

THE IRISH TIMES

TRAVEL

Love is in the Éireann

There are idyllic hideaways and days out to suit most budgets all over the country, writes **Joan Scales**

Love affair package

Do you have a question to ask your Valentine? Choose possibly Dublin's finest and most opulent suite, the Pembroke at the Intercontinental Hotel, for the right setting. The newly-refurbished suite has antique furniture, fine art and luxurious fabrics. On arrival sip champagne and enjoy red velvet cupcakes while the butler unpacks your cases and arranges your long-stemmed roses in a vase. Make use of the pool and thermal spa with special treatments. Dinner is served in your suite's dining area. Breakfast will be served in your suite when you are ready. The Suite Love Affair package costs from €2,100 from February 10th to 19th, call reservations (01) 665 4000.

Cool spot in Donegal

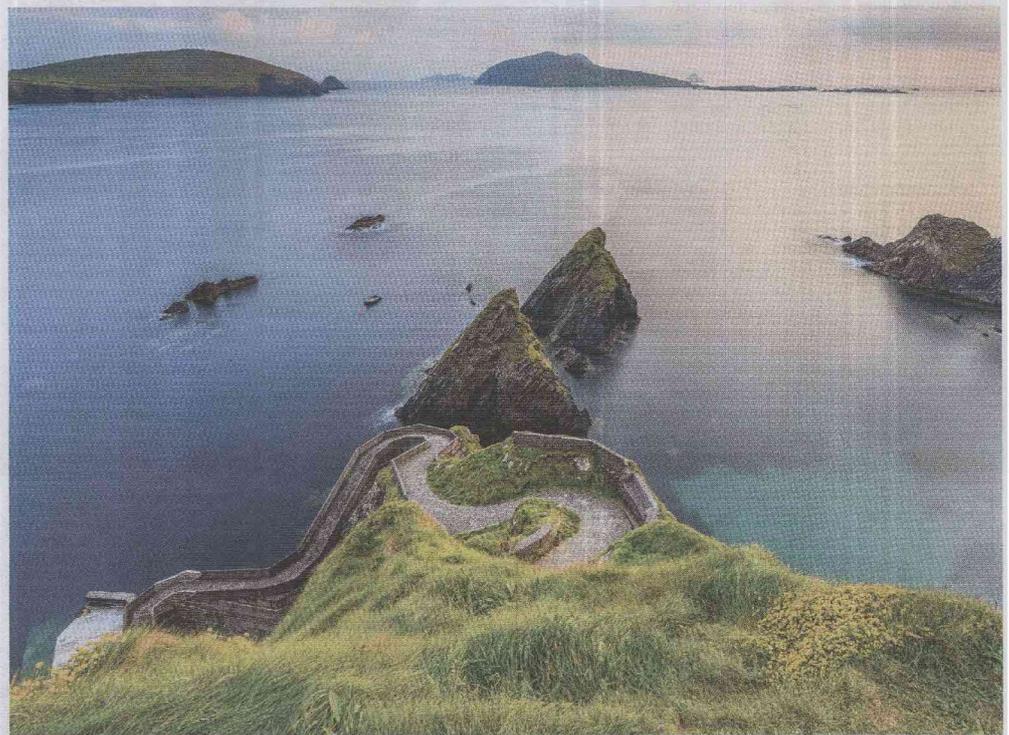
Donegal is a great place to share romantic moments. "Up here it's different," they say about the county. *National Geographic* agrees and put it at the top of its Cool List for 2017. For five years in a row Harvey's Point Hotel, which is nestled in the Blue Stack Mountains of Donegal on the shores of Lough Eske, has been voted top hotel in Ireland by the users of Tripadvisor. It is the perfect place for a Valentine's break. Loll around in your suite with homemade cookies and fruit, dine in the lakeside restaurant and enjoy the entertainment and treats from Harvey's. Two nights midweek cost from €178pps and €218 at weekends from February 10th to 19th. Harveyspoint.com, (074) 9722208.

Walkaround Dingle

Castlewood House in Dingle has appeared on more than a few lists as a place of great romance and comfort. The latest accolades to Castlewood are from Tripadvisor as Ireland's No 1 for romance, best small hotel and best bargain hotel. Explore Dingle or take a tour arranged by Castlewood when there. Choose from a private, guided tour with your interests in mind, Dingle Distillery, walking in the Blaskets or in the footsteps of *Ryan's Daughter*. Book the drawing room for a private breakfast and you can have the luxury of looking out over Dingle Bay. Rooms cost from €96 to €150 B&B. Castlewooddingle.com, (066) 9152788.

