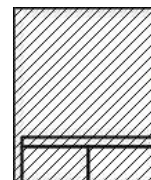


Publication:	Irish Independent	Media Cost (€):	36828.5
Date:	Saturday, September 14, 2024	Reach	83,900
Page:	12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,	Size (Sq. Cm)	10090



Hot 100

best hotels in Ireland 2024

From luxury layovers to fab four-stars and affordable escapes, Pól Ó Conghaile shares his annual list of the island's top 100 hotels

A hotel is never finished. "We learned that a long time ago," Bill Kelly of Kelly's Resort in Co Wexford, which topped last year's Hot 100, once told me. It's a journey. "If you stand still, you're gone," said John Courtney of this year's highest new entry, The Victoria in Killarney. He made the throwaway remark while helping a guest with her case.

I hope the Hot 100 reflects that. This is my list of the 100 best hotels in Ireland, at this moment in 2024. But it's not about rigid scores or scientific comparisons. It's subjective, based on my travels, taste and experience, and one I know (and hope) you'll quibble with. It's about hotels that are best in their class, and best at what they are trying to be — regardless of star ratings.

This is the Hot 100's third year. As a reminder, we move the number ones into a Hotel Hall of Fame, retiring them from future consideration and growing a broader list of legends — it now features Ashford Castle (2024), Kelly's (2023) and Adare Manor (2022). The Hot 100 also excludes B&Bs, smaller country houses and other types of stays.

So what does it take to make the Hot 100? Anyone who reads our

reviews knows that we respect chains and global brands. But we relish hotels that have independent streaks; are run by passionate people; where warm, confident service reflects glowingly on management; where Irish food and culture are woven into stays. They are into genuine sustainability, not greenwashing. They are well-run, but they are not rinse-and-repeat businesses.

The 21st century is almost a quarter done. We've seen seismic changes over the past 25 years, and hotels are at the centre of debates about dynamic pricing and the role of tourism accommodation in housing markets. Yes, hotels can disrupt communities. But they can also add to them — from the local mussels on a menu to the families sustained by their jobs, the art they hang, or the local walks, surf lessons, food trails or cafes they connect with guests.

I know lists like this have their flaws. By my reckoning, there are over 1,000 hotels on the island. It's impossible for me to get back to every hotel every year. Hard as I try, there are new openings and ritzy refurbishments I haven't seen (yet). It's very personal, from 'ooh' moments to knocking on walls and running my hand over fabrics. It's often decided by a feeling. But then, so are the best nights away.



1

Ashford Castle MOVING UP
Cong, Co Mayo

Just over a decade ago, with the Irish economy in collapse, Cong's storied castle stood at a crossroads. It was growing fusty, trading on former glories. What happened since the Tollman family bought it in 2013, splashing some €100m, has been nothing short of transformational. Visitors today will find not only opulently restored rooms and interior details (the Oak Hall still draws a gasp), but additions like its superb spa, cinema and new leisure centre, Éalú — shared with the Lodge at Ashford Castle, itself integrated into the estate as a sister hotel. But what makes this such a meaningful evolution, as opposed to a mere upgrade, is the depth of storytelling and service at the five-star. Increasingly operating in a world of "ultra-luxury", as manager Niall Rochford terms it, the hotel's warmly professional service now mixes with layered experiences like 'Cré' (Irish for earth, or soil), which links a garden tour with cooking and dining at an estate cottage, Wild Geese wine tastings or executive chef Liam Finnegan's menus at the George V (on Michelin's radar, surely). Yes, there will be cloches and it can occasionally feel cheesy, but this is a hotel at an absolute high point. "You need to walk out feeling like you've been taken care of," Rochford says. And you do.

Details: €€€€€; ashfordcastle.com

2

Armada Hotel **Spanish Point, Co Clare**

If this buzz could be bottled, Red Bull would worry. A four-star with wild Atlantic views, it would be so easy for owner John Burke to serve up a banal, bucket-and-spade offering, but instead he has poured everything into an evolution of the Irish coastal hotel. From revamped cocktail bar and restaurant to its own farm, activities like yoga, sea swims, a new sauna and even knitting for guests, and a mushrooming set of stays that includes a rebooted 19th-century guesthouse and self-catering 'Reef House' with hot tub, you'd almost call it The Armada 2.0. In a world of greenwashing, it's a lesson in genuine sustainability, too. Never far from a local nod (a gallery celebrating local surfers, for example, or suppliers like Moy Hill farm on the menus), it's also B Corp certified and has a staff well-being manager. Prices are rising with the standards, but I think deservedly so.

Details: €€€€; armadahotel.com

3

Ballynahinch Castle MOVING UP
Connemara, Co Galway

I was searching for a way to describe Ballynahinch's blend of luxury and comfort when I saw a pair of white slippers next to the wellies in its hallway. Perfect. This is a storied Connemara stay with chef Danni Barry elevating the Owenmore dining room, revamped suites and sun lounge by interior designer Bryan O'Sullivan, and highlights from owner Denis O'Brien's art collection, but in which you might still find locals chatting with gillies in its Fisherman's Pub, walking in its woods, or nourishing whoomphs of cosiness in log fires and lounges. On a recent (incognito) visit, I found room to improve in its pub menus and a space spotted with TVs, but it has all the ingredients of an Irish classic, and just keeps getting better (woodland saunas have just landed, next to a lake plunge). "There are lots of changes going on but, at the same time, we don't want to change anything," said general manager Eoin Walsh.

Details: €€€€€; ballynahinch-castle.com

4

Parknasilla Resort **Sneem, Co Kerry**

Parknasilla needs a pantheon of its own at this stage, so beloved is this Ring of Kerry retreat of repeat visitors. Its story is layered, from grand, 19th-century home to Great Southern hotel, but like all of the best stays, it keeps moving, respecting what guests love while investing to ensure that love is future-proofed. Curated experiences include yoga and mindfulness with Karin O'Shea and history walks with Tim Buckley (better-known as bar manager and actor Jessie Buckley's dad) and more recently, a new outdoor infinity pool heated to 36C (gas-fired hot tubs are replaced with a more sustainable, air-to-water system). Summers book out far ahead, but winter can see savvy travellers net some surprising deals. A new nine-hole pitch and putt course opens in spring, aimed at teens.

Details: €€€€€; parknasillaresort.com

5

Harvey's Point
Donegal, Co Donegal

Harvey's lost some of its best-known faces following its sale by Deirdre McGlone and Marc Gysling, and the retirement of Noel Cunningham (though he still leads its weekly walks). But the feeling hasn't faded. Think of the ginormous bedrooms. The Lough Eske and Bluestack mountain views. The natural warmth to its service. Throw in its Christmas packages, 24 years of cabarets, event nights with the likes of Phil Coulter, and activities like wine tasting and painting breaks, and you have a hotel at one with itself and its audience (a 5.0 rating on TripAdvisor speaks to its guest reviews). Next up are a refurbishment of the restaurant and a "total makeover" of its reading room into a lounge for afternoon tea and drinks with lake views. A new Mindfulness Walk will run through the lakeside woods, too.

Details: €€€€€; harveyspoint.com

6

No 1 Pery Square **Limerick**

When you sit down for drinks or dinner in No 1 Pery Square's elegant little Long Room, take a look at the 'locat map' on its menu. Suppliers from Co Limerick and beyond are listed, from Cahill's Tea to the Milk Market and Rigney's Farm. It's just one snapshot of a hospitality business leaning into its community, and distinguishing itself as a one-of-a-kind townhouse rather than a rinse-and-repeat retreat. Patricia Roberts's Blue Book stay also includes a refurbished Heritage Spa in the basement vaults, a choice of Georgian wing or contemporary bedrooms, and ongoing tweaks I love stumbling upon — a quirky 'container garden' designed by Des Kingston, aimed at bringing more of fresco life and vibrancy to Pery Square, for example. Service is always warm in this jewel box, too.

Details: €€€€; oneperysquare.com

7

Dromoland Castle MOVING UP
Newmarket-on-Fergus, Co Clare

Among the suits of armour, oil paintings and fresh flowers in Dromoland Castle's lobby, you'll spot a trophy: 'Ireland's Best Hotel', from our Reader Travel Awards 2024. It's a testament to the five-star's burst of form, running from behind to catch up on flagship competitors with a

**Ireland's
 Hotel Hall of
 Fame**

Each year, we move the number one hotel from our Hot 100 into a collection of classics, removing it from consideration for future Hot 100s. Here's the list so far.

