



Pack up and go...

edited by Moira Hammon, email chictravel@ihstar.ie

Home or abroad, our weekly travel page has all the best deals and ideas you need for getting away



A wheely fab cycle trail

GREAT WESTERN GREENWAY — A cyclist on the scenic trail, Yvonne (left) and Knockranny House (below)



Is that the hotel with the helipad?" a colleague asks when I mention that I'm going to Knockranny House in Co Mayo for the weekend, writes Yvonne Gordon.

A quick check reveals that it is indeed — and although I'm not sure how often the helipad is used these days, it indicates the level of luxury to be expected.

It doesn't disappoint — when we arrive I find that the lavish bedroom is bigger than my entire apartment and is furnished with huge comfy chairs, a couch and lots of books.

However, the trip isn't a lazy weekend to luxuriate in opulent surroundings — we're renting bikes to cycle the Great Western Greenway, the 42km trail that stretches from Westport to Achill Island.

The hotel has arranged the bicycle hire and it's bright and sunny the following morning when our bikes are delivered to the front door.

Armed with water and plenty of snacks we set off along the trail, which starts from near the hotel.

The Great Western Greenway is Ireland's longest off-road walking and cycling trail. It was built along the route of the Westport to Achill railway line which closed in 1937 so it's traffic-free — one of the reasons for its massive success since it opened 18 months ago.

In August, a reported 1,000 people used the trail on one day alone. Fortunately, there's plenty of space so it never gets crowded.

The trail goes from Westport to Newport (11km), from Newport to Mulranny (18km) and then from Mulranny to Achill Sound (13km).

The first part of the track from Westport is a pleasant jaunt along a bramble-lined trail, past stony fields full of sheep and over lots of little bridges, with no traffic sounds — only birdsong and the swish of the wind in the trees.

The trail is mostly flat, with the odd incline proving good for loosening out the leg muscles.

The first part of the trail ends at Newport, which means cycling through the village — the perfect place for a coffee pit-stop.

Back on the Greenway, it's from Newport onwards that the scenery gets really interesting — what was so far a narrow trail opens up to a wide expanse, stretching over to the foot of the Nephin mountains on one side, with views out over Clew Bay and its islands on the other.

At the village of Mulranny, we stop for a refreshment at Daly's Bar, which looks pretty ordinary from the road but at the back has a long outdoor deck with magnificent views right across the bay to Croagh Patrick.

From here, it's a further 13km to Achill Island, which you can also cycle around.

One of the advantages of the bicycle hire is that a shuttle service will take the bikes and you back to your starting point, so you don't have to cycle all the way back.

Upon our return, we've an 'important appointment' at Knockranny's spa for back massages, to loosen up any tightened muscles after the cycle. We follow this with a relaxing swim in the pool and a visit to the thermal suites.

One of the highlights of Knockranny is the food

— La Fougere restaurant, helmed by Mayo man Seamus Commons, has won numerous awards including two AA rosettes.

With a post-cycling appetite, we're delighted to tuck in to the evening's specials, which include roast Mayo lamb, lemon sole with Killary mussels and Irish beef with tarragon emulsion.

At checkout, I ask someone at the hotel if the helipad is used much and am surprised by the answer — apparently it's used every couple of weeks by connections from Galway airport or by corporate visitors.

Luckily for most, the hotel is also a five-minute walk from the town and not far from the train station, and any hotel which you can arrive at by bicycle or by helicopter is my kind of hotel.



● The Knockranny House Hotel's Greenway Getaway, with two nights' accommodation for two adults and two children with breakfast, bicycle hire and packed lunch, costs from €175 per person (under 10s stay free). ● See www.knockrannyhousehotel.ie or call 098 28 600 for more info.

proximity to challenging climbs and superb scenery makes it the ideal base for club training weekends and gatherings. Transport is available from Killarney Railway Station. Call 064 6675100 or email information@sneemhotel.com.

RING OF KERRY CYCLING WEEKENDS IN SNEEM

● The four-star Sneem Hotel has launched speciality Ring of Kerry Cycling Weekends from only €109 pps for two nights' B&B plus one evening meal. It arranges escorted cycling weekends for groups of 15 people or more all year around. The hotel's

SNOW WAY — Fun-filled trip to see Santa and co



An elfing great visit to Santa in Lapland

■ FOR A PRIVATE VISIT WITH SANTA AND HIS ELVES, exhilarating husky and reindeer sleigh rides, snowmobiling and tobogganing, a visit to Lapland is the perfect way to get into the Christmas spirit.

