits with interest.

As night drew closer we flamed up the barbecue and enjoyed steaks, wine and a campfire. We went to sleep with that tiredness people only has when they've overdone it on physical activity and sunshine. Like anywhere in Ireland, the weather is never certain. But there is so much to keep you distracted at Share Village, you probably won't even notice what's going on above you.

This summer, Share Village has a number of special offers, too many to list. The best way to find out is by checking out their website at sharevillage.org, or email reception@sharevillage.org or tel: +44 (0) 28 677 22122.

While in the Lakelands, save some money with some free activities, writes **Sandra O'Connell**

AS IN life, some of the best things in the Fermanagh Lakelands region are free. For example, while getting a haircut will cost you money, it costs nothing to visit the railway museum at Headhunters Barber shop in Enniskillen.

The unique barber shop cum museum is the result of the proprietor's family's interest in local railways, and many of the artefacts on display here were donated by former employees of the Great Northern, Sligo, Leitrim & Northern Counties and Clogher Valley Railways.

While you're in the town, head on up Cole's Monument, a formidable series of spiral steps which, once conquered, give terrific views out over Enniskillen town.

No fancy restaurant can compete with the taste of even the most pedestrian picnic, and Fermanagh Lakelands is full of scenic spots to lunch al fresco. Lough Navar has a scenic seven-mile drive leading to a viewpoint looking out over Lough Erne, Donegal Bay and the Bluestack and Sperrin Mountains.



CUT THE COST Check out the trains at Headhunters Barbershop & Railway Museum (above) or join a paint workshop at Belleek (below)

One, two, free... go!

If there's any bread left over, give it to the ducks at Round O Quay in Enniskillen; there are always loads of them waiting, and swans too.

Check out the saints and scholars, or at least sculptures of them, at the Centenary Garden beside the Sacred Heart Church in Irvinestown. Carved out of Irish bog oak, they are the work of Lithuanian sculptor Jonas Raiskas.

Belleek pottery sits in the finest cabinets across the world and,

though a luxury item to buy, it costs nothing to visit the famous manufacturer's visitor centre and museum in the market town of Belleek, in west Fermanagh although the tour costs £3.50 (€4.33) for adults but is free for children.

If you've a car with a rack, bring your bikes and try the North West Trail, a 326km loop through Donegal, Tyrone, Fermanagh, Leitrim and Sligo, with dramatic Atlantic views along the way. Or browse the art and craft units at the atmospheric Buttermarket Craft & Design centre, housed in a restored 19th-century dairy market in Enniskillen.

If you've kids, municipal playgrounds are always a winner. The Zone, adjacent to the Fermanagh Lakeland Forum at the Broadmeadow, Enniskillen, is an outdoor leisure facility providing a variety of play equipment for youngsters between the ages of eight and 16. There's a tots area beside it for little ones too.

Finally – and admittedly this will set you back the cost of an ice cream – don't go without visiting Tickety-Moo in Irvinestown, where, apparently, the cows have a “voluntary milking system” and get proper mattresses to lie down on. Priceless.





Beautiful Belle Isle

At the Belle Isle Cookery School, **Una Mullally** discovered that it really is possible to cook an Indian feast in just six hours

TWENTY MINUTES outside Enniskillen, surrounded by water is Belle Isle, an island in Lough Erne, and a 470-acre estate with a 17th century castle on the banks of the lake. Instantly you feel isolated – but in a good way.

Even though the estate is easily accessed, complete silence falls save for a grunting pony and the occasional disturbed pheasant taking flight.

Belle Isle is one of those places that serves a fair few functions. One part of the castle is home to Charles and Fiona Plunkett and their family. The larger part is rented for weddings and group weekends. It has a beautiful dining room and drawing room and eight bedrooms.

One of them has a sleigh bed that was previously owned by Coco Chanel, so that will probably give

you an indication of the sophisticated luxury we're talking about.

You can shoot woodcock and snipe on the grounds (the latter probably being more difficult I'd imagine, considering the accuracy needed gave rise to the term sniper) from October to January, and the lake has some of the best pike fishing around.

A group of Dutch and German fishermen were in situ in the estate's cottages when I was there, and others rave about the level of pike fishing in the area.

A visitor the previous week caught one particularly hefty pike weighing in at 10.88kg. If you're not interested in scrapping with pike, bream and roach are common. Accommodation on the estate comes in a few shapes and sizes. There's the castle itself, and then a

long courtyard building built in 1860 which houses eight apartments. Each can accommodate two to six people and prices range from around £70 (£87) per night in low season, but that depends on the size of the apartment and whether it's a weeknight or weekend and so on.

The slightly older coach house has also been converted into two apartments, and each sleeps four. And there are three cottages; Bridge House, Cathcart's Lodge and Walled Garden Cottage, the latter being where I stayed.

In the walled garden, which ends at the green house and cottage, there are the beginnings of a kitchen garden, which makes sense considering it's a stone's throw from the cookery school itself, one of the main attractions at Belle Isle. I was there to make an Indian

banquet, which seemed like a pretty steep ask in six hours.

Belle Isle Cookery School has been running for nearly a decade, and is run by Ballymaloe-graduate, Corrie Cadden. Tutoring us on the day was Naseem Booth, Kenyan-born to Indian parents, who knows her way around an Indian banquet or two. The school's courses range from day-long ones, themed on a particular cuisine. Aside from the Indian banquet like the one I was attempting, the range of short courses includes bread-making, cooking for toddlers, perfecting dinner party menus, chocolatier cooking, newly-wed classes and healthy weeknight dinners. There are also longer, more intensive courses.

The kitchen where we cook, in pairs, is big as well as being excellently stocked and well prepped. Booth outlines the busy menu for the day and pretty soon we're down to it, making things that I never thought would be possible back in my simple kitchen, without an Aga or an ice-cream machine. I'm assured, though, that such methods can be easily transferred to the home. And Booth is right. What I thought would be complicated – making rosewater and pistachio kulfi – is broken down into simple stages.

The mystery of how onion bhajis are actually made is shattered when Booth whips up a simple batter from gram flour and flash fries onions dipped in it, making the lightest, crispiest, most delicious ones I've ever tasted.

And it's not just straight-up, instructive cooking, we're also taught the theory of how the food comes together, making our own garam masala in a coffee grinder and thinking about how to personalise it.

An apple chutney that takes about a minute to make is another eye-opener, as is a super-fast raita. By the time we're on to a two-stage murgh makhani and stuffing sea bream with spices, there's the realisation that making an Indian feast in a matter of hours is perfectly feasible when the teaching is good and when it moves at a pace that everyone is comfortable with. It also helps that the more academic side of what we are doing and why is being taught in tandem.

The day finishes with a



Above: The walled garden and right, the Coach house



Stirring stuff: Una Mullally prepares her Indian banquet

beautifully simple potato and cauliflower tomato-based curry. Then, as with all of the courses, the group sits down to eat what we've made, which is as satisfying as a truly collaborative and learning meal can be.

Learning how to cook food that I like but don't usually cook meant that I got the most out of the course – a tip for anyone trying to decide which course to opt for. Instead of honing skills I already had, I came away with a bunch of new ones, and more importantly a knowledge that they could be utilised in a practical manner.

☐ Details of courses are on irishcookeryschool.com, with prices around the £130 (€162) for a day course. There is more information about Belle Isle on belle-isle.com

Living history in a family getaway

When **Edel Morgan** took her children to stay in the Butler's apartment in an 18th-century estate, she wasn't sure they would like it – now, they're counting down the days to their return

I WASN'T SURE how my three children, aged three to seven, were going to react to staying in the Butler's apartment at Florence Court, an 18th-century National Trust estate in west Fermanagh that was, until the 1950s, the ancestral seat of the Cole family, the Earls of Enniskillen.

The apartment is located in an old stone courtyard in the grounds, once called Men's Way, which was made up of living quarters for the male servants. It is done up in an olde-worlde style, with Staffordshire dogs on the mantelpiece and old black and white framed photographs of the Cole family and Jim Price, their chauffeur in the 1940s, in the kitchen and in one of the bedrooms.