**Kelly's Resort
 Hotel & Spa
 (2023)**

Kelly's is always the same, but always changing. That's its secret weapon — an ability to keep the loyal guests returning, but surprising them each time. Of course, the coastal setting, kids' club and spread of restaurants, including the old-school Beach Room and new glass-box concept Sea Rooms, helps. This year saw a revamp of its famed Ivy Room, as well as a stylish reboot of its family bedrooms (needed, it has to be said). The Sea Spa is a sweet sanctuary for adults.

€€€€€; kellys.ie

**Adare Manor
 (2022)**

The benchmark for five-star resorts on this island, Adare Manor continues to polish and perfect a 2.0 edition jump-started by JP McManus and family. Highlights range from the Michelin-star Oak Room restaurant to a padel club and leisure centre in the woods, suite of self-catering stays, and of course, a golf course set to host the Ryder Cup in 2027. Service shines through, from the smallest details — a cocktail in the Tack Room, perhaps, or a passing encounter in a hall — to grand set pieces like afternoon tea in the Gallery. €€€€€€;

adaremanor.com

Price Guide

- € Budget bolthole
- €€ Affordable for most
- €€€ Mid-range magic
- €€€€ Luxury at a fair price
- €€€€€ Eye-watering, but worth the splurge

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multimillion euro investment revamping rooms, adding its first lodge, the new-look Castle Spa and a boutique alongside timeless set-pieces like the Earl of Thomond restaurant. Its storytelling has gone to a different level, too — a detail that sounds fanciful, but is increasingly important in an age of wealthy guests seeking experiential stays. Picture pressed garden flowers by the treatment rooms, or a history tour with Jane O'Brien bringing to life "what was very much a family home". Service is polished, but deliberately personable. "If Ashford is Buckingham Palace, this is Balmoral or Sandringham," as one staff member confides.

Details: €€€€€; dromoland.ie

8

Hotel Doolin Doolin, Co Clare

Fancy a taste of 30-mile tapas? Head to Glas restaurant, where every ingredient is caught, reared, grown or produced within 30 miles of the kitchen (from Flaggy Shore oysters to Lónasa Farm pork belly). That's the kind of walk-the-walk commitment to community tourism at Hotel Doolin — other examples range from an Eco Barn for weddings to its Dooliner beer and not-for-profit arts group (Doolin Arts, which runs a summer FolkFest). A new bakery is on the way, too. It could so easily be a tourist honey trap, but instead is ferociously committed to locality... and was Ireland's first carbon-neutral hotel to boot. A refurb is needed, so it's great to hear a reimagination with sustainability at its heart is in the works with Limerick Design House, Studio Saol. The challenge is to grow, as manager Donal Minihane once told me, "without losing what we are".

Details: €€; hoteldoolin.ie

9

The Shelbourne Dublin

Celebrating 200 years, Dublin's grand dame was sold this year to an investment group for a reported €260m. It's a mark of the hotel's enduring style, popularity and ability to be at once iconic and innovative that few Dubliners will have noticed... or cared. As well as its elegant bedrooms (book a view of Stephen's Green, if you can afford a splash), it's a unique business in that some 75pc of the ground floor spend comes from non-residents — be it afternoon tea in the Lord Mayor's Lounge (a new menu launched in April), cocktails in No 27 or Christmas dinners in The Saddle Room. As its much missed concierge Denis O'Brien once told me, "The doors open the same for everyone".

Details: €€€€€; theshelbourne.com

10

Ballygarry Estate MOVING UP Iralee, Co Kerry

"I don't want [it] to be an Excel spreadsheet hotel," owner Pádraig McGillicuddy told me this summer. There's no danger of that. Ballygarry is a family-owned four-star that has evolved over three generations into a gold-standard business in the Kingdom. This year saw a new 5km trail threaded through Ballyseedy woods, there are meadows planted with 29,000 native trees, a reed-bed filtration system to treat waste water, outdoor seaweed baths at its Nadúr Spa, and a suite of woodland cabins on the way. Staff are warm and friendly, superior family rooms have nifty bunks recessed into an alcove, and surprises include a turndown service in all rooms... unexpected in a four star. It's one of the highest risers on this year's Hot 100.

Details: €€€; ballygarry.com

11

Ballyfin Co Laois MOVING UP

There is nothing else like the restoration of Ballyfin on this island. Its transformation from boarding school with sagging ceilings into stunning five-star resort took longer than the original build, and the Regency manor was this year named the UK and Ireland's best resort by *Travel + Leisure*.

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There is extravagance and exquisite detailing at every turn, from the magical intricacy of its marquetry flooring to set-piece saloon, library and conservatory spaces. It's one of Ireland's most expensive stays, but that price tag sees you share 614 acres with just 40 other guests and butlers ready to action your every request ("This was a party house," as manager Peter White put it on our visit). Country pursuits like falconry, fishing and carriage rides are available at an extra charge, but don't miss the highly personal tours with its gardener, florist or estate hikes, which bring its stories to life brilliantly. One for the Lotto win.

Details: €€€€€; ballyfin.com

12

Dunbrody House Arthurstown, Co Wexford

Catherine and Kevin Dundon's Blue Book bolthole was a pioneer when it opened over a quarter of a century ago, paving the way for exciting transformations of tired old country house retreats. Despite selling to a US family in 2022, the couple remain hands-on with the house, and its momentum continues. A refurb with well-known architect Hugh Wallace is complete; you can eat at the main restaurant, Champagne bar or gastro-pub; a little boutique sells local paintings, crafts and jewellery; the gardens are glowing; and, of course, there's the spa and Kevin's cookery school. Don't miss the 4km coastal walk around the estate edges — it passes a private cove for swimming.

Details: €€€€€; dunbrodyhouse.com

13

The Montenotte Cork

Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher, said that we never step into the same river twice — the river is always changing, as are we. His words come to mind when I visit The Montenotte. This summer, it opened a daring new concept, The Woodland Suite Experience, which adds several larch-clad suites into its forest gardens. "Very immersive and fun, but very sophisticated" is how manager Frits Potgieter describes stays that will set Instagram alight, but feel thoughtful, too (a native tree is planted for every guest in partnership with hometree.ie). Priced at a premium, they also include a clubhouse where you can enjoy breakfast or sundowners overlooking the cityscape, before popping up for cocktails in The Glasshouse, a movie in its Cameo cinema, or a spell by the hypnotic Himalayan pink wall in its spa's new salt room. A trendsetter.

Details: €€€€; themonnottehotel.com

14

The Amber Springs Gorey, Co Wexford

You can't have a conversation about Ireland's best family-friendly hotels without this Gorey getaway. The four-star is a textbook example of a hotel bending over backwards for its target audience. Family rooms include 65sqm dens



Galgorm Resort

with bunk pods (‘the game changer,’ as energetic manager Eibhear Coyle says), activities range from train rides to its pool, 80-seater cinema and gaming zone for teens, and a new 200sqm adventure play area is in the works with local company Spraoi Linn. Burgers are made with beef from the hotel owners’ farm in Gorey, families can book a sensory playroom, and a portion of every direct booking through its website goes to LauraLynn — it recently donated over €16,500 to the children’s hospice.

Details: €€€; ambersprings.ie

15

Cashel Palace MOVING UP Cashel, Co Tipperary

‘You can’t expect or plan for it,’ general manager Adriaan Bartels told the *Irish Independent* this year. He was talking about The Bishop’s Buttery’s new Michelin star, the latest win for a hotel recasting the mould for luxury town hotels in Ireland. Magnier family millions help, of course, but there’s much more to Cashel Palace 2.0 than mere money. The local sourcing, full-time sustainability manager and clever features like its indoor/outdoor pool and casual dining counterpoint in Mikey Ryan’s pub are just some features of a five-star that has found its feet, and is starting to gallop. A new ‘Solo Soujourn’ package for solo travellers bundles B&B, a pub dinner in the snug and pampering from €369. Self-care, anyone?

Details: €€€€; cashelpalacehotel.ie

16

Fitzgeralds Woodlands Hotel Adare, Co Limerick

Not just one of the best hotels in the country, but one of the best in Adare. The Fitzgerald family’s happy hub is as much a model of an evolving four-star country stay as a pulsating community crossroads. What began life as a B&B today hosts an award-winning outdoor dining area (The Treehouse), popular Revas Spa, organic garden, new family ‘loft’-style rooms and much, much more. A bite at Timmy Macs, or a pint in Dick’s Bar, is pure country hospitality. In a world of marketing speak around sustainability, here’s a business that’s been serving the locality for 40 years — even sponsoring the Limerick ladies’ football and camogie teams — and will shortly dig a second well, making it entirely self-sufficient in terms of water.