■ Sunway, who specialise in trips to Lapland, is offering two-night trips departing on December 12, 14 and 16. Prices start from €1,189 per adult and €999 per child and include flights, transfers, accommodation and activities. Check out Sunway's dedicated Lapland brochure, call 01 2311888 or see www.sunway.ie.

ABU DHABI DO

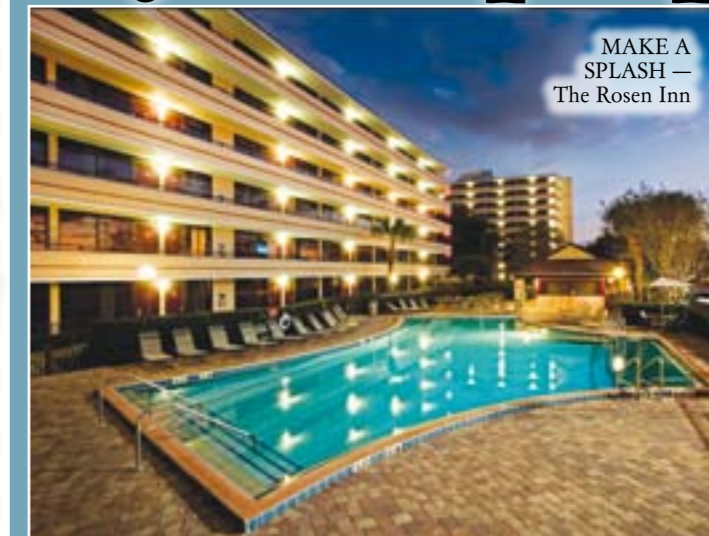
● THE BEAUTIFUL EMIRATE OF ABU DHABI has emerged as one of the best-kept secrets in the Gulf and a 'must-see' destination for discerning sun-seekers this year. Abu Dhabi is renowned as being laid-back and relaxing, where visitors can soak up a wealth of culture while enjoying a range of fun activities. Thomas Cook Ireland is offering hotel and flight packages for a romantic Valentine's getaway in February from as little as €45 per person per night for hotel, with flights from €1,048pp.

● Some of the highlights of this sun-kissed city include the world's fastest roller-coaster at Ferrari World (the world's biggest indoor theme park), a visit to the magnificent Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque and a thrilling desert safari in 4x4's to a traditional Bedouin camp including camel riding, sand boarding and BBQ. To book call (01) 514 0328, log onto www.thomascook.ie or visit your local travel agent.



REVVY FOR SOME FUN — Ferrari World

Florida holds the key to a top trip



MAKE A SPLASH — The Rosen Inn

● American Holidays have released their brand new 2014 Florida brochure. Inside you will find exciting new park attractions, fabulous new hotels, self-catering accommodation and Orlando homes — giving you added value to make your Florida holiday the best ever.

● The Rosen Inn Pointe Orlando on International Drive is fantastic value, with kids aged nine years and under enjoying free breakfast and/or dinner when accompanied by paying adults.

A family holiday of two adults and two children staying at the Rosen Inn Pointe Orlando starts from just €589pp for travel in May 2014.

● Fancy staying in Disney World itself? Book by November 5 for all 2014 travel dates (except Easter) and receive the Disney Quick Service Dining Plan free of charge!

● You and your family can enjoy a six-night stay at the three-star Disney Caribbean Beach from €989pp or at the four-star Disney Animal Kingdom Lodge from €1199pp. Prices include flights and theme park tickets.

● Call into American Holidays at 18-19 Duke St, Dublin 2 to pick up your Florida 2014 brochure today. You can also visit www.americanholidays.com or call 01 673 3840.

■ CONDE NAST TRAVELER has included The Lodge at Doonbeg, Co Clare, at number 20 in their top 100 Hotels & Resorts in the world, according to their annual Reader's Choice Awards survey. There was plenty of praise for its "stunning setting on a remote whitecapped bay and staff who are easily among the most welcoming in Ireland". For bookings at this top hotel, call 065 9055602 or email reservations@doonbeglodge.com

■ JUST OUTSIDE THE HERITAGE village of Slane, in Co Meath, Tankardstown House (inset left) has been named the AA Ireland Guest Accommodation of the Year for 2013/2014. The



Georgian mansion is set in 80 acres of tranquil parkland. Find the outdoor hot tub tucked away in the walled garden, go for a cycle or curl up by the fire with a good book and a glass of bubbly.

Enjoy a seven-course tasting menu in the two-AA Rosette restaurant and breakfast next morning. This Digital Detox deal is available from €130pps. See www.tankardstown.ie for more.