The apartment is described as "atmospheric" on the website, and this is no exaggeration. There was a slightly eerie feel when we first walked in and saw some long-lost ancestor of the Coles peering at us

from an oil painting on the stairwell, and the musty smell of old building took some getting used to.

But once we got over our preconceptions of what a self-catering experience should be, it was great fun to temporarily inhabit a place that doesn't have the bland furnishings and identikit rooms of most holiday rentals.

The two flights of wooden steps up to the apartment might put people with babies or toddlers off staying here – there's no stair gate at the top – although reading the comments in the visitors' book it appears families with small babies have stayed there and managed just fine.

The children took to it immediately and had hours of fun playing hide and seek in the apartment's nooks and crannies and chasing each other up and down the long stone-floored corridor. They loved the big roll top bath and eating around the big table in the

country-style kitchen.

Best of all was the feeling that we had the grounds of the estate at our disposal after hours. The rhododendron-filled gardens and woodland walks surrounding the house close to the public at 7pm but we had a late-night picnic by the playground, where our only companions were the cows in the next field. There is another holiday rental property on the estate, Rose cottage, located in the walled garden.

We didn't arrive on time to go on the children's tour of Florence Court, where a nanny dressed in full 1850s regalia guides her charges around a few of the rooms (probably the ones with the least number of breakables). It gives an insight into life for a 19th-century child at Florence Court and ends in the white bedroom, where there's storytime and they get to play with Victorian toys.

We went on one of the regular guided tours of the house instead – a slightly stressful experience with young children who are automatically drawn to the most delicate and priceless antiques in each room.

We missed some of the history of the place as we coaxed our five year old away from the old fine bone china cups in the diningroom and from a travelling trunk in the bedroom, thought to have belonged to Queen Mary II, wife of William of Orange.

A sucker for anything remotely *Downton Abbey*-esque, I found it interesting to hear how the food was stone cold by time it made it up from the kitchen in the bowels of the





house to the stately diningroom and how the third earl had the kitchen roof reinforced with concrete to protect his fossil collection in the room above, in case of fire. .

Our stay coincided with Florence Court's annual fair, a great family event with falconry displays, magic shows, craft and cake stalls, a bouncy castle, farm animals and dog shows.

The children were mesmerised by a very laidback turkey roaming the main courtyard, which kept invading the gift shop, to the surprise and consternation of visitors. It didn't seem to mind being petted and followed around by our seven year old, who is now asking that we get a turkey as a pet.

To my amazement, the older two were at the top of the queue of kids to handle the falcon, an unexpected highlight of the day.

When it was time to go home, we had to prise them out of the playground and my three year old wailed that she wanted to stay in our "new house". Although we stayed two nights, we didn't get to explore every inch of the grounds, so a return visit is a real possibility.

Three nights' stay at the Butler's apartment up to July 19th costs £422 (€545) while a five-night stay

Cal McGrane tries his hand at falconry and, below, Cal with, from left, Ava, Theo and Edel Morgan. Below left: a bedroom in the Butler's apartment

is £552 (€681). Rose Cottage is also available to rent, and sleeps four and costs £431 (€532) for three nights and £563 (€695) for five nights until July 19th.

Entry to the park and gardens costs £10 (€12.30) for a family. There's a coffee shop and gift shop on the grounds. See nationaltrust.org.uk/florence-court/ for more information.



Something for all the family

The Lakelands offer so much for all ages, writes **Sandra O'Connell**

THE PLACE to start if you're bringing the family to the Fermanagh Lakelands is, of course, the lake. Erne Tours (ernetours.com) provides guided boat trips across the lake including an extended stop on Devenish Island, a monastic settlement dating to the sixth century with one of the best preserved round towers in Ireland. From my experience, it's much better the kids hear about this kind of history from a professional guide. I know when I explained how round towers came to be, my five year-old told everyone in school next day how monkeys had built Glendalough.

Erne Tours run four times a day in high season, beginning at 10am, with a family ticket, for a family of four, costing £28 (€34).

Being a watery part of the world, there are loads of water sports to choose from too.

One of the best value options is

from Corralea Activity Centre in Belcoo which runs terrific water (and land-based) activities for families.

A midweek three day family package for three nights with three activities including archery, surfing and the Waterpark costs £473 (€582). See activityireland.com for details.

Back on dry land, check out the Aughakillymaude Mummers Centre in Derrylin, the only permanent space devoted to the ancient art of masking and masked performances in the country.

Mummers, not dissimilar to Wren Boys, dress up in straw costumes and stage rhyming, "idiotic" (and that's their term, not mine) performances in which there is always a fight, a death and a revival.

Ordinary entry costs £3 (€3.70) and the centre is open Monday to Friday. But if you're lucky enough

to be in those parts around June, 23rd don't miss the mid-summer solstice festival, which will include fire jumping mummers.

As lead mummer, Jim Ledwith puts it, "it takes real men to dress in straw skirts and jump fires".

Possibly the best known family visitor attraction in these parts is the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark (marblearchcavesgeopark.com), one of the finest cave systems open to the public in Europe and a fascinating world of subterranean rivers and waterfalls and echoing chambers. For teens it's a geography lesson come to life, with glistening stalactites and fragile mineral veils well lit and easily identifiable, with the boat ride along an underground river the highlight.

Bring a jumper because it gets cold down here and tours last a good 75 minutes.



Children making their own sunshine at the Aughakillymaude Mummer's Centre



Being a watery part of the world, there are loads of water sports to choose from. Below: learn new skills on a course at Orchard Acre Farm, near Lough Erne

The caves are set in a National Nature Reserve which is great for hiking. Family tickets cost £19 (€23.60), for two adults and up to three kids. If you're up to it, and you're not in flip flops, head for the Cuilcagh Mountain, offering some of the most spectacular scenery in Fermanagh.

At 665 metres, it's the county's highest point, with a distinct, table-top profile surrounded by blanket bog. The Shannon Pot, source of our longest river, is up here too and well worth seeking out.

For a change of pace, or indeed a rest, take a trip back to 1891 at Castle Coole (nationaltrust.org.uk) where you can enjoy a guided tour of the house by either the footman or the maid which is themed around the preparations for Viscount Corry's coming of age party.

You see the buzz and excitement both above and below stairs as the house gets ready to welcome gentry from all over the country. The tour concludes in the basement which is brought to life by costumed members of staff who are buzzing around getting ready for the party.

If you go to Castle Coole, don't forget to visit the scullery which is at the top of the servants tunnel in the basement of the house. The

room has lots of activities and challenges for kids to enjoy and you can learn a bit more about what would have happened in the basement when there were a whole army of servants working there. A visit to Castle Coole costs €1.81 (€2.25) for children and £4.54 (€5.60) for adults.

Alternatively you could pick up a Tracker Packs from the reception at Florence Court, another National Trust property, which provides an

array of activities for kids to undertake and trails to follow around the grounds, which include a lovely three acre walled garden and a 1,200 hectare forest park. Or brush up on your twitching skills at the new bird hide at Crom, the National Trust run nature reserve and bird sanctuary in Newtownbutler.

While away the hours spotting for great crested grebe, heron and the very shy water rail, on the shores of Derrymacrow Lough. A family ticket costs €8.50 (€10.50).

Finally if you're looking to bring the kids somewhere a bit different by night, check out Orchard Acre Farm, a small holding near Lough Erne.

As well as a range of children's workshops – which cover everything from eco-crafts to bread making – kids can feed the chickens, pigs and sheep on her smallholding before retreating for the night to one of her teepees, available for weekend rental for £240 (€300).

Check out the Facebook page (facebook.com/Orchard.Acre.Farm) for specials however, such as a camping and canoeing weekends for £260 (€323), which include accommodation plus a half day's fun on the lake. It is the Lakelands, after all.





Take the plunge

Take to the waters and the wild and explore Ireland's very own lake district writes **Alanna Gallagher**

IMMERSE YOURSELF in Fermanagh's Lakelands – Ireland's best-kept secret. The winding banks and archipelagos of Lough Erne are rich in aquatic life and history – from early Christian monastic sites to second World War air bases.