Windy walks on the beach

Renvyle House Hotel in Connemara is the perfect place to holiday on the Wild Atlan-



■ Explore Dingle and the surrounding areas and coastline using Castlewood House as a base. PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY

tic Way. It was a meeting place of poets, politicians and influencers for many years and a romantic hideaway. Enjoy windy walks on the pebble beach and fine gourmet food. Renvyle reopens on February 10th, one night with five-course dinner from €99pps and two nights with one dinner from €175. Renvyle.ie, (095) 46100.

Perfect gem

A perfect gem of a lodge is the perfect place to spend time as a couple. No distractions, just time together. The Landmark Trust has a small selection of perfectly-formed period properties around the country that are ideal for an escape. Pack a hamper of quality foods and wines, throw in a few books of poetry, maybe a few games and set-

tle in for a few days of togetherness. Lodges to consider are Salterbridge near Lismore, Co Waterford, Magheraintemple in Ballycastle on the Antrim coast, Triumphal Arch in Fermanagh, or Batty Langley Lodge in Kildare. landmarktrust.com

Cottages for couples

An hour west of Cork in the area of Skibberreen, Schull, Bantry and Baltimore is a collection of very special cottages especially for couples. These restored barns, stables and cottages have been carefully modernised retaining lots of character. There are also two tree houses. So if you can see yourself lounging in a hot tub in the heart of the countryside, pack the Prosecco. Bedrooms also have a Jacuzzi bath, priced from €129

to €189 per night, cottagesforcouples.ie, (028) 22957.

Dublin at dusk

Do something different this Valentine's, fall in love with Dublin at dusk on the Etihad Skyline Tour next weekend. That would be one way to impress your lover. The special Valentine's edition tours will take place at 4.30pm on Sunday 12th, Monday 13th and Tuesday 14th. The adult-only tour costs €25 and will include a glass of bubbles and some sweet treats. crokepark.ie/valentines

Blessing of the rings

If you are getting married this year, then you may like to get your wedding rings



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blessed on the saint's feast day. Every year in Whitefriar St Carmelite Church, where the relics of St Valentine are kept, there are two masses with the blessing of the rings by Fr Bernard Murphy. They are at 11.30am and 3pm. whitefriarstreetchurch.ie

Take a stroll

Take a romantic stroll in the lanes around Temple Bar, behind the Olympia Theatre on Dame St in Dublin. As part of the Love the Lanes project, the walls of the alleys have been dedicated to love using hand-made decorated tiles, stencils and tiles with quotes about love-inspired music and poetry (just don't expect to find Love Lane here. It's beside the canal).

Storm a castle

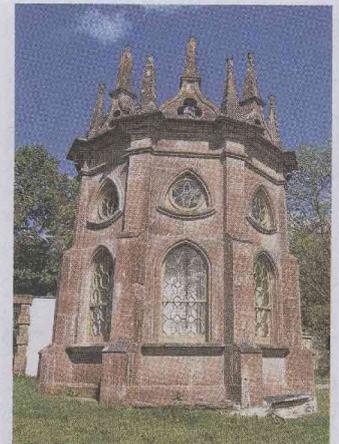
Add to the romance of Valentine's Day celebrations by staying in a castle with a four-poster bed. Consider **Castle Leslie** in Monaghan, Condé Nast Traveller Readers' Choice winner Waterford Castle, Clontarf Castle in Dublin, Ballynahinch in Connemara, Ashford Castle in Mayo or Cabra Castle in Cavan. See irelands-blue-book.ie for ideas. Or for a thoroughly authentic experience, have an entire castle to yourself; search Airbnb.com for castles, there are about 30 to rent in Ireland.

Grand gesture

If you won the Euromillions recently and



■ Above: The Desmond suite at **Castle Leslie** in Monaghan has views over Glaslough Lake; right: the Landmark Trust's Batty Langleigh Lodge in Kildare is perfect for a few days of getting cosy together



want to treat your beloved, you can do it discreetly in the Sheen Falls Lodge in Kerry by booking the Grand Gesture package. You will stay in the Falls master suite overlooking the cascading Sheen Waterfalls.

Arrive by private chauffeur transfer. Begin with a bottle of Cristal in your suite. Room service breakfast in your bedroom

and a romantic candlelit dinner in the Falls restaurant with accompany wines is included. A magical Valentine's Day costs from €4,205, call (064) 6641600. sheenfallslodge.ie

By the sea in Ardmore

Food lovers will adore the Cliff House Ho-

tel in Ardmore, Co Waterford, and the Michelin-starred food of Martijn Kajuiter. It is a proper seaside hotel with rooms overlooking the bay. Snuggle up together and leave the windows open to be lulled to sleep by the gentle shushing of the sea. Dinner, bed and breakfast from €555pps, (024) 87800. thecliffhousehotel.com