Details: €€€; woodlands-hotel.ie

17

Monart Enniscorthy, Co Wexford

‘People say to me, this is my sanctuary,’ general manager Mark Browne said when I last visited Monart. I could see them all around us. Couples napping. Friends chatting. Mothers and daughters. Solo travellers taking time-outs, for all kinds of reasons. Almost 20 years since it opened, Monart is one of luxury Irish hospitality’s most recognisa-

ble brands — and is regularly full. The large spa is its headline attraction, of course, but revamped rooms, two newly refurbished suites in the Georgian manor, Mary Reynolds’s gardens, its lounge and restaurant round out the picture. It’s adult-only, phones are discouraged, and everybody swans around in robes, bearing the relaxed faces of people who have not been checking their email. Bliss.

Details: €€€€; monart.ie

18

Park Hotel Kenmare Co Kerry

‘I like the challenge. I’m not the Brennans. I’m an unknown entity.’ So Bryan Meehan told me a few months after buying this iconic five-star from Francis and John Brennan, sharing his plans for a new model of community-focused, sustainable luxury stay. The Park has reopened to non-residents, replaced generic Victorian art with bold modern pieces (the suite of Sean Scully paintings in its dining room is sublime), and is working on plans for a spa overhaul and connections with Meehan’s nearby property, Dromgarriff Rainforest. James O’Sullivan’s menus are a high point, and the service is as warm as ever, but this is very much a period of transition. The proof will be in the pudding, as Meehan says himself. It’s off to a tantalising new start.

Details: €€€€€; parkkenmare.com

19

Galgorm Resort MOVING UP Ballymena, Co Antrim

What Dean hotels have done for rooftop bars and restaurants, the Galgorm Collection has done for spas. The thermal village here, with hot tubs, saunas, pools, salt rooms and more sprawling along the river is a brilliant and busy example of creative business (guests can use it from 12pm, long before their rooms are ready). But that’s just the beginning. A mushrooming menu of accommodation now includes lodges, cabins, shepherd’s huts and pet-friendly forest dens, with ‘boho backyards’ crammed with saunas, showers and hot tubs. Sister hotels The Rabbit and Old Inn at Crawfordsburn are serious spa players, too.

Details: €€€€; galgorm.com

20

Regency House Belfast, Co Antrim

The folk behind this boutique treasure in Belfast are like chefs tinkering away at the pass, perfecting their dish. First, it was The Regency, centred around restored Georgian townhouses split into ultra-luxe, self-catering ‘residences’ with 24/7 butler service. Today, it is Regency House, with a wellness suite, restaurant, piano lounge, membership and smaller room types on the way next spring — including an accessible heritage stay suited to couples and solo travellers. Details like copper tubs, vinyl baskets and salvaged furniture are gorgeous, set alongside hi-tech touches such as swanky kitchens, work stations and valet parking. It’s very pricey, but mixes the best of the 19th and 21st centuries simultaneously — a balance few places I’ve seen pull off to this degree of detail.

Details: €€€€€; theregencybelfast.com

21

The Westbury MOVING UP Dublin

A stone’s throw from Grafton Street, the Doyle Collection’s finest Irish hotel is at once grand dame and modern five-star, subtly shape-shifting with the times. There are barmen in white jackets in the Sidecar bar, city slickers bustling through Balfe’s brasserie, and a luxurious leafiness surrounding the marble tables at Wilde. A gallery window seat is one of the best in town, and newly refurbished suites provide a fresh excuse to check back in. From salads to chateaubriands, gin cocktails to gorgeous Irish art, it’s a sophisticated classic that just seems to get better over time.

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The Victoria



Hayfield Manor

Kudos for its 'Slice of the City' recommendations for Dublin sights, shops and events, too.

Details: €€€€€; doylecollection.com

22

Glasson Lakehouse Glasson, Co Westmeath

Alongside the Galgorm Collection, few have done as much to shake up Ireland's hotel scene in the past decade as the Dean Hotel Group (whose properties formerly fell under the Press Up Group). While urban boltholes like The Dean, Dylan and Mayson made headlines, this rebooting of a tiring midlands golf resort was an electrifying change, reading its audience perfectly with the addition of outdoor hot tubs, pool, airstream trailers, tech-forward Power gym and Brooks & Co Spa. Executive chef Dee Adamson, formerly of the Fatted calf, is the secret weapon in Bonnie's restaurant. It's a stay you could see a family and their pet enjoying as much as Bridget Jones and her boss.

Details: €€€; glassonlakehouse.ie

23

The Merrion Dublin

Think of it as Dublin's good room. From stunning art (a Mainie Jellett here, a Jack B Yeats there) to its blend of

period charm and contemporary notes, The Merrion has a knack for knitting together layers of luxury. Dine in the brick vaults of the Cellar Bar or two-Michelin-star Patrick Guilbaud's, cosy up on a winter city break, or get your glad rags on for summer's transformation of its garden terrace with bespoke cabanas and seasonal menus (including a €29 lobster roll). Over 25 years since it opened, the spa and pool have stepped up, and a steady stream of celebs ranges from Rihanna to Bill Clinton. For me, the rooms and bedroom corridors could push the design punch just a tad more, and the immaculate tone has sometimes slipped when it's busy. For many, it's Dublin's best address.

Details: €€€€€; merrionhotel.com

24

The River Lee Hotel Cork MOVING UP

Cork has quietly been stepping up its luxury stays, from The Montenotte's woodland suites to Hayfield Manor's glass box bar, and this Doyle Collection doozy is at the heart of that. The ground floor unfolds like an essay in local luxury lifestyle, from barista coffees and leafy brasserie vibes to waterside terrace and cocktails with local notes (the 'Rosie Martin' includes both Middleton's Method and Madness gin and Mònéir blackberry wine). Collaborations on curated packages with the likes of food writer William Murray and author Caroline O'Donoghue are creative examples of neighbourhood thinking, too.

Details: €€€€; doylecollection.com



25

Marlfield House Gorey, Co Wexford

Similar to stays like Dunbrody, Liss Ard and Ballyvolane, Laura and Margaret Bowe's Marlfield House is a case study in classy country house evolution, blending the old-world atmospheres of its main house, library bar and conservatory dining room with the delicious Duck terrace restaurant and its Pond Suites (think free-standing baths, woodland views and low carbon footprint). Stay over, or book lunch or dinner and amble through its 40-acre gardens. It's a gorgeous hospitality hub in Gorey, and a member of both the Blue Book and Relais & Châteaux.

Details: €€€€; marlfieldhouse.com

26

Killeavy Castle Slieve Gullion, Co Armagh

In the early hours of March 10, 2013, Mick Boyle woke wife Robin with news that he'd bought a crumbling castle across the globe. Over a decade later, the couple have made countless trips from Australia to South Armagh, steering the refurbishment and development of this fab four-star. Local links are everything, from its farm supplying Longhorn beef and Cheviot lamb to the kitchen, to replanting oak on the slopes of Slieve Gullion. A small spa, chef Darragh Dooley's locavore menus and a new suite of dog-



The Station House

friendly cottages and lodges are just some reasons to visit. **Details:** €€€; killearycastle.com

27

Dunmore House Clonakilty, Co Cork

"We're always kind of experimenting here," Dunmore House's Richard Barrett once said as he showed me around the hammocks, sculptures and polytunnels of its 'Cliff Garden' overlooking Clonakilty Bay. Developed from a family home over the course of several decades — or nurtured, is probably a better word — the 30-bed hotel is a lesson in doing the simple things well, and surprising guests along the way. Check out the John Shimons painting over the fireplace, taste the chowder or crab claws in its bar and restaurant, or grab a seat on the sea terrace, a lovely spot to sit and eat if the weather co-operates. **Details:** €€€; dunmorehousehotel.ie

28

Hayfield Manor Cork MOVING UP

The door is held open. There's a real fire, locals chatting over pints in a wood-paneled bar, couples sipping cocktails in Bloom, its new glass-box garden bar, a family playing cards in the drawing room, and a man reading his paper in a suntrap under a gallery of paintings upstairs. Staying this spring, I found Cork's only five-star purring. It's a luxury

country house luxury is its thing — from Fern Allen's intimate history tours to hunks of cake on arrival, or extra helpings at dinner (leave room for the dessert trolley). **Details:** €€€€; ballymaloe.ie

