

# The Sunday Business Post



**M**ud-spattered and victorious, riding high and noble on their mounts, the 40 riders and dogs follow the hunt along the backroads of Dunboyne, Co Meath. Further on, we meet more riders – teenagers this time, out for a casual Sunday trot.

It's hard to believe all this resplendent Irish country life is happening only a 15-minute drive from the suburban mecca that is Blanchardstown Shopping Centre. And if, when you're parked up and getting your weekend papers at the village Eurospar, your SatNav tells you you've arrived at **Dunboyne Castle Hotel**, don't be alarmed: the hotel is just around the corner.

The hotel exterior, with its modern addition to the Georgian house built on the site of the original castle, belies the comfort inside. The lounge area is cosy yet airy, with comfortable seating, a small bar to the rear and paintings of horses all around.

Off this area, there is a terrace and the private drawing room where we took Mint Afternoon Tea. This included a delicious selection of sandwiches as well as mint meringue pie, peppermint cake and a mint panna cotta. The period room – decorated in muted yellows, creams and gold – is an ideal private space for a party of up to 50 people.

For a Saturday in late February, **Dunboyne Castle Hotel** and Spa is extremely busy, with a constant quiet hum of activity. Accents come from the North, the US and nearby Dublin and guests are a mix of young couples, groups of friends quietly celebrating birthdays, a Christening party taking place in the Cellar Bar downstairs and family groups enjoying dinner.

The busyness of the foyer is echoed at executive chef John Nagle's Ivy Restaurant. I imagine that it caters not only for the guests of the 145 rooms, but also for a sizeable population of locals.

The Ivy is large (it's where guests have breakfast), but it is split by room dividers – a technique other hotels might do well to emulate as it reduces noise

## FIVE THINGS TO DO IN MEATH

**Tayto Park:** as if Europe's longest wooden rollercoaster wasn't enough of a draw, life-sized Ice Age mammals, a monstrous Easter egg scavenger hunt, a vintage carousel, and a new attraction that will require seafaring feet have been added to the park's line-up. Now open for the season. Dunboyne, Co Meath. See [taytopark.ie](http://taytopark.ie).

**Brú na Bóinne visitor centre:** the starting point for access to the impressive megalithic passage tomb monuments at Newgrange and Knowth is a worthwhile stop-off in itself. Transfers to the sites are by minibus from the visitor centre. Donore, Co Meath. See [heritageireland.ie](http://heritageireland.ie).

**Trim Castle:** take a tour of the grounds of the largest Anglo-Norman castle in Ireland, which was constructed by Hugh de Lacy and his son Walter. It comprises a massive, three-storied Keep which is cruciform in shape and gets very busy – so book ahead. Trim Town Centre, Co Meath. See [heritageireland.ie](http://heritageireland.ie).

**Irish Military War Museum:** drive a World War II tank and experience trench warfare at this new museum which puts in context Ireland's part in the two world wars of the last century. There's a collection of Allied and Axis military vehicles, as well as a chance to view an array of decommissioned weapons. Complete with a special 1916 section. Collon, Co Meath. See [imwm.ie](http://imwm.ie).

**Lough Crew adventure centre:** choose between a half- or full-day at the adventure centre set in the grounds of this beautiful stately home. Activities include archery, assault course, climbing wall and the mysterious crannog challenge. There's a fine restaurant and beautiful gardens to explore too. Oldcastle, Co Meath. See [loughcrew.com](http://loughcrew.com).



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Right: the hotel's master bedroom

Below right: the spa; a typically tasty dish at chef John Nagle's Ivy Restaurant

and enhances atmosphere.

My starter of scallops and main course of wild halibut were delightfully fresh, served on black plates which enhanced the pop of colour provided by their accompaniments: easy on both the eye and the palate.

Service was friendly and attentive, with the staff showing a good knowledge of the food and wine alongside a decent sense of humour.

Friendliness was again the order of the day at the four-storey Seoid Spa. The Peppermint and Seaweed Sugar Glow treatment is a 55 minute exfoliating full body scrub with scalp massage uses organic Voya products – great for detoxing the skin and moisturising after exfoliation.

The hotel often has deals on treatments which include full use of the thermal suite facilities – laconium (dry heat treatment room), herbal sauna and outdoor jacuzzi.

Just a short hop from Dublin, **Dunboyne Castle Hotel** was a bit of a revelation. It's so close that city dwellers can be back home in no time after their stay, while visitors from outside Dublin will find its proximity to Dublin Airport, the National Aquatic Centre and the Zoo a draw.

*The Mint Twist Package this May includes afternoon tea, spa treatment and one night B&B and costs from €160 pp based on two sharing. **Dunboyne Castle Hotel** and Spa, Dunboyne, Co Meath. Call 01-8013500 or see [dunboynecastlehotel.com](http://dunboynecastlehotel.com)*

