

Travel

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CHRISTMAS DE-LIGHTS

CHRISTMAS is coming... and the festive illuminations at Titanic Belfast are set to burst into life on November 24 to welcome Father Christmas — but the attraction is looking for someone special to switch

on the lights and start the celebrations. The centre is on the lookout for one lucky child to switch on the lights. Not only will they get to add sparkle to the iconic building but they will be

the first to welcome Father Christmas, who will be donning his finest red suit accompanied by his favourite reindeer and sleigh, before heading to the ticketed Magical Christmas Experience along with their

parents and siblings. Titanic Belfast's CEO Judith Owens said: "We want to add sparkle to someone's Christmas by giving them the opportunity to lead our celebrations. If you know a special child

who would be dazzled to start the countdown to Christmas by turning on Titanic Belfast's twinkling lights, visit titanicbelfast.com." Titanic Belfast's Magical Christmas Experience runs un-

til December 23 where children can enter into the Elves' Workshop, join Mrs Claus at her cosy kitchen, hear Christmas tales and meet Santa himself. For more information, visit www.titanicbelfast.com/lights

YOU'RE IN FOR A RE-TREAT



LUSH: The beautiful grounds and greenery of Johnstown Estate; (top and right) the luxurious Executive Suite; (left) the swimming pool at the estate



ADD SOME GLOSS TO YOUR STAY

THE Johnstown Estate has just launched the perfect pad for a girls' or bride-to-be weekend away.

The Mulberry is a deluxe suite which spans the width of three rooms and sleeps six with two bathrooms and three showers. The plush lounge area includes a wine fridge, Nespresso machine, 50" TV, a Bluetooth Bose speaker and seating for everyone in the suite.

In addition, there are four hair and make-up stations lit by nearly 50 LED bulbs to ensure a flawless make-up and hair finish.

"This concept is totally unique to The Johnstown Estate," said Anthony Smiddy, general manager. "The idea came from the number of brides who wanted to get married from the hotel. We wanted to develop a space where they could build memories with their 'I do crew' while getting ready.

"It's also a perfect spot for a group of friends who want to spend as much time as possible together while away."

Gloss at the Spa has also opened for grooming treatments including manicures, pedicures, facials, skin analysis, make-up, tanning and brows.

A gold and jewel-coloured suite, including a treatment room and 12 treatment stations, this is the perfect spot for exclusive use by a group of up to 10. A typical booking would include two half-hour treatments, skin analysis and a make-up tutorial, accompanied by a cocktail and hors d'oeuvres. Packages:

Sparkle at The Mulberry — €1,500 per six people:

- Overnight stay in The Mulberry
- Delicious full breakfast
- Moët & Chandon champagne and hors d'oeuvres upon arrival
- Two 30-minute treatments per person in Gloss at the Spa
- Cocktail and hors d'oeuvres in Gloss at the Spa

- Four-course dinner at Fire & Salt, the hotel's contemporary fine-dining restaurant
- Turn down service with luxury chocolates and Elemis pillow spray
- Late check-out until 2.30pm (subject to availability)
- Complimentary access to The Leisure Club

The Gloss Getaway — starting at €339 per two people sharing:

- An overnight stay in a Deluxe Room

- Delicious full breakfast
- A 30-minute treatment in Gloss at The Spa
- Prosecco with hors d'oeuvres served in Gloss at The Spa
- Four course dinner at Fire & Salt
- Complimentary access to The Leisure Club

FACTFILE: Prices for the Executive Suite in which I stayed start at €199 per night and the Deluxe King room which has the same luxurious design but without the living space is priced from €109 per night.

■ To book visit www.thejohnstown-estate.com

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By Martin Breen

HAVE just found my perfect country retreat and it is only two hours drive from Belfast.

Filled with history, character and warmth, The Johnstown Estate in Enfield, Co Meath, exudes Georgian splendour and modern day luxury.

The 127-bedroom hotel, owned by a Northern Irish businesswoman and her husband, has an 18th century rural residence at the heart of the estate.

My partner and I stayed there for a recent weekend escape and were blown away by the building itself, the food, the service and the spa.

After checking in we enjoyed a wonderful afternoon tea which included a selection of sandwiches, sweet pastries and petits fours. All were accompanied by your choice of Bewley's herbal and green teas or freshly-brewed coffee.