29

The Cliff House Ardmore, Co Waterford

Small-scale luxury and sophistication by the sea. That's the sell at this Ardmore oasis, where spa, rooms and Michelin-star restaurant marrying French and Thai flavours cascade down the coastal folds. All 39 rooms were refurbished this spring with furniture and fittings custom-made by local craftspeople and designers; House restaurant has moved to a more intimate dining room, seating just 22 guests; and everywhere you look, your eye is met with cruise-ship views over the bay. It has a suite of adjacent stays, too — including a super-luxe beach house, classy cottage, and new 'River Lodge' with its own fishing boat in the former garda station in Ballyduff. **Details:** €€€€; cliffhousehotel.ie

30

The Victoria NEW ENTRY Killarney, Co Kerry

I can't believe I missed out on this one for so long. John and Sinéad Courtney's boutique hotel is Killarney's Easter egg, a small roadside stay with a door that opens to reveal a world of surprises — chic, fanciful stylings, a beautifully friendly check-in, and a couple that are hands-on and clearly love what they're doing. The hotel has evolved from a B&B, but retains that kind of personality and cosiness, and makes the most of its small spaces — a lift clad in Moroccan-style cut-out panelling, for example, or zoned seating areas under large, abstract paintings on the ground floor. A little poem of a place. **Details:** €€€; thevictoriakillarney.com

31

The Merchant Belfast, Co Antrim

This Cathedral Quarter classic is one of the coolest, and most consequential, hotels in Northern Ireland. The five-star has turned heads over the years for its clever cocktails (alumni include Jack McGarry and Sean Muldoon of The Dead Rabbit in New York), Great Room (set in the former Ulster Bank headquarters), and catchy spaces like its Cloth Ear bar or rooftop hot tub. It can border on bling (a Festival of Prosecco runs this month), but there's always depth to its divilment, and the original A-listed building links through nicely to a 2010 wing with spa, Art Deco-styled rooms and Bert's Jazz Bar. Competition is bubbling away in Belfast, but this brash grand dame still gets my vote. **Details:** €€€€; themerchanthotel.com

32

Ballymaloe MOVING UP Shanagarry, Co Cork

Celebrating 60 years since Myrle Allen first opened her home to guests, Ballymaloe's sheer pedigree, decades of pioneering and ongoing innovation see it continue to climb the list. This hotel was doing 'farm to fork' dining before many of today's chefs were born (chef Dervilla O'Flynn continues the mission today), its 32 rooms now include newly refurbished suites, and fresh ideas include a Festival of Food, rewilding retreats and sustainability efforts like a biomass boiler and solar panels. Homely,

33

Castle Leslie Glaslough, Co Monaghan

The Blue Book still sets a bar for small, luxury hotels after 50 years, and here's another member in this year's 110t 100. Castle Leslie is much more than just a hotel, of course. Set on 1,000 acres, it has a 50-room Lodge (adjoined to Conor's bar, Snaffles restaurant and its equestrian centre), 21-bed Castle (no TVs, lots of antiques and heirlooms), and even 'the first plumbed bath in Ireland') and self-catering in the Old Stable Mews, all with different looks and feels. Country pursuits like archery, clay pigeon shooting and carriage rides are available, and the bar menu has over 100 gins. **Details:** €€€€; castleleslie.com

34

The Station House Kilmessan, Co Meath

One of Ireland's best small, family-run hotels, The Station House grew up around a former railway junction in the Royal County. It's a super wedding venue (with its standalone Signal Suite and woodland twinkling with fairy lights), and leisure guests can enjoy country house comfort in its 19 rooms, free bikes, freshly landscaped gardens, 1,000 square feet of new covered terrace and menus leaning into local produce like Boyne Valley Cheese. The Wooded Pig chorizo and Swainstown Farm veg. Packages can include tours of Dunsany Nature Park Reserve, or Boyne Valley tasting menus (November 24; December 20). **Details:** €€€; stationhousehotel.ie

35

Sheen Falls Lodge MOVING UP Kenmare, Co Kerry

This waterside five-star has had its ups and downs over the years (including winning and losing a Michelin star), but it's firmly on the rise again. I really enjoy Christine Bowen's playful art, as well as its thoughtful service and views of the cascading falls from dining room and bar. Now owned by the Mayrauge group (of Castlemartyr and Tullarris), it's benefiting from much-needed investment, including a new brasserie in the former stables. Rates are lower than some of Ireland's top five-stars, throwing up some steals in the off-peak particularly, and smart touches include a 'breakfast beag' (a smaller Full Irish), and welcome box of local Lorge chocolates. It's clicking very nicely indeed. **Details:** €€€€; sheenfalls lodge.ie

36

The Europe Killarney, Co Kerry

Vistas from this lakeside five-star are sensational. Dining, drinking, strolling or dozing with Lough Leane and the Kerry Mountains before you is a delicious thing, and the spa is not far behind — a spacious, atmospheric spread including 22m pool, magic-touch treatments, outdoor vitality pool and relaxation room with seats that remind me of an airline's first class. Its decor can sometimes feel generic, its scale intimidating, but it never comes across as too exclusive, and warmth seeping through (the intuitive service of a concierge, for example, or the earthy tones of bistro seats picking out landscape colours) do soften that. Sister hotels include Ard na Sidhe and The Dunloe. **Details:** €€€€; theurope.com



The Cliff House

Hot 100

37

Carton House Maynooth, Co Kildare

Carton House and the K Club are the premium picks for kicking back in Kildare, and both are on a roll. Carton House has jumped from four to five stars and is now a Fairmont-managed resort; highlights include its 1,100-acre estate, two golf courses, and the heritage wow factor of its original house (now set up as an elegant 'hotel within a hotel'). Pop-ups and collabs have brought spark to The Morrison Room (menus are now in the care of local chef Adam Nevin, previously of The Dorchester), and this year, it was inducted into the US trust, Historic Hotels Worldwide. You can self-cater at the new Lennox Lodge, too.

Details: €€€€; [cartonhouse](#)

38

Newpark Hotel Kilkenny

If you asked an Irish family to design a hotel, it could look a lot like this. Mini theme park full of robotic dinosaurs? Check. Adult-only spa and balcony suites? Check. Kids' club, 30C pool and tasty, something-for-everyone fare at Scott's bar and brasserie? Check. It's fun for visitors, hectic at weekends, and a hub for all the local weddings, meetings and communions you can imagine, too — but nobody feels harried or under pressure. This summer, it launched a new series of eco trails — self-guided tours bringing to life the biodiversity in its grounds.

Details: €€€; [newparkhotelkilkenny.com](#)

39

Fernhill House Clonakilty, Co Cork

File this jewel alongside The Station House and Dunmore House as a textbook example of a small, classy, family-run Irish stay. Run by the O'Neills, with Michael at the helm (he signs emails as 'fourth-generation proprietor'), gardens were originally designed by Mary Reynolds, personal service is led by deeply invested hosts, and there's a grá for storytelling — be it historical notes on the walls or an art trail emphasising local artists. Sixteen new rooms are in the works ("They should have a real flavour of west Cork," O'Neill says), as well as a restaurant refurbishment.

Details: €€€; [fernhillhousehotel.com](#)

40

Hodson Bay Hotel Athlone, Co Westmeath

A community hub as much as a hotel, here's a lakeside resort where you're as likely to encounter a communion as a conference attendee, wedding or carvery cruiser — yet it somehow balances the 'all things to all men' ethos with a sense of escape, fun and friendly service. The O'Sullivan family's 176-room hotel has been developing trails and activities on the adjacent Yew Point peninsula (planning has come through for new eco-cabins), and has given rooms a refresh (try for a lakeview, or if you fancy an adult-only stay, the Retreat Wing closer to its pool and spa).

Details: €€€; [hodsonbayhotel.com](#)

41

The Twelve Barna, Co Galway

Named 'Ireland's best pet-friendly hotel' several times in our Reader Travel Awards, this Galway gem was long ago innovating with ideas now considered mainstream. Think of its pizzas, bakery and gastro-pub fare (try the new focaccia sambos), its pet menus and thoughtful (rather than tokenistic) approach to four-legged guests, and the fun but sophisticated lines in wine and food under former manager and sommelier Fergus O'Halloran. He and chef Martin O'Donnell of West Restaurant have now moved on,

and some areas could use a refresh, so let's see what the next chapter brings for this trailblazer.

Details: €€€; [thetwelvehotel.ie](#)

42

Anantara The Marker Dublin

The arrival of Thai brand Anantara into Dublin has given The Marker a much-needed makeover. Behind the distinctive, chequerboard facade, you'll now find a revamped destination restaurant, Forbes Street, with chef Gareth Mullins given free reign with local ingredients (picture Oscietra caviar with Ballymakenny potato blinis, or a tastily curated Irish cheeseboard), suavely zoned ground floor, and experiences like rooftop yoga or Irish coffee making classes. Oh, and watch out for Bean and Goose chocolate by your bed. It's good to see luxury get local.

