

14 Travel

How to do Ireland in style: the cool places to book

From arty B&Bs and hip hotels to forest domes and waterside suites, **Nicola Brady** knows the best spots

Bubble in Fermanagh

Fancy sleeping under the stars without channelling your inner Bear Grylls? At Finn Lough you'll find stylish bubble domes spread throughout the forest, cleverly positioned so you won't cop an eyeful of another guest. Each transparent dome is kitted out with a sleek four-poster bed, so you can lie in a herringbone blanket and gaze at the night sky. In the Elements Spa you can leap from the glass-fronted sauna into the lake, or gaze at it from the hot tub. **Details** B&B doubles from £275 (finnlough.com). Fly to Belfast

Cool cabin in Cavan

If you've ever harboured fantasies about putting on a flannel shirt and living like a lumberjack, Cabü by the Lakes is the place to be. With a smattering of log dwellings dotted around Lough Oughter in the Midlands, Cabü hits the nail on the head when it comes to the cabin-porn aesthetic — faux fur rugs, copper saucepans and thick woolly blankets strewn on every chair. Come nightfall everyone heads to the Sitooterie to drink wine next to the fire and make s'mores. **Details** Two nights' self-catering for two from £292 (cabu.co.uk). Fly to Dublin

Get artsy in Galway

Set over three storeys in a higgledy-piggledy building on Galway's Quay Street, Coffeewerk + Press (coffeewerkandpress.com) is a warren of creativity combining a café, gallery and design shop. Follow the sound of music up the stairs, where, among the enamel mugs and brass candlesticks, you'll find an old record player with stacks of vinyl — all of which belonged to the owner's grandfather. Stay in Galway's West End a short stroll away, in the fabulous B&B the Stop, with its mid-century armchairs and framed poster art. **Details** B&B doubles from £100 (thestopgalway.com). Fly to Ireland West

Silver screen in Dublin

You can forget about the sticky-floored multiplexes. Stella Cinema (stella.cinemas.ie) is an art deco masterpiece in a restored cinema in Rathmines that dates from 1923. Get comfortable on a leather armchair, a sofa or even a double bed, and your food and cocktails will be delivered right to your seat as the film starts. There's a smaller Stella Cinema in the Devlin hotel in nearby

Raneagh that has artsy rooms and a rooftop bar.

Details Room-only doubles from £107 (thedeclin.ie). Fly to Dublin

By the sea in Waterford

Built into the cliffs surrounding Ardmore Bay, the Cliff House Hotel has a view of the sea from every room. In all likelihood you'll find yourself gazing at the water wherever you are, whether swimming lazy laps in the infinity pool or eating smoked salmon at the breakfast table. The spa is excellent, with outdoor treatments available in the warmer months and therapies that make use of Irish peat and seaweed.

Details B&B doubles from £274 (cliffhousehotel.ie). Fly to Dublin

Outdoorsy Westmeath

There's a strong American resort-lodge feel to Glasson Lakehouse — like a modern-day *Dirty Dancing* but with a dash more style and fewer perms. You can fill your days with wholesome activities such as kayaking on the lake or cycling around it, before settling in for an evening spent by the fire in the bar. Unusually for Ireland there's an outdoor pool (it's heated, don't worry), as well as an outdoor cinema in the summer and cedar-barrel hot tubs.

Details Room-only doubles from £124 (glassonlakehouse.ie). Fly to Ireland West

Coastal Donegal

The scenery on the northernmost coast of Ireland offers bulbous mountains, soaring sea cliffs and tiny white-sand bays such as Tramore beach. And Breac House is the perfect accompaniment to the Donegal landscape. You can wrap yourself in a locally woven tweed blanket and gaze at the views from your room's private terrace, or enjoy them from the wood-fired sauna in the garden. Each morning a breakfast tray will be sneaked into your private hatch, and your stay includes a backpack stuffed with picnic treats for a hike in the hills.

Details B&B doubles from £270 (breac.house). Fly to Belfast

Scandi-chic island life

Accommodation options on the west coast's Aran Islands have always tended more towards the chintzy than the cool. That all changed with the launch of Inis Meain Restaurant & Suites on Inishmaan — a stark and stylish stone



lodge that books up almost instantly when the calendar is opened each year — the next dates are for 2023. Get in there, though. There are just five suites, with granite-tiled bathrooms and cashmere cushions, and a small restaurant that — like the rooms — overlooks the desolate beauty of the island's stone walls and swathes of rock. **Details** Two nights' half-board from £560pp (inismeain.com). Fly to Ireland West

Classy stay in Dublin

One of Dublin's best hotels is a 25-minute train ride away in the seaside town of Dun Laoghaire. In a Victorian building that once housed a finishing school for ladies, Haddington House is the ultimate blend of historical detail and swish style. The Parlour Bar is a maze of cosy nooks and crannies where you can squirrel yourself away on a plush pink armchair with a whiskey sour. Come morning, join the locals for a dip in the sea.

