



BIRTHDAYS are important, so too are anniversaries. As my daughter Nicole turned 18 last month, I took the opportunity to celebrate her special date at Castle Leslie Estate, which next week meets the milestone of 30 years in business.

This grand house and estate is a pearl, set in the picturesque village of Glaslough in Co Monaghan, and has been integral to the town for centuries. The building of a 6km wall around the estate gave work to many during the Great Famine, while the soup kitchen gave sustenance.

The big stately house is home to over 1,000 years of recorded Leslie family history, which staff are only too delighted to share with guests. The estate was put firmly on the world stage when over 800 million people viewed the wedding reception of Paul McCartney and Heather Mills on TV 20 years ago. But there is so much more to Castle Leslie than hosting famous weddings.

We stayed at The Lodge, a Goldilocks-style getaway, which features 50 individual guestrooms, the 2AA rosette restaurant Snaffles and cosy Conor's Bar. Close to the entrance of the estate, it overlooks the stables, which were bought back by the current head of the Leslie family, Sammy, in 2004.

The superb riding facility makes this property unique. The equestrian theme runs through every inch of The Lodge, with bridles and paintings of horses hanging on the corridor walls. Guestrooms are named after horses that lived on the estate, rather than given numbers.

CELEBRATE A GREAT ESTATE

Castle Leslie is 30 years in business – which makes it a good time to join them

THE NOVEL TRAVELLER

MICHELLE JACKSON



Giddy up: Castle Leslie Estate and, inset, Michelle with one of the horses

Each room is more uniquely decorated than the one next to it, but all enjoy mod cons and updated technology such as an iPad and TV hidden behind a movable bookcase.

I always think you can tell a lot about a hotel by the en suite and a huge shower is essential but my personal favourite is a decadent Victorian bath.

The Victorian theme weaves through the spa and treatment rooms, which boast a large outdoor hot tub and sauna, also overlooking the stables and rolling hills. It would have been rude not to indulge so we enjoyed a hot

stone massage each. Included on the menu is a fabulous three-treatment spa day, which includes a pedicure, massage and organic facial for €270. This would make a wonderful pampering addition to any stay.

Sammy Leslie has nurtured the development of the estate, which started out as a tea room in the castle's conservatory in 1992, with great care and aplomb. Her ethos is admirable.

'Like my father I strongly believe that we neither inherit nor own lands, we are just guardians doing our best for future generations,' she said.

was salivating to get his chops around it when I arrived.

The stables are a hive of activity in the mornings and each horse has their name printed on the door of their home. Every stage of the riding experience is catered for

at Castle Leslie, from beginners to those hoping to hack and gallop around the estate. Some guests like to build a package that includes daily horse riding into their stay but there is also the option to go as you please with one-hour hacks from €55 and two-hour hacks from €75.

The views from the big house are breathtaking and the character and legacy of the Leslie family oozes from the eaves to the antique Persian rugs.

The lake is a focal point but walkers are spoiled for choice with many ways to soak up the beauty and wandering lanes that traverse the estate.

It's hard to believe that this thriving estate has evolved from selling scones and tea in the conservatory 30 years ago to this fine example of the best of Irish hospitality.

It's no surprise that Castle Leslie is a member of Ireland's Blue Book. I'm already looking forward to my next stay and Nicole has informed me that I won't be going back without her.

My little girl only turns 18 once and memories are made of experiences like the one we shared in Castle Leslie.

■ A MIDWEEK overnight stay in May starts from €195 per room for bed and breakfast. For more from Michelle, see thenoveltraveller.com



'It is my hope that Castle Leslie Estate will provide more decades of employment for those who live locally and continue to be a sanctuary for all our guests.'

I didn't have to step too far to see evidence of this at the estate. The wetland area close to the stables is used to environmentally and economically manage water and sewage needed for the village of Glaslough and the estate. I went for a stroll to the wetlands before breakfast and heard a cacophony of birds and wildlife living in harmony among the towering indigenous trees.

After breakfast, which is scrumptious and includes homemade preserves and estate-grown produce, we popped down to meet the horses. I picked up a juicy Granny Smith at the reception on my way, which was rather fortuitous as Bumble