Details: €€€€; [anantara.com/the-marker-dublin](#)

43

The Old Inn NEW ENTRY Crawfordsburn, Co Down

Ireland's second-oldest hotel (after Hunter's in Co Wicklow) is full of gorgeously timeworn touches — from mullioned windows and ceiling beams in its 1614 bar to the glowing lobby fire. But it's not just a hideaway for history buffs. A new spa opens from 8am-9pm with a playful spread of cabanas, barrel sauna, hot tubs and outdoor vitality pool to which you can order drinks via QR code (the Galgorm Collection took it over in 2020). The lobster Caesar salad is a home run in the restaurant, rooms are being refurbished, service is warm, and Crawfordsburn Country Park and Belfast Lough's loveliest beaches are on the doorstep.

Details: €€€€; [theoldinn.com](#)

44

Gregans Castle Ballyvaughan, Co Clare

A new general manager in Éanna Hassett (previously of Dunbrody House), and chef in Jonathan Farrell (who served our restaurant critic, Katy McGuinness, "one of the best dishes I've had anywhere in recent months" — barbecued celeriac with roast maitake, garden sprouts and a black garlic and Madeira jus, if you're asking) sees Gregans go up a gear. The Blue Book hotel has always brought the best of the Burren to its stays (its packages often include walks and tours), and the Small Luxury Hotels collection, of which it is a member, hails it a "boutique hotel that goes the extra eco mile". Add open fires, luxurious bedrooms and warm hospitality, and you're made.

Details: €€€€; [gregans.ie](#)

45

Glenlo Abbey Galway

Not content with new self-catered lodges, bar and spa, Glenlo Abbey has now renovated deluxe rooms and suites with Millimetre Design (a new-look presidential suite will be revealed later this year). There's a swanky dedicated kitchen for the Pullman Restaurant, too — set on two rail carriages from the Orient Express — so watch how chef Ultan Cooke and his team develop things here. Old favourites include its cosy in-house cinema, characterful bar and sweeping views down to Lough Corrib. Galway is a short drive in one direction. Commemorate the other. It's a lovely dance, in facilities, location and tone.

Details: €€€€; [glenloabbeyhotel.ie](#)

46

Mount Juliet Thomastown, Co Kilkenny

Having bought the five-star estate for €15m in 2014, owners Tetrarch Capital put it on the market for €45m this year. That tells you something not just about the market, but





major changes it's made over the past decade. Here are two hotels for the price of one, in a sense — the manor house, with its period charm and Michelin-star restaurant, and the more contemporary Hunter's Yard. Golf, country pursuits, restaurants and food satisfy a wide range of well-heeled guests. Christmas packages regularly sell out, and there's a lovely cinema and basement bar, too.
Details: €€€€; mountjuliet.ie

47

Brooks Hotel Dublin

A stone's throw from Grafton Street, this plum city-centre stay has been surprising new guests, and pleasing repeat visitors, for years. The blend of townhouse-style intimacy, location (it's a great stay for a show, shopping or business break), and warm charm you mightn't expect from such a central stay is on a pin. A step-change is on the cards under new owners, MIIL Collection, who are looking at a make-over in the months ahead (it counts the Glenlo Abbey, College Green and Trinity City hotels among its deck). Oh, and bonus points for its plush little in-house cinema.
Details: €€€; brookshotel.ie

48

The Dylan Dublin MOVING UP

Billing itself as 'Dublin's only five-star boutique hotel' doesn't do it justice. Sexy, fun and set just off Baggot Street, it's a real 'Little Black Book' kind of stay ("People say it's like a private members' club," says manager Gráinne Ross). There's art from the So Fine Art gallery, a dog-friendly terrace, and rooms and suites refurbished with custom furniture by Co Longford's Gem Joinery. And the food? Try the a new all-day menu in its Eddison restaurant, named for matron Edith Annie Eddison, who once lived in the former nurses' home, or check back for a tantalising new concept on the way for its elegant Ruby Room. Think top-end Italian wines served by the glass with a Coravin system, and authentic Italian snacks with ingredients like mortadella mousse and smoked provolone. Boutique brilliance.
Details: €€€€; dylan.ie



49

Gougane Barra Hotel Gougane Barra, Co Cork

"We've always been strong on west Cork," Neil Lucey once told me. And with a location straight from a fantasy novel, that makes perfect sense. He and wife Katy's 25-bed hotel is beloved of locals and "a mixum-gatherum" of guests, whether stopping by for the night, walking in Gougane Barra, or out for a Sunday lunch. Alongside the classically styled interiors, you'll find local goodies on the menus (fish from Union Hall, burgers in an Arbutus bun, Irish cheese plates... a *Cooking with Katy* book is available to buy, too). Ask to borrow their rowing boat for the lake.
Details: €€; gouganebarrahotel.com

50

The Celtic Ross Rosscarbery, Co Cork

The Wycherley family's hotel has the pool, rooms and wedding business you'd expect of a four-star, but also a keen focus on west Cork and Irish food (a €14 starter 'tasting plate' has five spoons of goodies, including Sally Barnes's smoked fish, for instance), and a new 'Green Wedding' initiative aims to reduce wedding footprints — by sourcing local food and flowers, for example. Ann Downey is the new general manager at the helm, and note its off-season packages and 'Stay longer for less' offers, which see 10pc off three-night stays, and 15pc off four.
Details: €€€; celticrosshotel.com

51

The Devlin Ranelagh, Dublin

The Dean has brought a bit of rock and roll to Ranelagh, along with nifty neighbourhood touches. "Mind your mile" is a guiding principle, and lots of locals can be seen in its savvy Stella Cinema, Americana lobby bar or Dime coffee station. Views from Layla's rooftop stretch to the Dublin

Mountains, and funky rooms add contemporary Irish art, clever storage nooks and Munchies mini bars. "It's for people who are used to travelling and have a bit of style," says general manager Adrian O'Connor. Six years since it opened, it's a crisp, smart suburban stay.
Details: €€€; thedevlin.ie

52

BrookLodge & Macreddin Village Aughrim, Co Wicklow

Time has flown! BrookLodge has been in business 25 years, pioneering many ideas in its time — from fully organic restaurant to destination wedding venue and organic bakery. Rooms and facilities are country luxe, despite the slightly twee village layout, and its Wells Spa is at the centre of a new 'Mindfulness at Macreddin' package that includes dinner, a massage, access to the thermal suite and little details like colouring books and journaling pads.
Details: €€€; brooklodge.com

53

Killarney Park Killarney, Co Kerry

There's change coming down the tracks for this town-centre five-star. This winter, a multi-million-euro refurb with MDO Architects will begin, transforming the lobby, rooms (increasing the keys to 74) and garden landscaping, and promising "a thrilling new look" for The Peregrine restaurant. It's a tantalising new chapter for a family-run hotel that well-heeled guests love, and that has been an energetic driver in the town's sustainability pushes. 'End of an Era' getaway packages are available to November. I can't wait to see what's next for this Irish classic.
Details: €€€€; killarneyparkhotel.ie

54

The Imperial Cork

Guests at Cork's grand dame have included Grace Kelly and Michael Collins, but a new generation is being looked after too, thanks to an injection of fun and playfulness into the hallowed halls. Sketch has revamped its restaurant (its style is based on vintage fashion magazines), themes like Moulin Rouge or Narnia dress up the lobby, and an urban spa feels like a secret weapon. Breakfast sees pastries served in birdcage stands, and its great to see menus include local notes like the English Market, Ballycotton seafood or Killahora Apple Ice Wine, too.
Details: €€€; imperialhotelcork.com

55

Castlemartyr Resort Co Cork

Vincent Crepel's Terre restaurant now has two Michelin stars ("the realisation of a lifelong dream" for the chef), and is this resort's USP. It's a stunning, theatrical taste safari that costs €200pp, but far from the only reason to stay. A multi-million-euro upgrade has edged rooms, Canopy restaurant and the overall experience into a more polished space than the Celtic Tiger extravagance of old, and features include a Ron Kirby-designed golf course, light-splashed pool, and the Hunted Hog pub in the village. This can be a good five-star for off-season packages, too.
Details: €€€€; castlemartyrresort.ie

56

The Bushmills Inn Co Antrim

A cosy layover on the Causeway Coast since the 1600s, this stay shoots for traditional luxury with a twist, and largely gets the balance right. Highlights are its snug and secretive spaces — the little cinema, bar with original gas lamps (mine's a whiskey, please) or inglenook under the stairs.

