

Travel Review: Destination Dingle does it all

Festivals are bringing much buzz to the town from the Dingle Film Festival to the Literary Festival and Other Voices, all taking place in the coming month



Dingle, Ireland, Europe - September 6, 2021 : Street in downtown Dingle

FRI, 07 OCT, 2022 - 02:00
TOM BREATHNACH

It was just the Kingdom Cead Míle Fáilte I needed. Inside the lobby of Castlewood House, a luxury guest house on Dingle Bay, I was met with candles flickering in hurricane jars, fresh lilies scenting the air and autumnal stagings of sycamore leaves, conkers and freshly picked garden apples.

If Dingle makes the perfect location to steal away for a night or two, I think I've found the perfect base from which to discover it.

Purpose built by owners Helen and Brian Heaton as a luxury guest house in 2005, Castlewood House has earned a reputation as a leader in hospitality, with accolades filling a wall to prove it.

"I suppose we just want our guests, many of whom have arrived after a very long drive, to immediately feel that sense of relaxation, unwinding and escape here," Helen tells me. "So we really try to create an element of sanctuary, where guests can simply arrive, sit by the fire, read a book, enjoy our complimentary afternoon tea and scones and feel well looked after."

That sense of sanctuary ripples through to my room, an upstairs junior suite with corner vantage views over Dingle Bay. From my luxury king bed, to cloudy bath robes and touches like purified water, a delicate fern and seated Buddhas, there's a touch of a faraway oasis here.

"Your room was actually inspired by the Silk Route," Helen tells me. "A lot of the furniture is inspired by the East and my sister even carried those Buddhas back from Thailand."

Following a Zen-filled sleep, breakfasts at Castlewood are billed as a more hedonistic affair and I enjoy a mix: Champagne and turmeric poached pears and gluten-free pancakes cooked-to-order by Brian Heaton and served with a delicious blueberry compote.

LATEST

[Revealed: Which county has the highest rate of imprisonment?](#)

3 minutes ago

[Trinity blames 'underfunding' as college slips further down global university rankings](#)

7 minutes ago

['No, I can't pack my bags,' says Ukrainian mother told to move from Killarney](#)

8 minutes ago

[California tree trimmer killed after falling into wood chipper](#)

16 minutes ago

FOLLOW IRISH EXAMINER



Lifestyle Newsletter

The best food, health, entertainment and lifestyle content from the Irish Examiner, direct to your inbox.

[Sign up](#)

Irish Examiner Family Notice



[From harvest bounty to Halloween: ten Irish events for autumn](#)

[READ NOW](#)



Breakfast at Castlewood House

“We want to champion local produce and so much of our produce is local, from the Dingle Whiskey on our porridge to our meats from Micilín Muc where butcher Seamus Fitzgerald could almost open his window and throw the sausages up to us.”

Dingle is the star event at Castlewood and Helen is keen to fill guests in on as many insider tips as she can.

This time of year makes a wonderful time of year to visit Dingle. The town is calmer but businesses, 96% family-owned, are so inventive here. Dingle was traditionally a town so dependent on fishing but now tourists can experience so much from sea safaris to seaweed baths. And everyone works together here in Dingle from the hotel and restaurants to the pubs and the activity providers.



Mussels at Dingle food fest

Festivals are bringing so much buzz to the town off-season too... from the Dingle Film Festival to the Literary Festival and Other Voices, all taking place in the coming month.



[From harvest bounty to Halloween: ten Irish events for autumn](#)

READ NOW

And sure enough, by the time I'd left town, I'd downed pineapple margaritas, seen a pod of dolphins and heard a brass band playing Backstreet Boys.

Castlewood Stay

I thoroughly enjoyed my visit at Castlewood. Welcome is warm, my room was luxurious and despite being a relatively new property, the building's trove of antiques and fine art add character beyond its years. Rooms are available on a B&B basis for October from €145 per night with rates dipping to from €110 in November. With the hotel's polish, great location and standard of breakfast, I think that represents a great deal considering rising hotel rates right now... little wonder it has been voted best value hotel in Ireland.