The *Lady of the Lake*, run by Manor House hotel, offers three separate tours of the lake. Its yellow tour takes you past St Angelo Airport used during the second World War as a stopover for Flying Fortresses. On the red tour, see St Ninnidh's island, Inishmacsaint, home to a 6th-century monastery. The black tour sails past the 12th-century church ruins of Davies Island. *Lady of the Lake* also offers a dinner cruise.

From the open-air viewing deck of the *Inishcruiser* you pass the folly at Crom Estate, described by locals as "a rich person's garden

ornament". It is run by Share Discovery Village and, berthed here, you can also hire canoes, or go kayaking, sailing or windsurfing. The kids can even learn circus skills. Comedian Tommy Tiernan is a fan and has canoed and camped here with his family.

While on the water, expect to see ducks, swans, kingfishers, coots, crested grebes. Canoeists can explore the island town of Enniskillen from the water.

Follow actor Adrian Dunbar's lead and travel aboard Erne Tours' Enniskillen-based *MV Kestrel*,



Erne Tours' *MV Kestrel*, and (right) the seaplane tour of the lough

which lands at Devenish Island, home to a 6th century monastic site founded by St Molaise. You can climb to the fourth floor of its 12-century round tower and imagine marauding Vikings attacking. Erne Tours also offers a pre-dinner cruise with music.

You can also hire a day boat. Castle Archdale Marina, Manor House Marine and Inishclare Cottages all let you skipper your own craft on a half-day or full-day basis. Stop at Boa Island to see pre-Christian icons dating to 2,500 BC.

Or you can take the slow route: hire a cruiser and explore the waterways over several days, docking at different marinas as you go. Manor House Marine is just one company that offers this service. No training is required and apart from taking in the scenery, there are lots of attractions to explore along the waterway including Belleek Pottery and the bustling town of Enniskillen and the Lough Erne Resort.

With a permit you can fish anywhere along the loughs. Whatever you catch you can cook on board or barbecue on shore. Lusty Beg Island is a delicious place to drop anchor for lunch. Stop off at one of the many hotel moorings and revel in their nightly entertainment. In Enniskillen enjoy the ambience of the Killyhevlin Hotel. The Watermill Restaurant at Kilmore Quay is another must. Pascal's 36-hour slow cooked rib eye draws



pleasure craft like moths to a flame.

Hire a seaplane and you'll get a bird's eye view of Fermanagh's Lakelands. Ask nicely and Lakeland Seaplane Tours will even land on the water and skip several times down the lough.

This transport is popular also with time-poor fishermen and newly-weds looking for a backdrop for wedding photos.

For information, tel: 048-66323110
Fermanaghlakelands.com



Take the slow route: hire a cruiser and explore the waterways over several days, docking at different marinas as you go.

Splash out on water activities

Erne Tours depart daily at 2.15pm during June. In July and August there can be as many as four tours, at 10.30am, 12.15pm, 2.15pm and 4.15pm. Dinner cruises (Saturday night only) cost €31.20/€18.70 adults/under 16s.

Tel: +44 (0) 28-66322882;
Ernetours.com

Inishcruiser departs on Sundays and bank holiday Mondays at 2.30pm from Easter to September. Tel: +44 (0) 28-67722122

Sharevillage.org/inishcruiser

Lady of the Lake cruiser sails, weather permitting Saturdays 11.30am September-June and, during July and August, daily at 3pm. Tel: +44 (0) 28-68622200
Manorhouseresorthotel.com

At Share Discovery Village during July and August you can sign up for a day's activities. Choose from canoeing, kayaking, sailing, windsurfing, mountain biking, archery and circus skills and much more. Tel: +44 (0) 28-67722122;
Sharevillage.org

Enniskillen Canoe Tour starts from Lakeland Forum beside the Tourist Information Centre Enniskillen. It runs weekends in July and August. The minimum age: seven. Under nines must be accompanied by an adult. Tel: 048-6638 6123;
mobile: +44-7902-021991;
Activityireland.com

You can hire boats from **Castle**

Archdale Marina. An eight-person boat costs €106/€156 half-day/full-day. A six-person boat costs €75/€106 half-day/full-day. Tel: +44 (0) 28 68621156 (daytime in season) +44 (0) 28-68621892 (out of hours) Castlearchdaleboathire.com

At Manor House Marine an eight-person boat costs €106/€156 half-day/full-day. A six-person boat costs €75/€106 for half-day/full-day. Cruisers start from a short break for a two to four-berth cruiser, with one cabin saloon that can be converted into a double bed, from €617 for two to three nights. Tel: +44 (0) 28-68628100; Manormarine.com

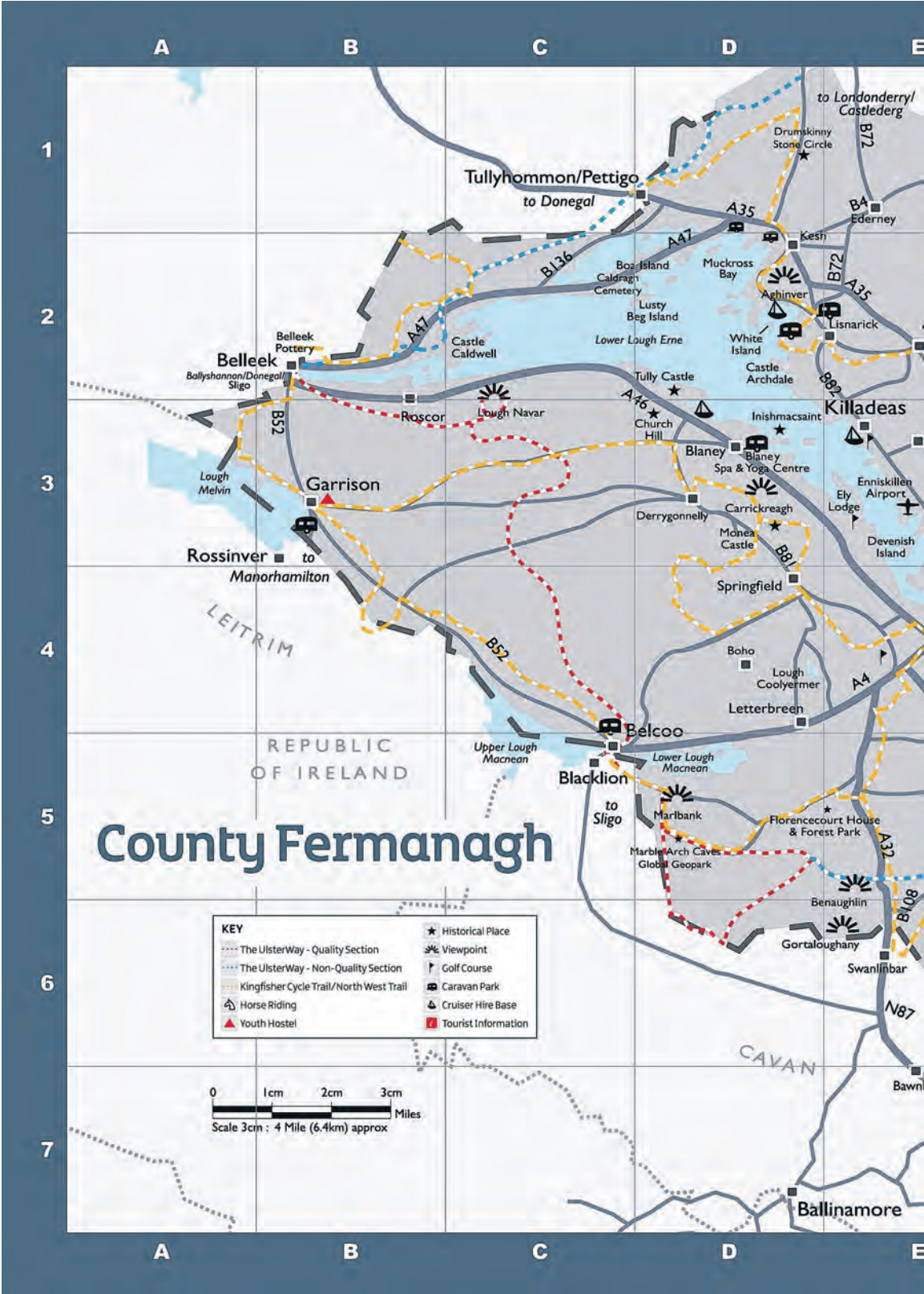
Boat hire at Inishclare Cottages costs €112 per day, or €62 per day if staying in their self-catering cottages. Killadeas, Enniskillen. Tel: +44 (0) 28-66340127;