Details B&B doubles from £137 (haddingtonhouse.ie). Fly to Dublin

Seafood shack in Sligo

Cork and Kerry may get all the glory, but the Sligo coast has the same killer scenery without the mass of tourists. An added bonus? The local seafood in these waters is unparalleled, with native lobster and oysters rivalling the best in the world. The Driftwood is a seafood restaurant in Rosses Point, a fishing village just outside Sligo town, with eight stylish bedrooms upstairs. Have your fill of lobster rolls and buttery crab

claws, then haul yourself upstairs to soak in a freestanding tub in a bedroom overlooking the sea.

Details Room-only doubles from £91 (thedriftwood.ie). Fly to Ireland West

Gastro Galway

It can be tough to navigate the good food spots in a new city. But hit the streets of Galway with Sheena Dignam and you'll eat your way around all the best places. You might sample fat oysters dressed with a tangy slurrp of buttermilk, seaweed-spiked squid toast or fresh sushi made with turnip and smoked mackerel (from £55; galwayfoodtours.com). Make your base the G Hotel, designed by the milliner Philip Treacy. **Details** Room-only doubles from £147 (theghotel.ie). Fly to Ireland West

Yurt in Donegal

Glamping spots may be ten a penny these days but Lough Mardal is a prime example of the concept done right. There are just five yurts spread around the blustery wilds of Ballintra, designed with peak cosiness in mind — solid antique beds, plush faux fur throws, wood-burning stoves and sheepskin slippers. Surrounded by wildflowers and the hills rolling down to the lake itself, this is wilderness living at its best. **Details** Room-only doubles from £108 (loughmardalglamping.ie). Fly to Ireland West

Fine dining in Dublin

When the culinary master Mickael Viljanen joined Chapter One last year, the Dublin food scene was all aflutter.



The Ha'penny Bridge in Dublin

The Mayson, on the banks of the Liffey in Dublin



And rightfully so — soon after it scooped a second Michelin star. A meal here will stick in your mind for months: each dish arrives like a delicate piece of art, finished tableside with a theatrical flourish. The £54 lunch menu is one of the best deals in town (chapteronerestaurant.com). Stay in the sleek apartments in Zanzibar Locke, a 15-minute stroll away on the River Liffey.

Details B&B doubles from £104 (lockeliving.com). Fly to Dublin

Rooftop drinks in Cork

On a hillside just outside the city centre, the Montenotte has one of those rooftop bars that makes you want to grab a table and settle in for the night. With views down to the hotel's Victorian gardens and out over the city, the Glasshouse bar leans into the botanic theme with loads of greenery, plus herby cocktails made with its own gin. The rest of the hotel is just as colourful, and there's an in-house cinema, as well as a spa in the Georgian part of the building.

Details B&B doubles from £180 (themonnottehotel.com). Fly to Cork

Pond suite in Wexford

With floor-to-ceiling windows and elaborate murals, the Pond suites at Marlfield House combine the feel of the countryside with a splash of creative flair, dotted around a pond in the ancient woodland. The surrounding landscape is a constant source of distraction, whether you're enjoying the views from the sofa overlooking

the water or watching the estate's peacocks wander past the doorway. **Details** Half-board doubles from £415 (marlfieldhouse.com). Fly to Dublin

Bohemian Belfast

While things can get fairly lively in the centre of Belfast, down in the southern part of the city it's much more laid-back. Stay here and you can stroll through the Botanic Gardens, potter around the Ulster Museum or browse the bookshops scattered along Malone Road. Keep the literary theme going in the Harrison, a delightfully bonkers guesthouse that is all class. Each of the 16 rooms is individually styled, with Victorian antiques, standalone baths in the bedroom and chaises longues in the giant bay windows.

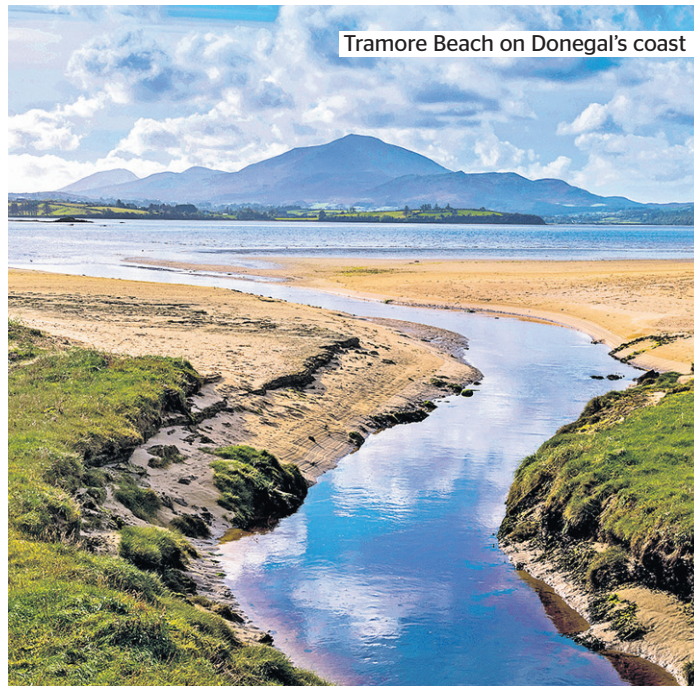
Details B&B doubles from £150 (chambersofdistinction.com). Fly to Belfast

Dublin tub with a view

On the banks of the River Liffey, the Mayson is an amalgamation of heritage warehouse buildings and a jazzy steel extension that towers over the original brickwork. Inside, the rooms vary in character, from modern doubles overlooking the water to vintage-style suites. But it's the warehouse suites that really wow, with freestanding copper baths right by the full-length windows and killer scenery. Heck, there's even a view from the loo, where you can watch the world go by as you, erm, go about your business.