The location for afternoon tea — in the hotel's atrium — really has the wow factor. With soft velvet wing-backs in cosy corners, vibrant and original Irish art and luxurious bespoke carpet, all bathed in light from the double height windows and glass ceiling, it is the ideal location to sit for hours on end and relax.

The atrium attracts a mix of people as it is a perfect place to talk business, read the papers or enjoy afternoon tea as we did.

After stuffing our faces we headed down to the spa for some treatments to recharge the batteries. The spa is also an impressive space with 18 treatment rooms, aroma and Finnish steam rooms, caldarium, relaxation room and lounge with a complimentary smoothie, juice or fresh fruit.

With a bad back constantly playing up and

after the drive from Belfast, the Elimis Deeper than Deep stone massage was just what I needed to relieve the tension.

The massage involved Balinese stones bathed in Frangipani Moni body oil which were worked deep into the muscles.

It was one of the best massages I have ever had and I literally felt like a new man as it fixed quite a few knots in my back.

Downstairs from the spa there is also a hair and make-up salon which I am reliably informed is particularly busy during one of the countless weddings on the estate.

You really have no need whatsoever to leave the grounds of The Johnstown Estate as everything is on site.

Our room for the night was a superb suite designed in soothing grey and blue tones called the Executive Suite. It has a spacious living room with a dining table that can seat six off the elegant bedroom and bathroom which had a rain shower and free standing bath. Top marks to whoever sourced the king-size bed as it was amazing.

We dined in the hotel's Fire & Salt restaurant where I had one of the most amazing steaks. Specialising in Himalayan salt-aged steaks of up to 36 days seared, sealed and caramelised over charcoal embers, the restaurant is sophisticated but contemporary. The service, like the food, was first class.

Irish seafood is also another speciality so I had a superb seafood linguine for starters. It was faultless but my other half's ricotta and goat's cheese ravioli was the real star of the show as the perfectly cooked pasta gave way to a wonderfully cheesy centre. A real taste

sensation.

For mains my 28 day-aged fillet steak was cooked exactly medium rare as I requested and was full of flavour. My partner ordered a wonderfully moist roast chicken supreme with gratin potato, wild mushroom and tenderstem broccoli which again showed flair in the kitchen.

Being a bit indecisive I opted for two sauces on the side — a peppercorn one and a whiskey, mushroom and pancetta sauce. Both were quickly gone as I used them to dip the very moorish triple-cooked chips as well as pieces of my steak in them.

When your steak is brought to the table the server will shave off salt over it from a block of shimmering, pinky-orange Himalayan rock salt. It all adds to the theatre of the service and put a smile on my face.

BUZZING

We shared a dessert which would quite possibly be part of my death row meal (not that I ever think I would be there!). That was a popcorn chocolate bar served with a white chocolate cremeux, salted caramel, beetroot gel, toffee popcorn and chocolate sauce.

After dinner we enjoyed drinks in The Coach House bar which has such a homely feel with its snugs, booths and blazing fire.

I definitely savoured my pint of Guinness when there. Make sure to also check out its creative cocktail list. On the Friday night we were there the place was buzzing with some great live Irish music.

If you feel you have overindulged and you will (overindulge, maybe not feel it) you could

walk around the beautiful estate grounds to check out the hotel's leisure facilities.

These include a superbly-stocked fitness suite, 30 scheduled classes including circuits or yoga, a jacuzzi, outdoor Canadian hot-tub and award-winning Prunty pitch.

It is little wonder that Premiership and international football and rugby clubs often use the hotel as a training base.

If you want to be a bit more adventurous and venture further afield, Tayto Park theme park and zoo is around a 40-minute drive away and the estate is 35 minutes from Dublin city centre and Kildare Village.

Having been to Tayto Park on a previous occasion I would definitely recommend it.

As well as getting a tour of the Tayto factory, the park is home to Europe's largest wooden rollercoaster with an inversion, the Cú Chulainn Coaster, and many other rides.

If you are heading there and travelling with children it is worth noting there are also family-friendly lodges available to stay in on The Johnstown Estate grounds.

Once you do stay at the estate trust me you will be back, just as I most definitely will.



IMMACULATE: The Gloss suite at the Spa (above); and Fire & Salt restaurant