Inishclarecottages.com

Boats are available for half-day and full-day hire at **Knockninny Country House and Marina** for €62 and €100 respectively. Why not add a champagne picnic for €94 per person. Tel: +44 (0) 28-67748590; Knockninnyhouse.com

Lakeland Seaplane Tours costs €187 for a 20-minute tour. Tel: +44(0)28-6634-6861; mobile: 0044-77-84682408; Lakelandseaplanetours.com

Less confident jetskiers can do classes for €187 per day at **Kilmore Jet Works** Tel: +44 (0) 28-67722073; Kilmorejetworks.com





Going underground

It's easy to imagine why people believed for so long that fairy folk and goblins lived in these cavernous caves, writes **Gary Quinn**



Deep in the Marble Arch Caves near Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh

PACK THE KIDS: buried deep in the Fermanagh hills is a magic time-machine that they're going to love. Follow the path from the Marble Arch visitors' centre down through one of Ireland's last remaining damp ash woodlands and there in a cliff-face the soft rolling hills give way to the mouth of a deep and ominous cave. Hide your fears and follow your guide inside and you'll be transported back in time and deep into another world.

It's cold down here regardless of the weather outside, and wet, so bring a coat. But that's where the discomfort ends. Despite the location, a visit to Marble Arch Caves is an incredible experience for adults and children. I'm here with my four-year-old who clings tightly to me as we're guided down

towards an underground river where a boat awaits. It's a thrill to imagine climbing on-board and travelling slowly downstream this far underground. As we're being talked through the safety drill, our eyes adjust to the surroundings and the cavern reveals itself. We take our seats on the boat and it pulls out into the stream and our guide talks us through the journey. We round a bend, ducking our heads to avoid low rock, and gasp in wonder as the cave roof beyond opens into a vast space. So it's not claustrophobic: this cave is huge and as we move slowly across the water, torches light up everything around us.

Our boat docks on the other side of the river and we begin a 1.5km stroll deep into the earth itself. Our guides are terrific. They take this

great geological wonder and turn it into stories and adventure that has meaning for all ages. They bring us within touching distance of stalactites but teach us to resist reaching out – our touch carries bacteria that could destroy their growth, they tell us, as well as brushing away decades of their drip-drip progress downwards. They reveal great feats of engineering that have allowed us to move from one cave to another on foot and walkways that allow us to walk through water. At intervals we're encouraged to look at the rock around us, to note the shape of the water that once carved the passages we are in and the high-water marks that reveal the river that dominates these spaces in the winter months.

Even though nothing actually



Walking - Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark

lives in the caves it really is a living space, packed full of history and imagination. It was discovered by a French explorer in 1895, who with Lyster Jameson from Dublin, travelled into the caves with only candles and a canvas boat to help them along. Greatly celebrated for what they found, they drew up detailed maps of their exploration, but it was 1935 before some cavers, this time Yorkshire ramblers, went even deeper and found more areas for us to explore. The visitor centre is all about learning about these journeys and it's worth taking time to visit the centre's cinema to learn about the history of the caves and the rest of the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark area.

Also look out for the large cut-away model of the kind of journey the ramblers took into the caves, which is on display in the visitor centre. It shows the tiny passageways within which cavers squeeze themselves before popping out into the large caverns we have access to today.

But our journey has no such perils, and since Fermanagh district council started planning public access to the caves, safety has been uppermost – and it's been a huge success. More than 50,000 people visit the caves each year during their five-month public season, which runs from March to September. And finding the caves is easy too. It took just over two hours for us to drive to Marble Arch from

Dublin, making it an easy family day trip, but the memory of our journey beneath the earth will last much longer than that.

Lighting is used sparingly in the caves and to great effect throughout our journey and the children with us gasped and laughed the entire route, taking turns to be in front and round the next corner ahead of the rest of the group. All their fears evaporated and not one complained about the 1.5km walk or the 100-plus steps back to the surface

and the sunlight above. Indeed, the long climb up out of the earth is a highlight, with everyone counting the steps up and laughing as the warmth of the sun touches our faces again.

Looking back at the hillside, it's hard to imagine the warren of hiding places beneath us but easy to imagine why for so long people believed that fairy folk and goblins lived below. And why not? In such a magical place only your imagination can hold you back.

Marble Arch Caves – wonders of the world

Marble Arch Caves are part of a Unesco Global Geopark that also takes in the highlands of west Fermanagh, including Cuilcagh Mountain, and parts of Co Cavan. A global geopark is an area that has been recognised by Unesco (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) for its geological importance in the world. Other geoparks include the Copper Coast in Co Waterford, the Lesvos Petrified Forest in Greece and the Hateg Country Dinosaurs geopark in Romania. For more see europeangeoparks.org

Don't miss:

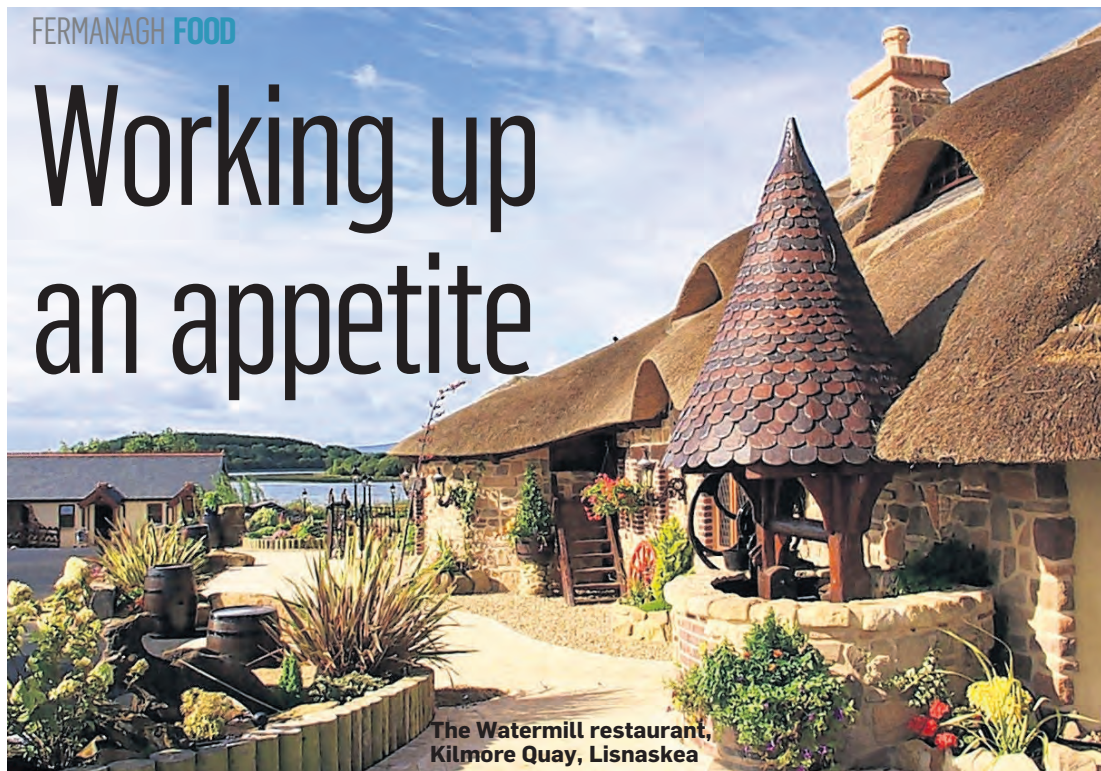
While in the area, plan to visit nearby Florence Court House, a

beautiful 18th-century house and estate owned by the UK National Trust, which has wonderful gardens, a sawmill, ice house and blacksmiths forge. See nationaltrust.org.uk/Florence-court for more

Contact

Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark, Marlbank, Florence court, Co Fermanagh. Tel: (From the Republic) 048 6634 8855 (From NI) 028 6634 8855. Web: marblearchcavesgeopark.com Booking is advised. Cave tours may not be available after periods of heavy rain. Restaurant facilities are available on site in the visitor centre

Working up an appetite



The Watermill restaurant, Kilmore Quay, Lisnaskea

Aoife Carrigy suggests a flavour of the Fermanagh Lakelands

1 EATING EN MASSE Whether you work up an appetite in the water or on the greenway, Fermanagh has plenty of fun choices for feasting with friends.

