

Pregnant pause

Clare Meredith takes a break for some pre-natal pampering at Castle Leslie.

I am six months pregnant and lying on a treatment table. For once, no one is monitoring, scanning, measuring or checking anything. Instead, a therapist is gently scrubbing me and my bump with a mixture of sugar and blueberries. Expecting has never been more blissful.

It is only 20 minutes since we arrived at the Castle Leslie Estate in Co Monaghan, and already I've forgotten about work and almost forgotten about my husband, who is unpacking somewhere on the estate. Child number one is also a distant memory, having been deposited with grandparents. For now, it's just me and Carla the therapist. I've signed up for the full "Mum to Be" package: scrub, wrap and facial.

Pre-natal pampering and baby showers are big business these days, with lots of hotels and resorts offering spa treats and other indulgences. Castle Leslie's offering has a Victorian feel, with period décor and fittings and an old-fashioned charm.

The "castle" is actually a Victorian house built in the Scottish baronial style in Glaslough village. You can stay in the house itself, the restored and enlarged gate lodge, a mews or cottage. We are ensconced in the lodge, and I immediately spot the large Victorian bath.

The house itself is a beautiful pile, built in its current form in the late 19th century by Sir John Leslie, the first Baronet. It's easy to see why it's a popular wedding venue – even Paul McCartney and Heather Mills tied the knot here in 2002. (That the knot unravelled six years later cannot be laid at Castle Leslie's door!)

There is a sense that we are joining a long list of visitors, from royalty to rock stars. In fact, the estate and village are probably worth a period drama of their own. The estate has been in the Leslie family since 1663, a home for such eccentric characters as a fighting bishop, a pre-Raphaelite artist, a Spitfire pilot,



and now current owner Samantha, whose love of horses is evident in the room names, bric-a-brac and artwork throughout.

Due to the volume of wedding bookings, the castle is often closed, but we did

manage to sneak a peek just before some lucky couple's big day. It's clear as you wander about the rooms that this is more a home than a hotel – there are family portraits of stern men and famous beauties, paintings by Sir John, and photographs of children look out from every corner.

The estate is home to a working farm and stables (our peaceful room overlooks the equestrian centre), and while taking in the stillness of Kilvey Lake and the beautiful rolling hills of Monaghan, I also waddle past the odd quad bike. Fortunately, if it all gets too wet and mucky you can borrow a pair of wellies and sink into a warm bath on your return.

Dinner is in Snaffles restaurant in the gate lodge, and it's a real treat. An evil temptress, sorry, I mean waitress, left wine and gin menus along with the food one. I order a non-alcoholic beer in Conor's Bar later, and get a sudden feeling that the bump will be a boy.

Castle Leslie is the perfect spot for some pampering, bump or not. Although, I can now add blueberries to my list of cravings. 🍓

REST ASSURED

Castle Leslie offers one-night packages including dinner and breakfast from €115pp, and two-night packages from €160pp. The Mum to Be head-to-toe treatment costs €120. castleleslie.com

What to pack ...

- 1 Stacking Rings by Charlotte Valkeniers €255 coldlilies.com
- 2 Éminence Organic Skin Care Blueberry Soy Sugar Scrub, €50 at AnneMcDevitt.com, 13 Wicklow Street, Dublin 2
- 3 Elie Maternity Top, €79 at isabellaoliver.com/eu
- 4 Maternity Embellished Midi Dress, €85 at asos.com
- 5 Darcy Dress, €272 at maddersonlondon.com
- 6 Maternity Moto Black Leigh Jeans, €58 at Topshop.com, 6-7 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin and topshop.com