Hot 100

for example. Service is warm; rooms can differ in location and size, and be pricey, so check before booking. Thursday movie nights combine dinner and a film for £35.

Details: €€€; hushmillsinn.com

57

Conrad Dublin

Well-known to international luxury travellers via Hilton's Honors programme, the Conrad doesn't have the same profile at home as five-stars like the Westbury, Merrion or Shelbourne. But the polished comfort of its rooms, central location (opposite the National Concert Hall) and classy Lemuel's bar and Coburg brasserie marry with some neat local touches — artist Ciara O'Neill's vibrant work in the restyled Terrace bar, for one. Aptly, US president Joe Biden stayed in its Presidential Suite last year, and breakfast is a bonus, from Bloody Marys to bread and pastries from the nearby Bretzel bakery. There's no spa, but watch this space.

Details: €€€€; hilton.com

58

The Ice House Ballina, Co Mayo

The setting of this stylish hotel, directly over the River Moy, is a peach. Named for the former ice store on the site, the four-star has some great river-view rooms, a waterside terrace and revamped Chill Spa that makes the best of the setting, and a surprising art collection includes works by the likes of Charles Tyrrell, Martin Gale, John Devlin and Hughie O'Donoghue, too. There's good value in its 'Golden Years' specials, which bundle B&B and early-bird dinners from €239 a night for two sharing over three nights.

Details: €€€; icehousehotel.ie

59

The K Club MOVING UP Straffan, Co Kildare

After a spell in the post-Celtic Tiger doldrums, the famous golfing resort has momentum on its side. Gary O'Hanlon is the new executive head chef (after five years at The Concorde in France), and visitors today will find a more rounded resort offering under general manager Paul Heery — with refurbished rooms, varied food and drink options like the splashy Palmer Clubhouse, Blue Martini cocktail bar and playful South restaurant (chalk it down for brunch), as well as a new focus on families and estate activities like paddle boarding, pickleball and wine cellar tours. It's another five-star with surprising value off-peak.

Details: €€€€; kclub.ie

60

The Great Southern Killarney, Co Kerry

Killarney has huge competition for hotels — but that drives the best to do better. This 19th-century stay has the Scally family (of Hayfield Manor and the Killarney Royal) at the helm, a new GM in Jamie Power, and a classy reboot of Brownes Bar. There's delight and depth to its cocktail menu, where you might sup a 'Property Ladder', made with Muckross Wild Irish gin, while reading a little story about Killarney National Park, for example. I always feel a sense of occasion here, and higher-end heritage suites are named for famous guests like Jackie Kennedy and Grace Kelly. Its Railway Residence is an elegant Victorian house, too.

Details: €€€€; greatsouthernkillarney.com

61

Wren Urban Nest Dublin

This compact, net-zero carbon stay opened in 2021, when debates about hotel developments in communities raged (it's on the site of the former Andrew's Lane Theatre). It takes sustainability seriously, however — from zero-waste



kitchen to Truwood's recycled wood bar furniture and Irish suppliers like Nicks Tea and Mourne Textiles. Rooms are very small, and traffic and grime can be an issue outside, but the location is ace, and the terracotta colourings of its exposed ceiling, textured woods and birds' nest lights bring a warmth that doesn't exist in other hip hotels.

Details: €€€; wrenhotel.ie

62

Strand Hotel Limerick

I've always liked the way this city four-star is at once what you'd expect (skyline views, decent bar, good business stays) and what you might not (20-metre pool, strong local focus in menus and specials like its Feel Good Friday and Limerick Afternoon Tea menus). The latest news is a partnership with Irish charity Hometree to plant native trees for conferences and weddings it hosts (one point in new Green Meetings and Green Weddings initiatives). Window seats in the River restaurant are worth rising early for.

Details: €€€; strandlimerick.ie

63

Lakeside Hotel MOVING UP Killaloe, Co Clare

You've two towns for the price of one at this four-star (Ballina, Co Tipperary, and Killaloe, Co Clare, connected by a stunning, 13-arch stone bridge). The Lakeside has evolved creatively over the years, adding an adult-only suite of

30sq m waterfront rooms, splashing on a refurb of O'Flara's Bar (named for Maureen, who opened a wing of the hotel in the 1980s), doing an all-day kids menu that's healthier than the usual children's fare, and food hut for summer pizza and ice cream. There's a 40-metre slide in its pool, too.

Details: €€; lakesidehotel.ie

64

The Blue Haven Kinsale, Co Cork

A town centre hotel in Kinsale could so easily tread water. But that isn't owner Ciaran Fitzgerald's style. Step through the distinctive, blue-and-white entrance and you'll sense the history to the place (not least in its cosy confines), before the bright ideas shine through. Service is glowing, chef Meeran Manzoor cooks up a storm in Rare, there are unusual design touches in spaces like its bistro (picture sitting in a luxury yacht) and care shown to local suppliers like Timoleague Vegetables or Toomsbridge Dairy.

Details: €€€; bluehavenkinsale.com

65

The Harrison Belfast

'Chambers of Distinction' is the tagline for this bold, boho and brilliantly individual stay in Belfast. A colourful counterpoint to Regency House, owner Melanie Harrison has converted Victorian merchants' residences into a townhouse stay with 16 rooms named for local heroes like Ruby Murray and CS Lewis, and decadent decor from her travels and treasure hunting (think standalone tubs, four-posters, record players or sultry botanical wallpapers). It's discerning, with a bit of divilment thrown in, and an expansion (with piano lounge) is on the cards.

Details: €€€; chambersofdistinction.com

66

Connemara Sands Hotel NEW ENTRY Ballyconneely, Co Galway

This merry hotel on Mamyn Bay disarms with its warmth ('Come and see me,' the receptionist says of any queries), elevation of local seafood like Dooncastle oysters and Graham Roberts's smoked salmon by chef Sinead Quinn, and some surprises among its 21 rooms — a two-room suite for



Wren Urban Nest

families, for instance. It's a small stay, with self-catering houses that could use a refresh, but one that ticks over gorgeously — marrying coastal chic with boutique buzz, a barrel sauna by the beach, and local nods from Micil whiskey to activity partnerships with Real Adventures Connemara. Proprietor Dean Gibson and team are doing a lovely job. **Details:** €€€; connemarasands-hotel.com

67

Mulranny Park Hotel
Mulranny, Co Mayo

Set on the Great Western Greenway, with blockbuster views of Clew Bay, few hotels can beat this one for location. There's a 20m pool, seaweed baths, Sri Lankan chef Chamila Mananwatta brings flourishes of fusion to Nephin restaurant (there's a Gourmet Greenway showcase dinner on October 26), staff are friendly and you'll find touches of extra TLC, too — a teepee in a family bedroom, for instance, or kids' teddy bear treasure hunts. The Waterfront Bistro, reception and most rooms have been refurbished — it would be great to see the rest, and its website, continue the refreshment this winter. **Details:** €€€; mulrannyparkhotel.ie

68

Farnham Estate
Co Cavan

This country escape is renowned for its spa (although competition is heating up around the island), but there are more strings to its bow. As well as rooms in its period and modern wings, there are new resort houses in the former orchard and walled garden, and Cedars steakhouse (in the old cut-stone house) brings a Jospier grill and supper-club ambience. Throw in an 18-hole golf course, nature trails, and 1,300-acre estate, and you're made. **Details:** €€€€; farnhamestate.ie

69

Garryvoe Hotel
Ballylongane, Co Cork

Independence "brings massive personality" to a hotel, Stephen Belton once told me. His Garryvoe and Bayview hotels (the latter in Ballycotton) are a great illustration of

that in east Cork. As well as a 25-metre pool and beachside location, there's a chic library, bar and Samphire restaurant (chef Kevin O'Sullivan does the local larder justice). Both are in the Original Irish Hotels collection, and bonus points for shout-outs to local businesses, be it Ballycotton lighthouse tours, Youghal boardwalk or local pubs. **Details:** €€€; garryvoehotel.com

70

Stauntons on the Green MOVING UP
Dublin

Some hotels recede in the memory after a stay. Others go the other way, glowing over time. That's the case for me with this thoughtful townhouse. Yes, there are quirks to the old building — no lifts, thin walls in places — but heritage and contemporary rooms click, warm breakfast service sees local tips dished out with the pastries, mimosas and cooked options, and fun footnotes include a library bar, afternoon tea, Harry Clarke stained-glass window and private access to the Iveagh Gardens. It's a sister hotel of Number 31 and The Bonham in Edinburgh, Scotland. **Details:** €€€; stauntonsonthegreen.ie