Franco's Restaurant

Queen Elizabeth Road, Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh
Tel: +44 (0)28 6632 4424
francosrestaurant.co.uk

This well-run operation delivers quality local food in an upbeat ambience, and its broad food offering makes it a good option for a crowd. Think contemporary pizza toppings and home-made marinades, locally sourced organic vegetables and Donegal seafood, Fermanagh lamb and 26-day dry-aged Kettyle beef.

Dollakis

Cross Street, Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh
Tel: +44 (0) 28 66 342616
dollakis.com

Locals head to this award-winning bistro when they need a holiday fix – at any time of day. Authentic Greek treats like pikilia platters or cinnamon-scented stifado cooked

with local venison sit side-by-side with crowd-pleasers such as mixed grill with Greek salad.

Lusty Beg Island Restaurant

Boa Island, Kesh, Co Fermanagh
Tel: +44 (0) 28 6863 3300
lustybegisland.com

Work up an appetite from any number of group activities offered on this private island including canoeing, archery and off-road driving, and then work it off with the likes of seafood chowder and smoked wild Irish salmon, beef and Guinness pie or ginger-spiced fishcakes.

The Bush Bar

Townhall Street, Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh
Tel: +44 (0) 28 6632 5210
thebushbar.com

Whether it's burgers and beers with the match, wine and nibbles in the rooftop garden with views of the River Erne, or a three-course dinner followed by cocktails and a live band, there's something for all the gang in this buzzed-up venue.

2 TABLE FOR TWO Top off a special day exploring the hidden charms of these stunning lakelands with an intimate evening at one of the area's excellent fine-dining options.

The Catalina Restaurant

Lough Erne Resort, Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh
Tel: +44 (0) 28 6632 3230
loughernerresort.com

Talented chef Noel McMeel has long been a passionate champion of local artisan producers. He combines this rooted sense of place with skilful delivery of classic and contemporary dishes in the elegant setting of the Catalina dining room with its impressive lakeviews.

The Terrace Restaurant

Westville Hotel, Tempo Road, Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh
Tel: +44 (0) 28 6632 0333
westvillehotel.com

Two brothers have joined forces to put this new culinary destination on the map, with owner Nicky Cassidy leading the friendly front-of-house service while his brother and chef Gavin heading up the kitchen.

Expect flashes of fine dining inspired by Gavin's time at MacNean House & Restaurant and l'Ecrivain.

Café Merlot / Restaurant

No 6 Church Street, Enniskillen,
Co Fermanagh
Tel: +44 (0) 28 66 320918
russellanddonnelly.com

Two acclaimed food offerings now nestle under the roof of one of Ireland's great pubs, Blakes of the Hollow. Begin your evening with a drink in the original Victorian front bar before ascending for fine-dining at Restaurant No 6 – or settle in to the vaulted Café Merlot Wine Bar for classy contemporary cooking.

Watermill Restaurant

Kilmore Quay, Lisnaskea,
Co Fermanagh
Tel: +44 (0) 28 6772 4369
kilmorequayclub.com

Perched on the shores of Lough Erne, boasting water gardens and a 50,000 litre aquarium, it's no surprise that the likes of warm lobster salad should take pride of place on chef Pascal Brissaud's menu. Home-grown garden produce also feature alongside Kettyle dry-aged beef served Rossini-style with truffles and foie gras.

3 FAMILY-FRIENDLY FEEDS
Fermanagh's lakelands are fertile grounds for family outings, and there are plenty of casual eateries with treats for all ages.

The Sheelin Tea Shop

Derrylin Road, Bellanaleck,
Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh
Tel: +44 (0) 28 6634 8232,
thesheelinteachop-bellanaleck.co.uk

It's all about attention to detail in these beloved Tea Rooms, which are adjacent to the impressive Sheelin Irish Lace Museum. Artisan baker Julie Snoddy crafts her baked delights from carefully sourced local produce. The result is a sweet little piece of heaven.

The Horseshoe & Saddlers

Belmore Street, Enniskillen,
Co Fermanagh
Tel: +44 (0) 28 6632 6223
horseshoeandsaddlers.com

Happy little campers savouring succulent fish and chips



With activity menus and child-friendly cups for younger diners and signature Saddlers steaks for their chaperones, the recently renovated Saddlers bistro is well-tuned to the needs of all its punters. A keenly-priced early-bird offering runs from 5pm.

FiddleSticks Restaurant,

Customs House Inn, Main Street,
Belcoo, Co Fermanagh
Tel: +44 (0) 28 6638 6285
customshouseinn.com

The pretty village of Belcoo lies at the foot of Cuilcagh Mountain. Here you'll find the family-run Customs House Inn, an award-winning gastropub whose menu ranges from

finger-lickin' chicken wings to family favourites such as roast chicken with colcannon.

The Thatch Coffee Shop

Main Street, Belleek,
Co Fermanagh
Tel: +44 (0) 28 6865 8181

Boasting the only original thatched building in any town or village in Co Fermanagh, the listed 18th-century building provides a picture-perfect setting for traditional treats such as homemade scones and cakes, hearty soups and freshly made sandwiches.

You can even pick up some fishing tackle or hire bikes for the afternoon.

A unique flavour of Fermanagh

If you're looking to sample truly local flavours, you need look no further than **Pat O'Doherty's Black Bacon**. As with any true dry-cured bacon, the traditional and natural curing process ensures no shrinkage in the pan and none of that white residue that inferior bacon can leave behind. Pat uses rare-breed pigs such as the all-black Wessex pigs and black and white Saddlebacks alongside Gloucester Old Spots and Tamworths, and takes his time with a three-month curing process. These lucky pigs are reared on their own private island on Upper Lough Erne where they are free to roam and feed on the wild herbs and grasses that give Black Bacon its

unique flavour. Visitors can arrange a trip out to see the pigs at Inishcorkish, or simply pick up 'The Fermanagh Black Bacon Cookbook' with a packet of black bacon from O'Doherty's Fine Meats in Enniskillen. See blackbacon.com

Where to stock up on local and artisan produce:

Orchard Acre Farm, Lisnarick, Co Fermanagh, is an open organic farm offering everything from cookery classes and seasonal events to tipi holidays.
orchardacrefarm.com

Ulster Farmers' Mart, Tempo Road, Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh, with its Farmers' Market on the last Saturday of every month



Fishing in Fermanagh: the lakelands of Fermanagh and Leitrim are a joy for anglers. There are plenty of good fish between 14lbs and 16lbs on Lough Melvin

Talking about Border loughs

Though foiled by a sunny day, being unable to fish does not mean you can't pursue fishing things, writes **Donal Byrne**

BRIGHT SUNSHINE and an easterly wind are a dreaded combination for the game angler. So, on a day that lifted the spirits of most others and the beaches beckoned, we had to abandon the plan to re-explore one of the country's most under-rated fishing locations, around Fermanagh and Leitrim.

However, the angler's loss was the local tourist's gain; the lakes and landscape were bright, inviting and beautifully formed under a cloudless sky. All around there were reminders of just how unique it is to enjoy a countryside not blighted with the kind of development we

have witnessed in other parts in the past 20 years. Sitting by the shore of Lough Melvin in Leitrim in the early afternoon was a serene experience, made all the more so by the company of a darting kingfisher.

