



WESTPORT

INTO THE WEST

A family minibreak in Westport convinced *Lynne Joyce* that four days in the west can fix just about any complaint.

There is something magical about Westport; in fact, it's practically a perfect storm for holiday destinations. Friendly locals, lots to do and stunning views of Croagh Patrick all combine to create a unique location that offers a solution to every holiday conundrum.

For those on a girls weekend, visit Spa Salveo at Knockranny House Hotel, a deserving winner at this year's *Irish Tatler* Spa Awards. On the other hand, boys on a stag weekend need to check out Adventure West, a company which organises activities in the greater Clew Bay area and offers anything from rock climbing to snorkelling. Those travelling with kids will be delighted to hear that Westport and its surrounding areas are incredibly child and family friendly with activities suitable for all energy levels.

Despite owning a fairly decent bike, I have cycled three times in the last year and never at any great speed, nonetheless, staff at Hotel Westport convinced me to rent a bike from Clew Bay Bike Hire and

take to The Great Western Greenway. This 42km trail follows the path of the original Westport to Achill railway, which was closed in 1937, and offers some of the most dramatic scenery in the area. Views of Clew Bay and the mountain range kept me distracted from the burning in my thighs. Luckily, before things got too bad we stopped off in Newport and, as it was a Friday, I got to spend a happy hour pottering around the weekly food market on Medicott Street, nibbling cheese and cakes from the number of artisan producers dotting the street. However, cheese doesn't hold the kids' interest quite like it does mine, and so it was soon back to the bikes.

The next day, we took off to spend some time at Westport House, home to the Pirate Adventure Park and former home to pirate queen Grace O'Malley. The Pirate Adventure Park was deemed to be an enormous hit by my eight and ten-year-olds, they loved the slides and rides, especially the Cannon Ball Dip, but were perhaps more taken with the feeling of

being able to escape adult company for a few hours to splash and shout.

It's rare to find one attraction that can keep families entertained for longer than a few hours, but the fact that Westport

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House is also home to an adventure centre which offers zorbing, zip lining and archery meant that once my little fish headed for dry land they were easily entertained. As for the adults, our highlight was the dungeon tour, which takes visitors around the dungeons of the sixteenth century house, explains its history and is believed to take place in the dungeons

from the original house. Pottery painting classes were also on offer, but there's only so much we could accomplish in a day.

Westport is a town filled with hotels, with all budgets and tastes catered for, but for us Hotel Westport was the perfect base. This four-star family friendly hotel is located in the heart of the town, so close to all attractions while the inhouse Panda Club is just an added bonus. Technically aimed at children aged four to 10, slightly older children are welcome to join in. The morning club, which runs from 9.30am to 12.30pm gave us time to have a much-needed lie on and me time to visit the Ocean Spirit Spa (try the Germaine Firming and Toning Facial for a real treat). The Panda Club also deserves extra praise for hosting a children's dinner each evening, which was a godsend, as it meant we could get ready for dinner safe in the knowledge the kids were eating before sitting down to enjoy our own dinner.

The care and attention shown by staff were made gold standard by the constant local knowledge showered upon us. A throwaway comment at breakfast one morning resulted in the name, address and phone number of a local trekking company who would be suitable for four beginners. The go!trekking! team advised that the Carrownisky to Silver Strand trek would be most suitable and so off we set, trotting through the surf and taking in views

of the Achill Islands. It was a truly magical experience and a quick look through the company's roster of treks has me planning a return visit to attempt the mountain-based Skelp to Prospect trek.

Trekking is certainly one way to work up an appetite and luckily Westport is a town filled with culinary options. From high end dining at La Fougère Restaurant at Knockranny House Hotel to the pub grub readily available throughout the town, local and high quality ingredients are the corner stone of all meals, with the abundance of seafood coming from Clew Bay making for some serious food deliberations. Our favourite includes The Pantry and Corkscrew and La Bella Vita.

Of course, no trip to Westport would be complete without at least sampling the legendary nightlife, and it did not disappoint. From the famous Matt Molloy's and West Bar to the oft forgotten Moran's and McGing's, if it's craic and a session you're after then you're in for a good night in Westport; especially if you sample a drink from the local Mescan Brewery. Ale brewed on top of Croagh Patrick, this stuff is more than a mouthful.

Four days in Westport and we returned home filled with a feeling of holiday cheer that can only be achieved by an Irish staycation.

For more information, visit Destinationwestport.com