



By Roslyn
Dee

We arrived mid-afternoon on one of those glorious Indian summer days in September. Up we drove through the picture-postcard village of Glaslough with its old stone buildings bedecked with overflowing window boxes, through the gates of the demesne, and into the grounds of Castle Leslie.

We had been here almost two decades ago when an artist friend was renting one of the outhouse buildings on the Monaghan estate, living the idyllic country life with his wife and children, free from the demands of city life, and able to paint to his heart's content. But, to be honest, we had driven straight to Neil's house that day and hadn't taken in much more of the 1,000-acre plus grounds.

This was different. This time we were here for a couple of nights, but not staying in the 'hotel' proper – neither in the Castle itself nor in the Lodge where there are also bedrooms and where the dining and spa facilities are both located. No, we were staying in the Stable Mews, the small complex that lies beyond the glistening lake and down a drive with horses munching contentedly in the fields on either side.

Here, in one of the beautifully designed two-bedroomed houses we were able to relax and enjoy the spacious accommodation – and all in the company of our dog, Finn. Yes, dog-owners take note – posh Castle Leslie is actually a dog-friendly zone. Okay, so you can't have your pooch with you in the room or on the bed where Paul McCartney and Heather Mills reclined after their nuptials at Castle Leslie back in the summer of 2002. Nor can you bring him into the general areas of the Castle or the Lodge, but you don't have to keep him in a kennel like you do in some 'pet friendly' establishments.

And the Stable Mews – a tasteful conversion of the old coach-house on the estate – is absolutely perfect dog territory, with the downstairs living accommodation (bedrooms are upstairs) opening by way of patio doors to a private outdoor eating area and to a grass lawn beyond that is perfect for scampering canines, particularly those of a younger vintage than our almost 16-year old!



THERAPY:
A facial in the Victorian spa proved life-enhancing

The Castle itself, of course, is beautiful. The husband had shot a wedding here (he is a photographer) a few years ago and had told me about the frescoed walls, the wonderful views and the general feeling of peace and relaxation. He was right. We wandered through the Castle on our first evening there and oohed and aahed at those views as the sun dropped in the sky and the light started to fade out over the lake, a gossamer mistiness beginning to envelop the landscape, giving the vista an extraordinary patina of romance.

We dined in Snaffles restaurant on our first night, on the first floor of the Lodge, where a delightful menu saw us spoiled for choice.

Would we like to choose from the gin menu by way of aperitif, our charming waitress wanted to know? The what? The gin menu, she repeated. So we had a look and there, sure enough, was a 'menu' with some 64 gins available – from the well-known Cork and Gordon's varieties to any number of exotic tipples from countries around the world. Colombian gin? No, I'd never heard of it either.

You could stay at Castle Leslie and never leave the place. We don't know the county of Monaghan very well and so we had a drive on our second afternoon, familiarising ourselves with Kavanagh's 'stony grey soil', and a landscape that was, on this particular sunlit day, anything but grey, but rather resplendent with the most wondrous shades of green and gold imaginable.

Largely, however, we stayed at Castle Leslie. A walk in the grounds with Finn, a few hours reading out on our patio or curled up on the big comfy leather sofa in front of a real

fire which we lit once the evening mist had swooped in to eradicate the heat of the day. Or a leisurely bath before dinner, perhaps, glass of wine in hand, enjoying the luxury of doing nothing at all.

I had a facial in the Victorian Treatment Rooms one morning. I'm not a spa fan, it has to be said, and nearly cancelled it at the last minute. Go on, the husband said, it'll do you good – no doubt with the thought of an hour or so in blissful isolation with the newspapers firmly to the front of his mind.

Anyway, I didn't cancel. And do you know what? It's the first hotel spa experience that I have ever actually enjoyed, and that was down almost entirely to the talents of my young therapist, Shauna.

She talked if I wanted to talk, didn't talk when I wanted to be quiet, explained things about different treatments that I had never understood before and left me with an overall sense of well-being.

We all left Castle Leslie feeling better than when we arrived. It's that kind of place. Life-enhancing. Even for dogs...

LUXURY:
Castle Leslie will leave you feeling restored

Roslyn Dee on Castle Leslie and its pet-friendly pleasures

A pooch's paradise

GETTING THERE

Castle Leslie has some 'special' breaks, including their 'Overnight Escape' package, priced from €120 per person sharing and including one night's bed and breakfast plus dinner in Snaffles restaurant. Their Christmas gift vouchers cover 'The Ultimate Indulgent Day' at the spa, horse-riding



CHOICE: The spa offers a wide menu of treatments

at the equestrian centre, afternoon tea for two, and fishing on Glaslough Lake. For all the details check

out www.castleleslie.com, email the hotel at info@castleleslie.com or telephone 047 88100.

NEW YORK, NEW YEAR: Clickandgo have January deals for long weekends in New York. Four nights in Manhattan's Upper West Side is on sale from €619pps, leaving on January 10 or 11. The price includes four nights in the three-star Newton Hotel and flights from Dublin to JFK. For details, see

Late DEALS

clickandgo.com or call (01) 637 1699.

LATE SUNSHINE: It's not too late to get a blast of sunshine, as GoHop have last-minute deals to Gran Canaria, the Algarve

and Fuerteventura. Six nights in the four-star Aparthotel Monica Isabel Beach Club in the Algarve starts at €134pp, leaving November 4, while seven nights in the three-star Fuerteventura Beach

Club starts at €193pp. See gohop.ie or call (01) 241 2389 for more.

BOLIVIAN ODYSSEY: Discover the magic of Bolivia on a 16-day tour with South American specialists Nuevo Mundo. The trip begins in the city of Santa Cruz and passes through the Amazon

plains before heading to the colonial town of Sucre, the salt flats of Salar de Uyuni, the Eduardo Abaroa National Reserve and then on to La Paz. The price – from €3,365pp plus taxes – includes flights, 13 nights' accommodation, tours and transfers. See www.nuevomundo.ie or call 0818 204 408 for more.