Not being able to fish does not mean you can't pursue fishing matters, though. This area is unique in terms of fishing options and, with a determination to come back and enjoy at least some of them and be adequately prepared, it was time to head for what might be termed, the fishing "capital" of the area – the little village of Belleek in Fermanagh.

The little Thatch Coffee Shop, with its half dozen or so tables, is the place to start the search for local fishing intelligence – not that you would know that when you walk in. Through a door at the rear, you enter Michael McGrath's quaint old tackle shop.

A retired schoolteacher, who was persuaded to take over the business by a Swiss businessman who originally ran it as a service to fellow Swiss anglers, Michael is an unusual proprietor. He doesn't fish. He is, however, a source of knowledge for all things local; he and his resident expert, local farmer Rory McCaffery, will give

you all the information you need to get the most out of a fishing trip to the area. Unusually, Rory does not hold back on the locations of local “hot spots” on both Lough Erne and Lough Melvin, pointing me in particular to Rossinver Bay on Melvin for the best chance of salmon.

The mayfly season is the busiest on Lough Erne, a huge expanse of 37,000 acres (15,000 hectares). It is a well-stocked and managed lake, according to Rory, with trout of one and a quarter pounds (560g) weight on average. All of the wild brown trout stocks are placed in the streams and the programme has been very successful, he says.

Although the dry fly is a popular fishing method, he says the “dap”, common to the western lakes, is not really a feature in the area. “You don’t see it very often. Most people stick to the dry fly and trolling. The best day is a damp kind of day with low cloud.”

Fishing for both trout and salmon is good right through from April to September, with salmon grilse averaging about four pounds (1.8kg) but with some bigger fish up to 20 pounds (9kg) on occasion.

He says Erne has a great deal less angling pressure than many other popular lakes and this has made a difference to fish stocks. Catch and release is not strictly enforced but most anglers, he says, are happy to keep what they want for the pan and return the rest.

Down at Lough Melvin, a short drive from Belleek but back into the South (one great attraction of the area is the proximity of different fisheries), local water-keeper Tom Hoy was tending to his duties, but his rods were up and ready just the same.

Melvin is not just a unique lake, it is also home to a unique species of fish – the sonoghan, which is thought to have been a sea trout that became landlocked in the last Ice Age. It is not found anywhere else in Ireland.

“It averages about one pound [45g] in weight, but it feels like a much bigger fish when caught because it has a big tail and fights hard, and its stocks are good,” says Jim.

Melvin is also home to the gillaroo, a trout that is deep and honey-coloured, and whose stocks have declined slightly in recent years. Heartening, though, is the

“Melvin is home to a unique species of fish, the sonoghan, which is thought to have been a sea trout that became landlocked in the last Ice Age

news from Jim that he has seen average salmon weights increase significantly since drift nets at sea were banned.

“There are plenty of good fish between 14 and 16 pounds [6.3kg and 7.25kg],” says Jim.

Spring salmon are, he says, coming later and later in the year (a phenomenon recorded elsewhere in the country) and are now arriving back from sea almost when grilse

would normally come. #]

Again, trolling is a preferred method on Melvin, using Tobies or Scotch minnows. Down at this end of the lake, at Rossinver Bay, there are at least two important spawning streams, making locations such as Ward’s Point a major focus of concentration by anglers. The Rossinver Syndicate controls a good area of the lake and offers excellent value fishing, €10 for a day ticket, and boat and engine hire €50 for the day.

For sheer variety, the area is hard to beat. If the lakes are not in order, there is always the chance of good sea trout fishing at Ballyshannon, and you are within a short driving distance of at least eight promising fisheries.

As the weather later turned, so did my thoughts to a return visit in better fishing conditions. It won’t be long before I make the journey again.

Belleek Country Cottages in Belleek village offers accommodation to anglers and other tourists. See belleekcountrycottages.com

BEAUTY SPOTS



Stay: Belleek Country Cottages in Belleek village offer accommodation to anglers and other tourists. Rates in July from £225 (€277) for three-nights in a two-bed cottage. See belleekcottages.com

Rest: The Thatch Coffee Shop in Belleek.

Play: You can fish for pike and rainbow trout on Castle Hume Lough at the Lough Erne Resort four miles north of Enniskillen and afterwards take a break from the fishing and try some golf. At the Faldo 18-hole lakeland course at the Lough Erne Resort, green fees during the summer are £105 (€129). loughernereresort.com



Making waves

The proximity of Lough Erne gives Enniskillen a holiday feel, writes **Fionola Meredith**. But this island town isn't shallow

IF YOU look at an aerial photograph of Enniskillen – originally known as “Inis Ceithleann”, or “Cethlenn’s Island” – you can see why it deserves its name as Ireland’s only island town. It stands surrounded by a maze of meandering blue waterways, almost exactly between Upper and Lower Lough Erne.

The proximity of the water gives this 400-year-old market town something of a light-hearted holiday feel, particularly in the summer. It’s not chocolate-box idyllic, but there are increasing numbers of lively places to eat and drink in and around the town’s mile-long main street which, confusingly, changes its name six times between the east and west bridges at either end.

Although the old market has been replaced by a large retail complex (one with a charming waterside location), shopping is a big part of Enniskillen life. People from both sides of the Border come here to stock up, and one of the pleasant things about the town is that it hasn’t been completely colonised by the usual big name

high street stores. Independent retailers which are a definite draw to the town include Houston’s department store and Desi Quinn’s shoe store.

The influx of tourists each summer encourages local restaurateurs to provide increasingly imaginative food. Chef Liz Moore, a native of Co Fermanagh, has high praise for Cafe Uno, on Belmore Street.

“I had seriously delicious hake there recently,” she said. “And there was a lovely atmosphere. Plus they have a great cocktail bar right next door – who could want for more?”

Moore also recommends Dollakis, a small Greek restaurant, and Cafe Merlot, a cosy wine bar with jazz at the weekend.

If you feel like really getting hands-on with your food, try the recently-opened Kitchen Academy: it’s a bright airy space, run by chef Joe Kelly, where you can learn to rustle up everything from sushi to authentic pizzas; the barbecue skills masterclasses are particularly popular.

Any town geared towards seasonal visitors will have its share of tacky merchandise. You can escape all that at the Buttermarket Craft & Design Centre. Housed in the restored early 19th century dairy market, it provides an outlet for the flourishing Co Fermanagh craft scene. Rebecca’s cafe, also in the courtyard, is a pleasant spot for a coffee.

History is never far away in Enniskillen, and the Enniskillen Castle museums – Fermanagh County Museum and the Inniskillings Museum – are a good place to start exploring. Built by the Gaelic Maguire chieftains, Enniskillen Castle gets its earliest mention in 1439 in the *Annals of Ulster*. Apparently King Tomas Óg Maguire was held prisoner here by Domnall Maguire ‘the Freckled’, and liberated eventually by Henry O’Neill.

It’s a little more salubrious these days, with the opportunity to sample medieval Gaelic banquets or attend open-air performances of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. (Oscar Wilde was a pupil at the



town's Portora Royal School, as was Samuel Beckett and, more recently, Neil Hannon of the Divine Comedy.)

Few rural market towns can boast their own theatre, but Enniskillen's Ardhoven Theatre is flourishing, offering a year-round programme of drama, music, dance and local talent. Actor and director Adrian Dunbar, another local boy, recently brought his acclaimed production of Frank McGuinness's enigmatic play, *Carthaginians*.

Railway buffs will love

Enniskillen Castle situated on the banks of the Island town

Headhunters Barber Shop & Railway Museum, which claims to "bring the golden age of the railway vividly to life". The railway vanished from Enniskillen in 1957, but many here remain entranced by that era, including the former railway employees and enthusiasts who set up this engaging museum in 2002.

Step into the charmingly reconstructed railway booking office and be prepared to be whisked away on a nostalgic journey.