Details Room-only doubles from £124 (themayson.ie). Fly to Dublin

Tramore Beach on Donegal's coast



Walden Lakehouse in Glasson, Co Westmeath



Strandhill seaweed spa

The idea of sinking into a bath filled with seaweed might sound far from chic. But people in the west of Ireland have been at it for years. At the Voya Seaweed Baths in the surfing village of Strandhill antique roll-top tubs are filled with piping-hot seawater and thick tangles of freshly harvested marine algae. The oils that seep out of it leave your skin as soft as a puppy's belly (from £25; voyaseaweedbaths.com). Stay nearby in Sligo at the Glasshouse Hotel.

Details B&B doubles from £75 (theglasshouse.ie). Fly to Ireland West

Dublin townhouse

Once a grand Georgian residence built to host parties when parliament was in session, the Powerscourt Townhouse is now an elegant centre with some of the best independent boutiques in the city. On the floors overlooking the atrium you'll find antiques dealers and homewares, all in a space dripping with crystal chandeliers and lined with neoclassical plasterwork (powerscourtcentre.ie). Keep the Georgian theme going by staying in the Pembroke Townhouse, in the peaceful neighbourhood of Ballsbridge.

Details B&B doubles from £126 (pembroketownhouse.ie). Fly to Dublin

Cool café in Belfast

With exposed brick walls and window-side stools perfect for people-watching, the newly opened Neighbourhood Café is an Instagram hotspot. All of your brunch favourites are on the menu; softly whipped ricotta

on thick wedges of sourdough, and ham hock eggs benedict in a buttery croissant are highlights (mains from £7.50; neighbourhood.cafe). Sleep in the nearby Bullitt Hotel, with a rooftop bar and a resident DJ at the weekend. **Details** Room-only doubles from £79 (bullittthotel.com). Fly to Belfast

Cocktails in Dublin

Sometimes you want to hide away at the back of a pub and just have a drink in peace. Other times you want to order a cocktail and indulge in some top-notch posturing. On those occasions Dubliners go to the Shelbourne. In the No 27 Bar beautiful people perch on high stools with a glass of champagne and a few oysters, keeping track of who's coming and going. For a more intimate vibe order an old fashioned by the fire in the book-lined 1824 Bar.

Details B&B doubles from £400 (theshelbourne.com). Fly to Dublin

Cabin on Lough Ree

In the centre of Ireland, Lough Ree is a peaceful lake lined with rushes and surrounded by wide-open fields. On the shores of the lough you'll find Walden Lakehouse, a two-bedroom cabin and one-time winner of Ireland's home of the year that's owned by a pair of interior designers. With a deck that overlooks the water and a well-stocked bar cart, this is a place just made for waterside cocktails at sunset.

Details Three nights' self-catering for four from £1,050 (uniquehomestays.com). Fly to Dublin

Connemara treehouse

Perched among the treetops of Fernwood Farm in a Connemara woodland, the Treehouse Dome is the kind of place you dreamt of living in when you were a child. With a plush super-king bed, a wood-burning stove and a deck jutting out between the branches, this geodesic dome is dreamily snug while exuding a slick sense of style. It's only a short drive from the coastal village of Clifden, the gateway to the rugged landscape of Connemara.

Details Room-only doubles from £167 (fernwood.eco). Fly to Ireland West

Get cosy in north Cork

When a country house has tennis courts, firelit drawing rooms and an artisanal gin distillery on site, you know you're onto a good thing. At Ballyvolane House in the Cork countryside you can be as active as you wish, whether you want to spend your days stomping the countryside or just flop down on a deep, squishy sofa. And if you're not an early riser, you're in luck — breakfast here is served until a very respectable noon.

Details B&B doubles from £216 (ballyvolanehouse.ie). Fly to Cork

Fine dining in Kildare

They had only been open a few months before they scooped not one but two Michelin stars, and since then the folks at Aimsir have gone from strength to strength. Almost everything you eat on the 18-course tasting menu has been grown, harvested or foraged in Ireland, most of it coming from the grounds, which you can tour with the head gardener (18 courses £175; aimsir.ie). The restaurant is at the Cliff at Lyons, a country hotel with beautiful rooms and a botanical-themed spa in the garden.

Details B&B doubles from £200 (cliffatlyons.ie). Fly to Dublin