71

Fota Island Resort
Fota Island, Co Cork

One of the hidden aces at this five-star is the proximity of Fota Island Adventure, adding family activities — from kayaking to obstacle courses and quests — many resorts could only dream of. Add a top-notch spa (now with spa dining and group treatments), championship golf course, decent range of dining (The Cove has reopened with new head chef, Eoghan O'Flynn) and choice of self-catering lodges and hotel rooms, and you have a 780-acre, private island experience you may never want to leave. **Details:** €€€€; fotaisland.ie

72

Avalon House
Castlecomer, Co Kilkenny

I love this creeper-clad building in Castlecomer, its red front door leading to one of Ireland's new breed of town centre hotels. The Comerford family's business mixes heritage and modern nicely (book direct for a complimentary breakfast), and there's a soothing effect to touches like the stove in its bar or the hearty food at Lark's Bar or Lil's restaurant. The brilliant Castlecomer Discovery Park is 300m from that front door. **Details:** €€€; avalonhousehotel.ie

73

Kilkea Castle
Castledermot, Co Kildare

It's not as well-known as Ireland's five-star castle stays, but Christy and Jay Cashman's multi-million-euro reboot cuts a dash and costs less. In addition to its 18-hole, par-70 golf course, spa, and 180-acre estate, it added four escape rooms this summer with themes like Knights Round Table and Shackleton's Quest. As well as self-catering lodges and carriage rooms, there are 11 atmospheric rooms in the castle itself — one with 360-degree estate views. **Details:** €€€€; kilkeacastle.ie

74

Lough Erne Resort MOVING UP
Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh

Here's another five-star that can provide disarming value,

especially off-peak. The golf and spa resort has been pampering itself in recent years, with sweeping upgrades nudging dating interiors towards designs more reflective of its natural setting, thanks to designer Ciara ní Laoi. Its Thai Spa, two golf courses and 3 AA Rosette Catalina restaurant (where chef Stephen Holland is building on foundations laid by Noel McMeel) are highlights. Midweek stays with a cocktail can be had from £199/€230. **Details:** €€€€; loughernerresort.com

75

Casey's of Baltimore Baltimore, Co Cork

"Our food is our raison d'être," the Caseys say. And when west Cork is your larder, that makes sense. From fish battered in its own Sherkin Lass pale ale (there's a nano-brewery on site) to pil pil prawns from Union Hall, organic garden veg or a Ploughman's plate with Gubbeen cheeses and meats, menus are mouthwatering — and enjoyed with views of the harbour and Mount Gabriel. Rooms are available in the hotel, cottage and lodge, and packages can include beer-tasting paddles and ferry trips to Sherkin Island from Baltimore. **Details:** €€€; caseysfbaltimore.com

76

Butler House Kilkenny

Kilkenny Castle's 18th-century dower house is reborn as a Blue Book townhouse stay at the city's heart. Seventeen rooms and suites are individually styled (your wall might feature art from the Basil Goulding collection). Georgian details are spotted throughout — from fireplaces to ceiling plasterwork — and a walled garden leads to the craft village in Kilkenny's Castle Yard. Afternoon tea is a treat. **Details:** €€€; butler.ie

77

Cabra Castle
Kingscourt, Co Cavan

The family-run Romantic Castles of Ireland does a super line in affordable, characterful castle stays with warm service ambience. Alongside Ballyseede Castle, Castlebellingham and Markree Castle, Howard Corscadden's Cabra Castle does set-piece weddings and leisure stays (with a mix of castle, courtyard and cottage rooms). "People will travel to a castle," he once told me. "It's the atmosphere." **Details:** €€€; cabracastle.com

78

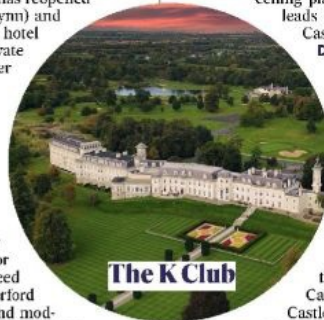
Inchydoney Island Lodge & Spa
Clonakilty, Co Cork

Des O'Dowd's coastal hotel is an Irish classic, with generations treasuring memories of stays by the Blue Flag beach. Add its Island spa with thermal seawater therapy pool, friendly staff and small wonders like the chowder at Dunes bistro and you have many reasons for a return visit. It's a hotel connected to its locality too, from whale-watching tours to local food suppliers and a tree-planting partnership with Crithir, the west Cork creative hub. **Details:** €€€; inchydoneyisland.com

79

The Dean Galway

You could pop the Dean hotels group into this entry — such is the influence of its fresh thinking on Irish hospitality. Rooftop restaurants, oodles of Irish art, 'Munchies' mini bars and lobby barista coffee bars are just the start.



The K Club

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The Galway edition stands out for me with its smart stewardship, pioneering Power gym (partly set in an old railway tunnel) and sense of substance behind the style. Watch out for new Deans to come in Belfast and Kilkenny. **Details:** €€€; thedean.ie/galway

80

Killyhevlin Hotel Enniskillen, Co Fermanagh

There was a time when expanding hotels had two options — new bedroom wings or self-catering houses. That's been blown wide open by creative cabins, lodges and standalone suites. Witness Killyhevlin's lakeland studios, aimed at couples, and woodland lodges with private decks and hot tubs. Add its pool, spa and casual Lakeside Lounge dining (Kove hasn't reopened after the pandemic), and you have a fine base for exploring the Fermanagh lakelands. **Details:** €€€, killyhevlin.com

81

Cahernane House Killarney, Co Kerry

I'm not a fan of marketing-speak. But when this hotel calls itself 'Killarney's best-kept secret', I have no quibbles. Set on the edge of the national park, rooms are split between manor house, garden wing and revamped coach house, combining old-school luxury with earthy tones and modern comforts that click nicely for the Kingdom. There are 'secret perks' for booking on its website too — including a glass of fizz, and a guarantee that the price will be at least €10 cheaper than an online travel agent. **Details:** €€€€, cahernane.com

82

Clonakilty Park Hotel Clonakilty, Co Cork

One of Ireland's best three-stars? This west Cork workhorse has a bit of everything going on, from coach tours to business stays and, of course, families making the most of its adventure play areas, aerial trekking, big pool and leisure area, kids' camps and more (there's a cinema over the road, too). Ask about rooms when booking, as some — like the superiors — have been refurbished more recently. I'm sure it won't be long before it has a fourth star. **Details:** €€, clonakiltyparkhotel.ie

83

Bishop's Gate Hotel Derry

A cosy, classy Blue Book hotel within the city walls, Bishop's Gate was a key opening in Derry pre-pandemic, and along with Shipquay and The Ebrington has really lifted the accommodation options there. The former gentleman's club (once visited by WB Yeats and Winston Churchill) retains Edwardian detail, isn't afraid to have fun (check out the dog paintings, or live music), has a mix of tidy rooms and apartments, and among chef Paul Sharkey's menus is a gluten-free lunch in The Wig and Gown. **Details:** €€€, bishopsgatehotelderry.com

84

Radisson Blu Royal Hotel MOVING UP Dublin

Le Pole Square is one of Dublin's newest, and oldest, hoods. Old, as it lay near a former Little Italy just yards from Dublin Castle. New, as the square itself was literally formed as surrounding hotels and a convention centre took shape. The Radisson Blu Royal is bounding forward with nos

to that heritage in its design and menus, but also a killer spa in Velvære (Majken Bech Bailey has curated juices and elixirs served with treatments), great summer space in its Dyflin garden, and sense of mission that belies its big size. The Chancery nearby is worth a nose, too. **Details:** €€€, radissonblu.ie

85

Lough Eske Castle Donegal, Co Donegal

The county's only five-star lies on the lakeshore in 43 acres of woodland, and a warm welcome awaits. Book treatments in its organic spa (or try one of the outdoor hot tubs), spoil yourself with its new menus, dip into the new whiskey cellar — and watch out for news this autumn, when a whole new wing will be unveiled. It's a beautiful base from which to explore a county *Lonely Planet* calls one of the world's best regions to visit this year. **Details:** €€€€, lougheskecastlehotel.com

86

The Lansdowne Kenmare, Co Kerry

John and Francis Brennan's town hotel has new owners in Aileen and Patrick Hanley. Or perhaps 'new' is the wrong word — Patrick's family once owned the hotel, so this chapter brings him full circle. The bones are all there, from velvet chaise lounges to brasserie-style dining at Shelburne Street and classy nooks in Poet's bar, and you can sense subtle changes — trad sessions and other tunes, for example, but there's more to come. "We just want to bring our own personalities to the operation," they say. **Details:** €€, lansdownekenmare.com