Of course, Enniskillen is the starting point for numerous tours around Lough Erne. The monastic site on Devenish Island, with its round tower and high cross, is a popular destination. But the otherworldly Boa Island is also worth seeking out. It contains one of the hidden treasures of Lower Lough Erne: Caldragh, an ancient Christian churchyard containing strange stone pagan idols. One of these has two faces, and was the inspiration for Seamus Heaney's poem *January God*. Standing in the quietness of Boa, it's easy to feel the centuries slipping away.

For those who fancy something a little more energetic, why not try the Enniskillen canoe tour? It's paddled at an easy pace, the canoes are safe and easy to control, and the guides offer an entertaining narrative on the history, literature and nature of the area.

Away from the water, Castle Coole is one of three National Trust properties in and around Enniskillen. Completed in 1798, this austere neo-classical beauty is set in a rolling landscaped park, ideal for strolling and picnicking.

Eat, drink and be merry

Eating:

Russell & Donnelly in Darling Street is a deli and wine shop; the black olive bread sandwiches and the cheese selection come highly recommended.

Drinking:

Blakes of the Hollow is Enniskillen's most famous pub, and an ideal destination for an Irish coffee. The place is a warren of nooks, crannies and snugs; bizarrely, there even used to be a bath for customers to sit in as they sipped their pints.

It's worth a trip to nearby

Derrylin to visit the Crushed Grape fine wine shop. There are frequent free wine tastings, and it also stocks local artisan beer, such as Inishmacsaint

Sleeping:

Belmore Court & Motel on the edge of Enniskillen provides accommodation to suit a range of budgets and offers free parking and wifi. Among their summer special offers is a three night break from £65 (€80) per room per night based on two sharing a superior double/twin. See motel.co.uk

Rooms to relish

The Lakelands are so lovely you won't want to leave, so it's just as well there are lots of cool places to stay, writes **Alanna Gallagher**

ONCE YOU discover the beauty of Fermanagh's Lakelands you won't want to leave. The region's welcoming accommodation includes everything from cool camping to historic self-catering to luxury golf and spa breaks.

Fermanagh's alluring lakelands should be explored at leisure. If you love luxury, try to stay at the five-star Lough Erne Resort, with its Nick Faldo-designed course, opened by Rory McIlroy in 2009. Golfers can work on their swing or sign up to the Faldo Academy, the first in Europe. Golf widows and widowers can unwind under the expert hands of the spa's traditional Thai masseurs.

The four-star Manor House Country Hotel is a hostelry with history. Its original Italianate interior was decorated by Italian craftsmen in the 1860s. During the second World War the property was requisitioned and was for a time used by American Forces. Local historian and Blue Badge Guide Breege McCusker maintains it was used as an officers' mess and headquarters for the seaplane base of Killadeas. A plane from this base sighted the *Bismarck* and thereby played a role in the German



battleship's destruction.

Knockninny House and Marina, in Derrylin, was originally built by John Grey Vesey Porter, who also operated Lough Erne's first steam ship. Hire a boat here and go island-hopping with a champagne picnic, provided by the hotel.

For a memorable family get-together the newly refurbished 17th-century castle on the Belle Isle Estate is atmospheric (it apparently enchanted actress Helena Bonham Carter when she stayed there). Set on the edge of the Upper Lough, it sleeps up to 16 and features Delft tile bathrooms and bedrooms with four-poster beds. Dine in the grand hall where a catered three-course meal starts from €56 per person.

Play lord and lady of the manor with a stay in Crom Castle's West Wing. The charming, six-bedroom wing was recently used as a location for the filming of a new BBC TV series, PG Wodehouse's *Blandings*, a reworking of the 1967 series, starring David Walliams, Timothy Spall and Jennifer Saunders. Included in the rental price is the use of a small boat with an outboard engine while on site.

Other self-catering options include Fermanagh Lodges, the lakeside Tully Bay Cottages and Manor House Marine Cottages.

Happy campers will love Rushin House Caravan Park located on a family farm. It has a lakeside walk and a new fishing stand, where you could try catching your next meal.

From castles to camping – it's your choice

❑ The castle at the **Belle Isle Estate** rents per night or per week. Mid-season it costs €870 for a weekend night. A week is €4,712 in high season..
Tel: +44 (0) 28-66387231
Belle-isle.com

❑ A three-night, self-catering weekend stay for a family costs from €2,245 to €3,118 in the West Wing, **Crom Castle**.
Tel: +44 (0) 28-67738004
Cromcastle.com

❑ Stay at **Fermanagh Lodges** near Lisnaskea in July and August for €810 per week. The lodges sleep eight. In June a two-night weekend stay costs €356. Tel: +44 (0) 28-67722240 Fermanaghlodges.com

❑ **Tully Bay Cottages** sleep up to six and cost €867 for the week in high season. Short breaks of two or three nights cost €437.
Tel: +44 (0)-28-68641737
Tullybay.com

❑ Self-cater at **Inishclare Cottages**. The seven-bed property costs €748 pw; the other property sleeps four and costs €499 pw. Tel: +44 (0) 28-66340127. inishclarecottages.com

❑ **Manor House Marine Cottages** sleep four for six people. A two night breaks is from €322 and one week is from €732.
Tel: +44 (0) 28-68628100
manormarine.com



Glamorous camping: (above) Drumhoney pods are great for 'glamping' (Above left) Crom Castle's west wing; (Above right) the diningroom at Belle Isle Estate Castle.



Or try "glamping" at Drumhoney Holiday Park in a fully heated, fully insulated, double-glazed wooden pod. The experience will give the kids a taste of the outdoors without them having to relinquish all creature comforts.

If camping, however glamorous, isn't your thing, B&Bs are a great option for those on a budget and who prefer a home away from home. There's a great choice of welcoming B&Bs dotted around the county.

The Customs House Inn in Belcoo, overlooking Lough MacNeaen offers fine food and a wine bar to repair to afterwards.

If you have time on your hands, spend a few days in Enniskillen, a town which has culture, great cuisine and shopping. For those on a tight budget there's The Bridges youth hostel while couples might prefer the boutique hotel design of the Westville Hotel.

Families should enjoy the Killyhevlin Hotel. (Ask about their planned tours to Tickety Moo, a family farm that makes ice cream.)

❑ Two nights B&B plus one dinner costs from €182 pps at the **Lough Erne Resort**.
Tel: +44 (0) 28-66323230
Lougherneresort.com

❑ Stay for two nights and enjoy one dinner at **Manor House Country Hotel** and a cruise and afternoon tea aboard the 'Lady of the Lake' from €123.50 pps. Tel: +44 (0) 28-68622200
Manorhousecountryhotel.com

❑ B&B at **Knockninny House** starts from €111 per room.
Tel: +44 (0) 28-67748590
Knockninnyhouse.com

❑ A two-night weekend stay at the **Westville Hotel** in Enniskillen costs from €136pps and includes breakfast and one evening meal.
Tel: +44 (0) 28-66320333
Westvillehotel.com

❑ A family of up to two adults and three children can stay two nights at the **Killyhevlin Hotel**, from €136 per adult sharing midweek.
Tel: +44 (0) 28-66323481
killyhevlin.com

❑ For the month of June a minimum two-night stay costs €50 per night at **Rushin House Caravan Park**

Tel: +44 (0) 28-66386519
Rushinhousecaravanpark.com

❑ Glamping at **Drumhoney Holiday Park** in a pod costs €62 per night in July and August. Tel: +44 (0) 28-68621892
Drumhoneyholidaypark.com

❑ **Derryvree House** in Maguiresbridge outside Enniskillen offers B&B from £25 (€30) pps.
Tel +44 (0) 28- 89531251

❑ **Customs House Country Inn** costs from €56 pps in high season.
Tel: 048- 66386285
Customshouseinn.com

Boston bags

Boston Quay in the Buttermarket sells clothing, accessories, jewellery and gifts. Pictured is their Sadie bag, €62.05. The shop also runs Mimimake craft workshops. Kids' craft classes on Saturdays run from 10.30am to 12.30pm and cost €12.41 per child. The fee includes all materials and you get to bring home what you make. It is suitable for children aged six and upwards. Tel: +44 (0)28-6632 3837, mimomake.co.uk

