

beautiful beaches



RELAXING STAY: the picturesque Water's Edge Hotel in Rathmullan ranks among Private Ireland's top ten 'feel at home' boutique, country and town houses

Rested, refreshed and ready to learn to fish

NOT long ago a farmer was offered over one million euros for his home blessed with one of the most spectacular views in Donegal.

It came as no surprise when he refused to sell, as no amount of money, he said, could replace his "little piece of heaven" on the Fanad Peninsula.

Understandably, this beautiful part of the county, steeped in history, has long been a favourite destination for holidaymakers or so-called "blow-ins," dreaming of owning a home there. With picture perfect white beaches and gardens open to the public (www.donegalgardentrail.com), its great outdoors are host to numerous activities such as golfing, horse-riding, kayaking, trout-fishing and hiking.

However, for those just wanting to sit back, relax and take in the inspirational scenery, no better place for it. The Peninsula can be reached along Donegal's eastern coast road through the pretty towns of Ramelton and Rathmullan or by ferry from Buncrana. I chose to take the Lough Swilly ferry to Rathmullan from the Inishowen Peninsula, where after a stroll along the beach, I booked into the Water's Edge Hotel, on the edge of the town literally yards from the shore-line.

The picturesque town of Rathmullan, with its colourful assortment of houses and Martello tower, looks onto Lough Swilly. This is where in 1587, the rebellious Red Hugh O'Donnell was lured onto a British merchant ship under the pretext of having a drink, and later found himself incarcerated in a Dublin jail for several years.

The town also served as the departure point for the Flight of the Earls in 1607, a watershed moment in Irish history, when the ancient Gaelic aristocracy of Ulster went into permanent exile. Rathmullan Heritage Centre recounts this event and the impact of the flight. Mandy Blaney who owns the Water's Edge Hotel with her husband Neil,



SWEET DREAMS: The Water's Edge Hotel's bedrooms

explained much of Rathmullan's history during a tour around Fanad Head – a place where she herself grew up and knows like the back of her hand.

We stopped for a stroll along Ballymastocker Bay Beach, which was recently voted one of the top ten beaches to visit in the world, in an Observer newspaper poll. The beach is situated beside Portsalon Golf Club (www.portsalongolfhotel.com/) and lives up to its well-earned reputation. Meandering round the coastal road and country lanes, we came across a rather unusual spectacle – a cow playing football!

We also stopped off at the Fanad Lighthouse, which is set on a magnificent cliff edge with spectacular views. It would have been rude not to stop at the charming Lighthouse Tavern, owned by Charlie Doherty and his family for well over 50 years and from the outside, looks more like someone's home than a pub. After a 'hot toddy', it was time to return to the hotel.

With her creative flair and attention to detail, Mandy is credited for the well thought design of the newly renovated Water's Edge Hotel which overlooks Lough Swilly and Inch Island. Its warm, earthy coloured decor and overall ambience, makes one feel instantly relaxed. It's not surprising to learn that it ranks among Private

Ireland's top ten 'feel at home' boutique, country and town houses. The ten bedrooms are crisp, clean and comfortable and beautifully decorated offering panoramic views of the Lough, while the ensuite bathrooms are stocked with an excellent range of handcrafted soaps, bath soaks and skin products by Ballgreen (www.ballgreen.ie), made by Donna Keeney who lives in nearby Ramelton. The restaurant offers fantastic views of the Lough in an attractive but simple setting complemented by a menu offering a delicious range of fish and meat dishes served up by Chef Michael Noonan.

I opted for Wok Fried Black Tiger Prawns to start, followed by Irish Hereford Medallions of Beef Fillet and seasonal fresh rhubarb crumble to finish, which was scrumptious. After dinner, I retired to bed where I had one of the soundest and most comfortable night's sleep I'd had in a long time. Following a hearty breakfast, I headed off for my first ever trout fishing lesson at Meadows Trout Fishery (Cloughfin, Rosnakill: 086 8047516/0863722747), which was highly enjoyable, despite being unsuccessful in catching a fish. After a spot of lunch in Mac's Bar in newly renovated Milford Inn it was time to drive home, rejuvenated from a thoroughly enjoyable few days spent in undoubtedly one of the most attractive corners of the world.

■ Rooms are available at the Water's Edge Hotel from 75 pps (approx £59) or suites are available from €85 pps (approx £67). The hotel, situated 16 miles north of Letterkenny, also currently has a mid-week offer which includes two night bed & breakfast and one evening meal for €170 pps (approx £134). Visit <http://www.theblaney-group.com/default.aspx> for further information, tel: 00353 (0)74 9158182 or email: thewatersedge@eircom.net



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