87

The Leinster, NEW ENTRY Dublin

"It's like The Merrion, only more craic," manager Melanie Nocher told me as this "luxury lifestyle" stay opened on Mount Street. It's a surprisingly tough location, but the mix of elevated rooms (think of them as a more premium take on the Dean — the brands are run by the same group), rooftop restaurant overseen by celeb chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten and its suave Collins Club (try the batch cocktails) will have staying power. There are talking points at every turn, from Japanese Toto toilets to a teensy, seven sq m room for solo travellers, dubbed 'The Nook'. **Details:** €€€, theleinster.ie

88

Arnold's Dunfanaghy, Co Donegal

This charming Dunfanaghy hotel does what traditional town hotels do best — serving guests and the community with hands-on hospitality, good grub and a hub for special occasions. The Arnold family's been at the helm for generations, and though rooms and other areas can feel dated, the three-star also has neat ideas, including Arnou cafe and burger bar, its cocktail space and chocolate-themed stays (next up on October 11-13). Aisling Arnold loves the "hectic-ness" of it all, she told me. "It's never boring." **Details:** €€, arnoldshotel.com

89

Powerscourt Hotel Enniskerry, Co Wicklow

There's lots happening at Powerscourt Estate, with its distillery, an evolving sustainability story in its house and



gardens (the estate plans to be 'net zero' by 2025), shops, cafe and river trails. Even better news is that the five-star seems to be integrating more and more with what's on its doorstep — you can take bikes on the trails, for example, a 'Powerscourt Passport' package includes tickets to the waterfall or house and gardens... and that's not even starting on its 20m Swarovski crystal-lit pool. Espa, buzzing Sally Gap brasserie or more formal Sika restaurant. **Details:** €€€€, powerscourthotel.com

90

The Lake Hotel Killarney, Co Kerry

The Huggard family's hotel hums along nicely on the lakeshore, with some super views from rooms, bar, terrace and restaurant. There's a steady tourist trade in season, the hospitality is proud and polished (you'll feel more cared for than you'd expect at a 131-room four-star), and there are some lovely stories in the photos on its walls (the family once owned Ballynahinch and Ashford castles). It can feel dated in parts, and is further out of Killarney than others, but the value, warmth and location win out. **Details:** €€€, lakehotelkillarney.ie

91

Ferrycarrig Hotel Wexford

A four-star overlooking the Slaney estuary, this hotel is renowned for its school holiday family stays, but that's not all it's got up its sleeve. Alongside the 20m pool, for example, there's Riverwood Wellness with its spa partners Dermalogica. Alongside the family and interconnecting rooms, there's an adult-only floor, and 'plus' rooms with water views and more recent renovations. Alongside the





all-day dining in its Dry Dock bar is a 2 AA Rosette option at Reeds. It's good to see local beef, lamb, veg and names like Killowen and Kilmore Quay on those menus, too.
Details: €€€€; jerrycarrighotel.ie

92

InterContinental Dublin

Now firmly bedded into Ballsbridge, this "urban resort" is maturing like a whiskey. One of the headline hotel builds of the Celtic Tiger era, it is, of course, swanky and sometimes unsettling in scale, but there is depth to the service and detailing (check out the fresh flowers, Irish art, or sumptuous Christmas packages), and its lobby lounge is one of Dublin's great set-piece spaces (try the Sunday Roast menu with brunch cocktails). Rooms can be enormous. Nicky Logue is a savvy and personable general manager, and its spa has had a much-needed refresh. The Ice Bar remains — for private hire or events like big rugby matches. If you know, you know.
Details: €€€€; intercontinentaldublin.ie

93

Clanard Court NEW ENTRY Athy, Co Kildare

Here's a hotel that knows what it is, and works that brilliantly. There's a bustling ground floor mixing everything from meetings to locals eating out, confirmations and communions ("The person of the moment is spoilt," managing director Mary Fennin-Byrne told me). Add a small garden spa with two treatment rooms, junior suites with in-room baths, and brainwaves like a changing room for early check-ins, US-style chapel and proper kids' play area



Clonakilty Park Hotel



in its wedding set-up, and you're starting to get a sense of the family four-star's warm energy. Guests can get a 10pc discount at the nearby Kildare Village, too.
Details: €€€; clanardcourt.ie

94

Granville Hotel Waterford

I'd recommend both hotel fans and hoteliers to try breakfast at this town centre stay. Brekkie can be a generic, assembly-line slop-out, or a precious parting impression, and it's very much the latter here — think eggs Benedict on a Waterford blaa, a gluten-free full Irish, or an 'Organic Porridge Experience' with dashes of Bailey's, Highbank Orchard Syrup or Muldoon Irish Whiskey liqueur. There's a traditional charm to its rooms, dining space and service, and a central location overlooking the River Suir. "Start your day the Granville way," as they say.
Details: €€€; granvillehotel.ie

95

Knockranny House Hotel Westport, Co Mayo

The key attractions of Knockranny are its large rooms (some with views of Croagh Patrick), Salveo Spa and long-time chef Seamus Commons's menus at The Fern Grill (try the five-course 'Taste of Knockranny' menu... or the charcoal-grilled smash burgers). But the creativity and local partnerships in its packages give an insight into thought and energy behind the scenes, too. Walks and storytelling with Terra Firma guides on a 'Mayo Full Moon Walking Weekend' (November 15/16), for example.
Details: €€€€; knockrannyhousehotel.ie

96

Slieve Donard NEW ENTRY Newcastle, Co Down

The dramatic Victorian exterior may look the same, "but inside, it's a different story" as Nicola Brady wrote in our review this year. New owners Marine & Lawn specialise in magnificent properties by top golf courses (here it's Royal County Down; others include Rusacks at St Andrews, and the forthcoming Adelphi at Portrush), and a multi-million-euro refurb blends heritage and classic luxury in its lobby, bar, JJ Farrell's restaurant and 180 rooms. Think cascading greenery, forest-loads of wood panelling and William Morris-style floral headboards and tartan carpets.
Details: €€€€; marineandlawn.com/slivedonard

97

Faithlegg Co Waterford

A sister of FBD Hotels's The Heritage in Co Laois, Castleknock in Dublin and Killashee, Co Kildare, this four-star is a popular base for weddings, family stays and exploring Waterford. Built around an 18th-century manor, the feel is a mix of period style, home comforts and family-friendly functionality, with chef Jenny Flynn's menus making use of local goodies like Goussbridge trout, Knockanore cheese or Baldwin's ice cream, a 17m pool and leisure centre, golf, whiskey and cocktail bar, and room options from basic self-catering to newer wing and 'masters' in the house.
Details: €€€€; faithlegg.com

98

Rathmullan House NEW ENTRY Rathmullan, Co Donegal

This family-run, Georgian country house is at the heart of its community, and another Blue Book property surprising with its ideas and style. As well as the country luxe rooms (interconnecting options are available), food and drink has a laser-focus on local — from pizzas with toppings like Corleggy Cavanbert washed down with Kinnegar beers in its summer pavilion, to Greencastle-landed fish, Burtonport crab or pierogi dumplings with wild mushrooms and sauerkraut in its Cellar Bar, which reopened last October, following a revamp. Another Donegal delight.
Details: €€€€; rathmullanhouse.com

99

The Connacht Galway

Energetic, evolving, enormous — it's still hard to believe this 358-room operation is a three-star. You can stay in family bunk rooms, apartments, or even the 'Connacht Cruiser', an American-style motorhome ("It's like having your own private boat," they say), and noteworthy touches include a lobby barista bar, living wall, large pool and leisure centre and The Aviary, a slick outdoor terrace complete with faux grass underfoot and retractable roof overhead. It can get very busy at times, and a welcome bout of room refurb is underway, adding air-con. It's a sister of Hyde, the Galway Bay Golf Resort and Residence Hotel.
Details: €€€; theconnacht.ie

100

Mount Falcon Ballina, Co Mayo

Some great lodges, 100 acres of woodland, activities like falconry and fishing and its spa and leisure centre have made this family-run four-star a popular getaway in north Mayo. A 'Summer Tent' set-up sees gears switch to move live music, dancing, cocktails and chef Tom Doyle's cooking outdoors under a marquee, while the Kitchen restaurant and Boathole bar are cosy spaces to indulge in over the cooler months. Book B&B seven or more days ahead and you can get €30 off in an advance purchase special.
Details: €€€€; mountfalcon.com