Hot rocks

SRLAKE_LOGOCLIP Angela Kelly uses native stones to make her decorative designs. Her signature stones include red jasper from Silvermines in Co Tipperary where it has been mined since the ninth century and Mourne banded stone. Prices start at €27. Her workshop is at 18 Buttermarket, Down Street. Tel: +44 (0)28-6632 8741, angelakellyjewellery.com

Love the love seat

SC Minns & Sons make custom furniture using top-quality hardwoods. This decorative chair, made in maple, featured in an arts and crafts exhibition some years back. Prices start at €310 for a small coffee table. Visit the workshop by appointment at 81 Enniskillen Road, Ballinamallard, Co Fermanagh. Tel: +44(0)28-6638 8900, scminnssonsenniskillen.co.uk

Pen your memoirs

Looking for a very portable souvenir of your time in Fermanagh? Brendan Bannon is a woodturner who combines fine metalwork into his pieces. His bog oak pens come with sterling silver, chrome or 10ct gold-plated finishes and as ballpoints or cartridges. This gold cartridge pen is €215. The Woodturning Shop, 13 The Buttermarket, Down Street, Enniskillen. Tel: 0044-771 140 9181, brendanwoodturning.com

Getting

Literary chop

Headhunters Barber Shop is offering Samuel Beckett cuts to celebrate the works of the Nobel Prize-winning writer. Enniskillen is where the writer spent his formative years attending Portlaoise Royal School. Happy Days Enniskillen International Beckett Festival takes place from August 23rd-27th. The haircut costs €7.45. While there, journey back in time by browsing their railway museum. Entry is free. Headhunters Barber Shop, 5 Darling Street, Enniskillen. Tel: +44(0)28-6632 7488, headhuntersmuseum.com

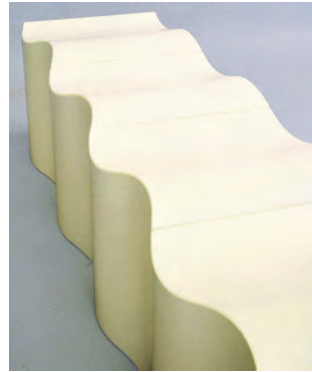


Go potty in Belleek

Belleek pottery and giftware is one of Ireland's best-known exports. At their museum, there's a piece called Prisoner of Love (left), costing around €21,103, that was reintroduced into the collection three years ago as a limited edition. A decorative mirror dating from the early 1900s took two men a year to complete and is insured for €310,331. Main Street, Belleek, Co Fermanagh. Tel: +44(0)28-6865 8501, belleek.ie

Exhibits of antique Irish lace

The award-winning Sheelin Antique Irish Lace Museum houses more than 700 exhibits dating from 1890-1920. The adjoining Sheelin Lace Shop offers antique Irish lace items for sale as well as bags, belts and chokers, hand-made using vintage pieces. Bellanaleck, Enniskillen. Tel: +44(0)28-6634 8052, antiqueirishlace.co.uk



Fresh design, cubed

Design Onion is a furniture design workshop run by Ronan Lowery whose best-known work, Cubes (above), is a seating design made for Lifestyle Sports' Waterford premises. A set of four cubes, made of birch ply and MDF and sprayed using high-quality lacquer, costs from €1,092. Visit him by appointment at Unit 6, The Craft Village, Belleek, Co Fermanagh. Tel: 0044-79 5569 2608, designonion.net

crafty

Pot luck

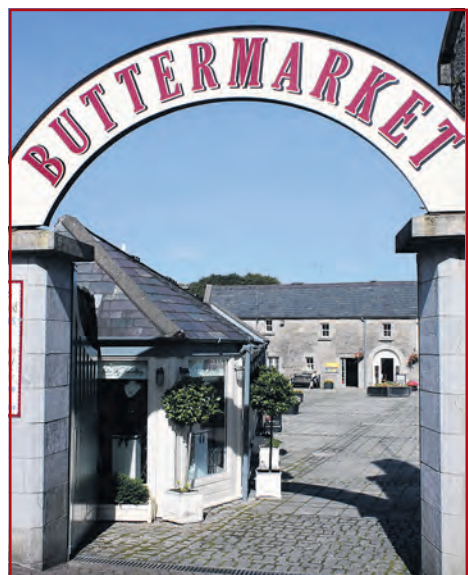


Check out Ann McNulty's stoneware and Raku pottery. Colourful mugs cost €11.20 each. A large stoneware pasta dish is €58.35. Matching bowls are €12.41 each. A stylish white Raku pot costs €490.50. Unit 1, The Buttermarket, Down Street, Enniskillen. Tel: +44(0)28-663 24721, annmcnultypottery.com

Shopping central

The Buttermarket Craft and Design Centre is a browser's paradise in the heart of Enniskillen comprising art and craft units, a coffee shop and gift shop, all housed in an early 19th-century dairy market.

Buy artisanal pottery, ceramics, handmade jewellery, textiles, picture framing, photography and original art. Open 10am-5pm, Monday-Saturday.



What's on?



Some old-fashioned family fun days above, or traditional skills at Irvinestown, below

From a major festival dedicated to Samuel Beckett to the best agricultural shows, **Sandra O'Connell** discovers what's on

SAMUEL BECKETT WENT to school in Enniskillen, at Portora Royal School. It's why by far the biggest event taking place in the Fermanagh Lakelands region this year is the Happy Days Enniskillen International Beckett Festival – the world's first annual festival dedicated to the Nobel-winning writer.

A range of events are planned, some of which are free, with writers Edna O'Brien, John Banville and Antonia Fraser opening the festival

programme on August 23rd with an in-conversation event with BBC broadcaster William Crawley.

Other highlights include performances by the Vienna Piano Trio, comedian Stuart Silver and tenor Ian Bostridge.

As part of the Beckett celebrations, Castle Coole, a National Trust-run stately home on the edge of Enniskillen, will feature sculptor Antony Gormley's *Godot Tree*. Part of a stage set for a *Happy Days* production due in 2013, it will be on view from July 2nd.

It's just one of an eclectic mix of events worth looking out for this summer, including the Lisnaskea Water Festival, which offers both land- and water-based activities such as cruiser tours and treasure hunts from June 22nd to 24th.

Crom Estate in Newtownbutler, another National Trust property, is hosting a day of family fun for Father's Day on June 17th, with a vintage car rally, craft activities and traditional sports such as egg and spoon and sack races.

On June 22nd and 23rd, the Aghakillymaude Mummerys Centre, the only exhibition space in the country dedicated to the ancient folk art of mumming, is running a special Midsummer Festival that will include a torch-lit procession up a mountainside, bonfires and fire





Above: a vintage car rally for Father's Day at Crom Estate. Below, the Happy Days International Beckett Festival

jumping. The following week, July 1st, sees a family "Diamond" event, at Castle Coole to mark its 60th year open to the public. Among the highlights on June 28th-30th will be swing, jazz and an Abba tribute in a marquee.

There's an open day at Orchard Acre Farm, a family friendly farm with sheep and chickens at Lisnarick, near Lough Erne, on 15th July.

There is also a Lady of the Lake Festival at Irvinestown on July 15-24th, 10 days of fun in honour of the mythical Lady of the Lake, whose arrival heralds good times to come, so let's hope she puts in an appearance.

If you're looking for something special for the kids, three-day summer camps will run in July and August at the Corralea Activity Centre in Belcoo, for nine- to 15-year-olds, priced from £90 (€112) per child, including activities such as canoeing, climbing and surfing.

Agricultural shows are always a great day out, even if you wouldn't know a heifer from a hogget, and Fermanagh County Show takes place at the Agricultural Centre



on Tempo Road on August 7th and 8th. Finally, Enniskillen Castle Museum has living history events on selected dates throughout the summer, where costumed staff will introduce you to such items as medieval food, or help you celebrate National Archaeology Day. There's a Family Fun day on the afternoon of August 27th.

Below: The family-friendly open day at Orchard Acre Farm is on July 15th



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