

Hotel Review



The Ebrington in the Waterside area of Derry, with cosy rooms (below), is a great spot to unwind. PICTURES: PETER BRUCE PHOTOGRAPHY

Derry delight

There's something very relaxing about walking across a footbridge over a river into a city in the morning – seeing the views slowly unfold before you, as clock towers and spires get bigger, rather than suddenly opening a door onto a noisy street.

I discovered this after checking into The Ebrington on the Waterside side of Derry, a brand new hotel which is near to the action but away from the city hubbub. A 10-minute walk across the Peace Bridge gets you set up with fresh air and views as you approach the walled city.

Staying in a hotel on this quieter side of the River Foyle is now possible thanks to the opening in July of the hotel on Ebrington Square, a former army barracks originally built in the 1840s. The barracks closed in 2003 and the square reopened in 2011, along with the 234m footbridge connecting to the city. "It's actually very nice to walk across at night too," says manager Gary McDonald.

Arrival & Location

The hotel is off the main road, so away from traffic, and arriving in, I notice the feeling of open space all around. People are strolling among the lovely restored buildings or soaking up the sun over coffee outside the redbrick Bakery (thebakeryebrington.com). There's a large open-air car park (£6 per night) and plenty of space for set-down.

The hotel faces onto Ebrington Square and the barracks' old parade grounds, with the river beyond. Part of the property, including the reception and restaurant, is actually in a modern building which links two former barracks buildings, the Clocktower (former dormitories) and the captain's house, now the Corner House Pub and Lounge. The reception is bright, thanks to large glass doors and windows, and the welcome friendly. **7/10**

Service & Style

The Ebrington is just four weeks old when I stay. I'm expecting glitches, but don't notice any. Service is a great balance between professional and friendly; from reception to spa, staff seem genuinely delighted to welcome visitors.

The spa is my first stop after check-in. It's based around a hydro-pool with bubble beds and powerful jets. The smallish spa pool is more for relaxation than swimming, especially when the jets are going – but it's a relaxing space. (I'm surprised to see some guests using phone cameras – this isn't the hotel's fault, but many don't allow it for privacy reasons). There's also a sauna and steam room.

I love the hotel's scent – a mix of gorse, oak and cashmere. It was specially created and is pumped into public areas like the lobby and drawing room, and is also in its toi-

The city's new £15.5m hotel is putting a former barracks on the map as an urban destination, says Yvonne Gordon, and it's got a slick spa and its own signature scent, too...



letries, so it's like you carry it with you during the day when out and about (you can buy lotions and diffusers from the spa). Price-wise, massages start from £55 for 25 mins, with facials (from £95) and guests get 10pc off. **8/10**

The Rooms

Eighty-nine rooms are located either in the modern wing or the restored Clocktower side of the hotel – where, once inside, there's no real hint of its past life as a barracks. Wood panels on the walls give rooms a heritage feel and earthy colours like greens and oranges add a touch of cosy personality. There are four suites, four accessible rooms, and a mix of other room types, 33 with river views. Windows in the Clocktower side of the house are smaller than

the modern side, but a small window seat gives character.

I love seeing eco-friendly touches like recyclable cardboard water containers and large refillable toiletries in the rooms, though I'd like less single-use plastic elsewhere on things like hotel slippers or water cups in the spa. Bathrooms are compact and my shower has a rainfall option. The hairdryer was great, and other touches I liked were the generous desk space, a kettle with barista coffee bags, ice bucket and decent bathrobes. There was great lighting and soundproofing (no hearing next door's TV), but I did find the air con noisy and it kept switching itself off.

My tip? Ask for a river-facing room on the second floor (in either building) for the best view of the River Foyle and the Peace Bridge. **7/10**

Food & Drink

The Oak Room restaurant, a large bright space with views across the square, is headed up by chef Noel McMeel (formerly of Lough Erne Resort), so standards are high.

There's a focus on local and seasonal – with starters like Lough Neagh smoked eel with Armagh apple and Comber Potato, or Killybegs hake with roast celeriac, sea herbs, citrus and seaweed creamed sauce. I enjoy a smoked salmon starter and an excellent pork fillet main which appeals to a sweet tooth with glazed beetroot, a caramelised pear and confit carrot (two courses £36) with a glass of wine (£6.75).

Breakfast is in the same room, with a large buffet or dishes like high protein options to order. The Corner House Pub and Lounge is a cosy space with a gastropub menu (sandwiches from £12, beef burgers, buttermilk chicken or curry from £15 to £18 and steaks from £29) with a pint of draft beer coming in at £5.30. **8/10**

The bottom line

This four-star deluxe has a luxury feel and is a great addition to Derry. As well as a relaxing foodie and spa base for those on city breaks, I noticed some golfers wandering around and in the spa. The hotel gives a nice option to those who might be playing Royal Portrush or Ballyliffin and traditionally may have driven across Donegal or to Belfast in search of some pampering. **7.5/10**

Insider tip

There's a small secluded roof terrace between the two buildings on the second floor, for great night views of the city.

Local 101

The Walled City Brewery next door has a gastropub for lunch and dinner, plus brewery tours, beer tastings, beer masterclasses and a gin school. walledcitybrewery.com

Rates

Executive king rooms start at £140 B&B. Yvonne was a guest of the hotel. theebringtonhotel.com

The rating

7.5/10