



RURAL CHARM

ULSTER TATLER'S HANNAH REILLY VISITS CASTLE LESLIE ESTATE IN COUNTY MONAGHAN

Upon mentioning to my companion that I was due to visit Castle Leslie Estate for an overnight stay, she jumped at the chance to accompany me. Nestled amongst acres of Irish countryside just across the border, the estate is commonly regarded as a favoured spot for luxurious or adventure-filled escapes.

With the estate being only 60 minutes from Belfast, we arrived in no time. Recent extensions to the estate's Lodge, a boutique hotel located a short distance away from the castle itself, have added 21 new rooms to the building, as well as a 40-seater conservatory. We were greeted by Audrey at reception, who kindly took us on a short tour of the Lodge before showing us to our room. Rather than being distinguished by numbers, each room is named after a horse that lives on the estate; a quirky touch that added character and charm to the building (our room name was Pluto). Our room was beautifully decorated with an equestrian theme throughout, and several personal touches quickly made us feel at home, such as a card welcoming us to the

a private 12-seater cinema. For those interested in a more transitory visit, castle tours are available several times during the week.

After returning to our room to freshen up, we headed to the estate's Snaffles Restaurant, which is also located in the Lodge; having acquired 2 AA Rosettes, I knew that I was in for a culinary treat. With the restaurant's dinner menu comprising of up to six courses, staff patiently walked us through the structure of the menu. The estate's rural location allows for the sourcing of local and seasonal produce, and the quality of each course was distinct throughout the entire meal. While enjoying a plate of homemade wheaten and sourdough bread, I mulled over the selection. After much deliberation, as I could have eaten every dish, we eventually made our decision, and the chef's choice of appetiser soon arrived: cheese tortellini, served with pickled mushroom and baked potato consommé. The pasta was delicate and was paired perfectly with the sharpness of the mushroom, but the consommé was the star of the dish - baked potato is such an innovative flavour, and it was wonderfully smoky and potent.

Our starters soon followed - I opted for the Five Mile Town Goats' Cheese, served with ribbons of beetroot, candied walnuts and truffle. For her starter, my companion chose organic salmon, which was served with cucumber, crème fraiche and a lovely side plate of brown bread, which I also picked at to eat with my cheese. The chef's choice of soup course followed: cauliflower soup served in a dainty espresso-sized glass. It may have been a small portion, but it certainly packed a punch of flavour!

My main course brought several firsts for me in terms of food. I chose the glazed halibut, which was served with lobster ravioli, yuzu gel, and Dillisk gnocchi. Having never tried lobster, yuzu or gnocchi before, I was more than happy to experience new flavours alongside the fish, which was delicious. My companion opted for the chargrilled fillet steak, which was cooked perfectly, and we both cleaned our plates without question.

Our desserts brought the meal to a delightful end - I opted for the estate honey panna cotta with roasted nuts and strawberry sorbet. My companion's choice was somewhat less traditional - her baked lemon custard tart was served with beetroot sorbet, beetroot meringue and celery -

but, of course, the combinations were in perfect harmony. Despite the restaurant going through a busy service, staff took the time to mention every element of each course upon presentation, which made for a very attentive dining experience. We retreated to our room following dinner, and found that our beds had been turned down for the evening while we had been out for dinner, and soft music was playing from the TV. This was an unexpected touch, and the aura that had been created meant that my companion and I were



lulled into complete relaxation before we settled into our beds. After a comfortable night's sleep, we headed back to Snaffles for breakfast. We first made a beeline for the continental buffet, and enjoyed some yoghurt and granola before ordering our cooked food. My companion and I both opted for the Castle Full Irish. It was honestly the cleanest Full Irish that I have ever eaten, and the taste of the sausages and black pudding in particular was second to none. We once again left the restaurant feeling wowed by the standard of the food.

Sadly, it was time to leave, and on our way to reception we passed the estate's Victorian Treatment Rooms - my companion and I immediately began to formulate plans for a pamper-filled spa getaway during our next visit to the estate. Whether you are interested in an active retreat in the country through the use of the estate's equestrian centre and variety of other activities which include clay target shooting, archery, falconry, hot air balloon rides, fishing and boating; or if you are looking for a more peaceful trip through its walking trails or Treatment Rooms, Castle Leslie Estate undoubtedly caters for every guest's wishes. With the recent renovations to the Lodge in particular increasing the number of rooms available, there are more opportunities to visit the estate and become entranced by its rural charm.

An Overnight Escape at The Lodge to include one night's beautiful accommodation, a full hearty Irish breakfast and a 5 course dinner in the 2 AA Rosette award winning Snaffles Restaurant starts from just £117 per person sharing.

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estate, and Audrey phoning us shortly after to ensure that we were settled into our room. After unpacking, I made some coffee and spent time out on our balcony to take in views of the estate. My quiet surroundings dropped me into an oasis of tranquility; in contrast to my normally hectic schedule back home, it was pure bliss.

After we settled into the room, we headed to Conor's Bar, located on the ground floor of the Lodge. For those looking to unwind with a pint or a coffee, or enjoy traditional cuisine, Conor's Bar is the ideal spot to dine and socialise within a relaxed environment. My companion and I visited the bar for a drink, then headed outside to explore the estate. Castle Leslie Estate offers a range of walking trails, detailed on a map that is provided in an information pack in each room. While walking undisturbed down one of the paths, and breathing in the fresh country air, I felt like I was in a kind of rural paradise, happily secluded from the rest of the world around me. Of course, we wanted to get a glimpse of the castle itself during our walk, and it immediately exuded a sense of grandeur and history. With 20 uniquely indulgent bedrooms which have no TVs or radios (however WiFi is offered throughout), the castle is the perfect choice for those looking to unwind in a traditional environment. For groups who are looking for a night away with a twist, the castle is also home to