- see castlewooddingle.com

Dingle Sea Safari



Dingle sea safari

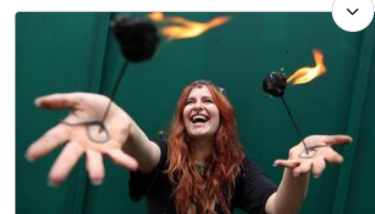
This family-run business has become a social media star of late, sharing epic scenery and wildlife reels captured along the coast of the Dingle Peninsula. I embarked on the outfit's exhilarating tour, skirting from the inlets and sea caves of the spectacular Sleah Head out to the iconic Blasket Islands. Local Skipper Colm offers insights on everything from geology to ecology, highlights being Ireland's largest grey seal colony lolling around on Great Blasket. This is Dingle of course, so on the back leg, a pod of dolphins dipping offer the ultimate crescendo. Tours run up to November and cost €65pp

- see dingleseasafari.com

Slea Head Drive

The Ring of Kerry may be the country's most famous road trip but the Dingle Peninsula's Sleah Head drive is a worthy route rival. The entire 50km route makes a leisurely 2hr drive but you'll want to factor in another couple to take in some of the highlights — of which there are many. One of the country's most Instagrammed spots, Dun Chaoin pier is a sight to behold while Clogher Beach overlooking An Fear Marbh is a picture frame in itself. Ancient attractions include the beehive huts at Fahan as well as Gallarus Oratory and be sure to stop at the recently revamped Blasket Centre, an informative and architecturally impressive heritage centre showcasing the archipelago's rich history. A tip? Make an early start or you may end up sandwiched between tourists and Paddywagons at the more popular stops.

Fish & Chips



[From harvest bounty to Halloween: ten Irish events for autumn](#)

READ NOW



Solas Tapas in Dingle

Dingle has a Kinsale-of-Kerry vibe nowadays with its serious clutch of top restaurants per head of capita. I dined at Chef Nicky Foley's Solas Tapas, a gorgeous restaurant along the kaleidoscopic streetscape of Strand Street where I tucked into oysters with seaweed and olives, scallops ceviche, spuds bravas, octopus carpaccio and the most delicious orange and buckthorn sorbet. The next night, I headed to Fish Box, a seafood lovers' Shangri La which serving gourmet chipper fare, fresh off the Flannery's family trawler. I enjoyed the most delicious gluten-free battered calamari (a novelty as a coeliac), served zesty greens followed by chilli monkfish and rice (and perfect chips) washed down by a glass of Sauvignon Blanc. Both spots are must visits in Dingle with many more besides to relish; you can see why Americans on my safari tour were raving about the Dingle food.

Live Music

If seeking a sesh to remember, Dingle is one of the most vibrant hotbeds of live trad in Ireland. "You'll even find live music almost right through the winter here," Helen Heaton tells me. "Dingle is a very honest town and traditional music isn't something just put on for the tourists — it's very much a way of life in the town for the locals, too," she adds. Amid myriad great options, pubs like Neligan's, John Benny's or O'Sullivan's Courthouse are local favourites — and it's not all trad. I really enjoyed The Green Room, an ambient hipster lounge above Benny's where Old Fashioneds are served to some gentle funk beats and they also feature live acts.

- For more info, see dingle-peninsula.ie

[Read More](#)

➔ [From harvest bounty to Halloween: ten Irish events for autumn](#)

MORE IN THIS SECTION



[Check out: All change at Cork's luxury hideaway Castlemaryr Resort](#)



[A French Riviera buzz with a Balkan twist — is Montenegro the new Croatia?](#)



[From harvest bounty to Halloween: ten Irish events for autumn](#)

[READ NOW](#)



[Ten of the best European city breaks with a difference](#)

TRAVEL DINGLE

Lifestyle Newsletter

The best food, health, entertainment and lifestyle content from the irishexaminer.com, direct to your inbox every Friday.

SUBSCRIBE NOW



[From harvest bounty to Halloween: ten Irish events for autumn](#)