

## PLACES

# Away with the fairies in Dunshaughlin



Families will have a splashing time at the Rathbeggan Lakes Adventure Park which sits on 22 acres in the Tolka Valley in Dunshaughlin

## MEATH BARRY EGAN

**W**E'VE been to Northern Carolina's Lake Lure — where *The Last of the Mohicans* was partly filmed — Lake Garda in Northern Italy and Lake Geneva between France and Switzerland. They were all spectacularly beautiful. Be that as it may, and on a much, much, much, much smaller scale, Rathbeggan Lakes adventure park, on a mere 22 acres in the Tolka Valley in Dunshaughlin, Co Meath, provided us with a fantastic afternoon out in the open-air.

To call it a lake might be stretching it a bit, but we enjoyed ourselves by, and on, the Rathbeggan Lakes, courtesy of the Swan Paddle Boats and fabulous Bouncy Fun Zone.

We had a lovely picnic on the estate's extensive picnic benches, followed by a magical mystery journey aboard The Rathbeggan Express Train to the Pet Farm.

Apologies in advance for being a Daddy Bore but my baby daughter blissfully whiled away an hour of wide-eyed excitement feeding rabbits and watching chickens and other little creatures run around.

Afterwards we made the windy trek, up and down little hills — past Stone Age-y settlements with replicas that included an ogham stone, a stone-age camp, a crannog, standing stone circle, a passage grave, a ringfort, a holy well and more — to The Fairy Garden.

Personally, I enjoyed this almost as much as my little daughter did. Sitting there with the two-year-old,

my mind was suddenly lost in that William Butler Yeats poem: *Faeries, come take me out of this dull world/ For I would ride with you upon the wind/ Run ... And dance upon the mountains like a flame.*

Equally, as Emilia ran about pulling pictures of magical beings off the side of trees in this little ravine, my mind was just as lost in Richard Dawkins's wisdom about how "we cannot, of course, disprove God, just as we can't disprove Thor, fairies, leprechauns and the Flying Spaghetti Monster".

I could have sworn my two-year-old child expressed vague existential dissatisfaction when I told her that we had to leave The Fairy Garden and go home.

Her vague existential dissatisfaction, however, was lessened somewhat when she saw that 'home' for the next three nights was the rather glamorous penthouse suite of Dunboyne Castle. She had a massive space in which to run about and throw her toys with abandon.

Meanwhile, mummy and daddy had a separate dining room and living room to enjoy, with delish room service and adult treats such as sipping cocktails in bed and watching movies, while Emilia slept in her cot and dreamt of ultra-small imaginary beings of human form that have sweet, magical powers.

I have to say that Dunboyne Castle (a place I had never heard of before) was an absolute joy to stay in, not least because it is a mere 35 minutes from Dublin. It is well worth the drive.

Their Seoid Spa was a beautiful haven from the world, and, as it turned out, *me*: my wife pampered herself there amid their very swish, state-of-the-art facilities over three floors, with big thermal suite and hy-



Take the children to Tayto Park

drotherapy pool. She had a Self-Discovery Radiance Facial followed by a balneotherapy bath with the aid of Voya Aromatherapy salts one day, and a massage the day after.

I took the baby for a walk around the hotel's extensive grounds. It was wet.

So I put her in her welly boots and let her tramp around the muddy grass like Peppa Pig. Daddy Pig (me) trotted after her. There's something about this part of Ireland — the pristine air, the clarity of the light in the mornings — that makes it so special.

Afterwards we had afternoon tea and people-watched until mummy re-emerged from her swish treatments looking suitably radiant after her Self-Discovery Radiance Facial.

We then drove to Ashbourne down the road, to spend the rest of the afternoon at Tayto Park, theme park for children of all ages. This was anathema to the spiritual ab fab purism of massages with fancy names, but running after the baby at the zoo was a different type of self-discovery.

In particular, peering in at the Goeldi's monkey and the squirrel monkey, as well as the ocelot and meerkats and, of course, the Amur

tiger... to say nothing of walking through the ice valley with its actual-size prehistoric animals which move and make scary noises as you pass gingerly by them.

We didn't go on any ride, because Emelia was too small and I'm a scared-y custard about heights and speed; still we did have a cracking afternoon and a nice lunch too (no, not Tayto crisp sambos either.)

Later that evening, at Dunboyne Castle's award-winning restaurant, The Ivy, we had a beautiful dinner — overseen by executive chef John Nagle, who has two AA Rosettes and a listing in the Michelin Guide, no less.

Grilled sirloin steak with burnt orange mayonnaise, confit of shallot and fondant potatoes for me, plus roasted supreme of chicken with baby vegetables, pearl barley and chorizo broth for my wife (and yes, the baby had some of mama's chicken for her dinner, too.)

It was beautiful local produce and a great meal. Again, it is worth the 35-minute drive from Dublin just for dinner at The Ivy (provided, of course, you have someone who isn't drinking, to drive you there and back.)

We took our wine up to our suite and, after we got the baby off to sleep, finished the rest of the bottle watching a movie on the big TV. It was bliss.

The next morning, we had a leisurely breakfast in bed (with the baby between us) and imagined what it would be like to be here all the time; with Swan Paddle Boats on lakes, Bouncy Fun Zones, and parks called Tayto.

By the time we were stuck in rush-hour traffic back in Dublin city, that seemed like a dream stolen by a particularly naughty fairy.

## GETTING THERE



The Indulgence Escape package is available from €270 per room and includes an overnight stay, bottle of Prosecco on arrival, three-course meal, full Irish breakfast the following morning to your room with newspaper, thermal suite access and a leisurely late check out at 2pm the following morning. Dunboyne Castle Hotel & Spa, Dunboyne, Co Meath. Sunday Sanctuary with overnight stay on Sunday night: stay in Dunboyne Castle Hotel and Spa with breakfast, dinner and a one-hour spa treatment each from €145 per person sharing. [www.dunboyncastlehotel.com](http://www.dunboyncastlehotel.com) or call (01) 801 3500



Dunboyne Castle Hotel and Spa