

FIND YOUR ZEN

If your New Year’s resolution is to achieve balance and recharge after a hectic 2019, the IMAGE team has the breaks that promise that and a whole lot more...



BEST FOR OLD-WORLD COMFORT

Culloden Estate & Spa

Belfast’s Culloden Estate & Spa makes a striking first impression, perched up high in Northern Ireland’s own Hollywood Hills, overlooking Belfast Lough. Built in 1876, the fine Gothic mansion was originally the Bishop’s Palace before changing hands many times in the 20th century and finally being bought by Sir William Hastings in 1966, who developed it into Northern Ireland’s first five-star hotel. Today, the building retains many of its original ecclesiastic features but boasts all mod cons and comforts, thanks to the £5.5 million spent on renovations since 2015 to offer a luxury ESPA spa and pool, fine dining Vespers restaurant and generous guest rooms. Other highlights include the inviting Cultra Inn pub on the grounds (a great spot for a warming bowl of chowder) and its adjacent teeny train station, where you can hop on the train to be in Belfast City in 15 minutes. Not to mention the possibility of bumping into local legend Van Morrison in the bar, as we did. LGG

Double rooms from €260 B&B per room per night, hastingshotels.com.



BEST FOR A GIRLS’ NIGHT

The Johnstown Estate Hotel & Spa

Checking into this impressive four-star estate is like putting your slippers on after a long day in heels – the home-from-home atmosphere of this 18th century building is immediately comforting. The brand new Gloss at The Spa is a stylish space built with bridal parties and girlie groups in mind, offering a range of treatments including skin analysis and bespoke facials, make-up tutorials and pampering at the nail bar. The space can accommodate private groups of up to ten, where you and your pals can sip cocktails while you wait for your treatments. Another new addition is the stunning Mulberry Suite. Spanning the width of three adjoining rooms and sleeping up to six guests, this luxurious suite features huge make-up stations complete with Hollywood mirrors, Dyson hairdryers and plenty of bathroom space for getting ready for that delicious feast awaiting you and your party in the Fire & Salt restaurant downstairs. Finish off with a cosy night cap by the fire in the Coach House Bar and you’ve got the perfect end to a perfect day. LK

The Gloss at The Spa package starts at €319 per couple sharing and includes B&B, a 30-minute treatment at Gloss with prosecco and canapés, and dinner at Fire & Salt restaurant, thejohnstownestate.com.



BEST FOR A RECHARGE

Aqua Sana Longford Forest

Ireland’s largest standalone spa certainly lives up to the hype. Surrounded by 400 acres of woodland within Center Parcs Longford Forest resort, as you step up to Aqua Sana, it feels as though you’ve entered a whole other realm, with every ounce of worry being tossed behind you at the door. This is no ordinary spa on the grounds of a resort... It measures 2,500 square metres, has 14 treatment rooms offering superb Elemis and Voya treatments, and 21 hot, cold, sensory and meditative experiences across four zones: Nordic Forest, Hot Springs, Volcanic Forest and Treetop Nesting. (I will say, I am normally not a steam person, but I spent a decent length of time in both the Salt and Forest Glade steam rooms, for the invigorating scents alone.) And there’s no need to worry that you’ll be fighting over that lounge bed for five minutes of peace – you’ll find plenty of quiet corners here where you can hide away from other guests (preferably tucked cosily under a fleece blanket atop a waterbed). Even the most stressed-out workaholics will walk away from Aqua Sana with their zen well and truly restored. MW

Day and overnight spa breaks are available with packages starting from €55, aquasana.ie. ►



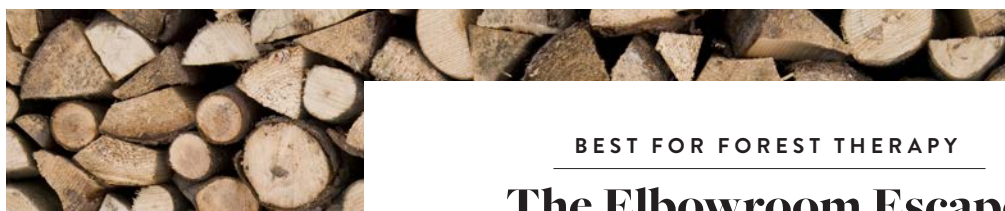


BEST FOR PEACE AND QUIET

Blackhead Lighthouse

The view of the stoic Blackhead Lighthouse weaves in and out as you make your way through the undulating northeast Antrim laneways toward it. Perched high above the water's edge, the still-functioning lighthouse was built in 1901 and houses three self-catering Victorian holiday homes. Originally the lightkeepers' lodgings, each cottage retains its old-world charm with hardback books on every shelf, Persian rugs covering creaky timber floors and squishy armchairs that frame the view of Belfast Lough, the lighthouse and the blue-tinged outline of Scotland beyond. Upstairs, beds are raised up on polished brass frames and shutters should be left open to ensure you don't miss sunrise. Leave your phones at home – all you need here are a few good books and a bottle of wine to while away the afternoon by the fire after a brisk cliff walk. LH

Cottages start from around €380 for two nights, irishlandmark.com.



BEST FOR FOREST THERAPY

The Elbowroom Escape

The Japanese have a term for it: *shinrin-yoku*, which literally means “taking in the forest atmosphere”. Entire books have been written on the restorative health benefits of spending time around trees, but you only need to spend a few hours at The Elbowroom Escape in west Wicklow to feel the soothing power of its forested surrounds. Founded in 2016 by Lisa Wilkinson, the former hikers' hostel has been renovated with exquisite taste and sensitivity to offer eco-luxury at its best. The wooden sleeping cabins boast bespoke furniture made using local Irish timber, rainfall showers (powered by mountain spring water), alpaca throws and duck feather bedding. Heaven. Most of the (delicious vegetarian) food you'll eat is grown in their own kitchen garden and they're almost completely zero waste. There is a range of different styles of retreat to choose from – from yoga and detox to gin-making and hiking, just make sure you don't miss a night-time wallow in the hot tub under the trees for your perfect hit of *shinrin-yoku*. LGG

Retreat weekends start from €299 per person sharing, the-elbowroomescape.com. ■

