



Outsider Escapes

If you're looking to get away from it all for a few days but want to combine that break with some fun in the great outdoors, look no further. Three of our regular writers, **Vanessa Lawrenson**, **Heather Irvine** and photographer **Peter McCabe** took off to different spots to suss them out. Here's what they had to say.

Blessingbourne self-catering apartments

Vanessa Lawrenson

LOCATED IN FIVEMILETOWN, Co Tyrone, these five self-catering apartments are the perfect Outsider escape. Anyone, from couples, groups of girls, lads or active families will just love living on this 550-acre historic country estate. Proprietors Nick and Colleen Lowry are fantastic hosts, even making sure that there's homemade wheaten bread, jam and shortbread in you apartment.

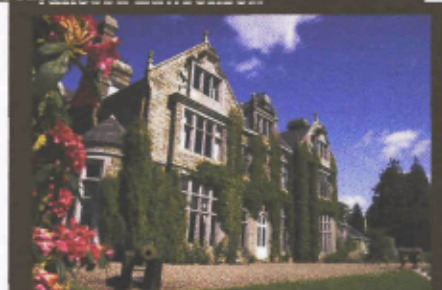
The apartments are set in the courtyard of a working farm, so this place is just perfect for kids. Parents

can relax at the tables in the courtyard with a beverage and the paper, while the kids race around with the local kids and play with the dogs, peacocks, goats and cats. If you have your own pet, they too are welcome, and the Lowries have welcomed everything from a hamster to a horse.

Jump on your bike and within seconds you are on the Blessingbourne mountain bike trails (see p22). You can also go walking, fishing and horse riding. Be sure to have a peek into the Carriage and Costume Museum at the collection of carriages and coaches, buggies, penny farthings, a genuine Romany caravan and old farm machinery.

At night-time, it's only a short walk down to the family-owned Valley Hotel, which has smashing mountain-biker-sized portions of food. If you are still up for it, you can boogie on down until the wee small hours in the massive nightclub.

For more details, rates and special offers, tel. +44-28895-21188, web: www.blessingbourne.com or search for Blessingbourne on Facebook. Two-night stays start from stg£199 in low season.



Castlecourt Hotel, Westport

Peter McCabe

I recently spent a week travelling and photographing my way across Galway. Each night saw me sleeping in B&Bs as I made my way to Co Mayo. I was meeting the family in my favourite town of Westport so it was time to spoil ourselves in the four-star **Castlecourt hotel**.

Located a short two-minute walk from the heart of town, this family-

friendly hotel has attention to detail without being pretentious and has something for everyone. For the more adventurous, surfing, cycling and hill walking are mere minutes away. If pampering is your thing the hotel's Spa Sula will take you away from the stress and strains of the world. My two year old took his first strokes to becoming an Olympic swimmer in the hotel's pool. (Mental note, must not pressure him)

After a night dining on fine food and fine wine in the hotel's Orchard restaurant, I relaxed later that evening in the room's jacuzzi reading a leaflet on the Sea to Summit challenge that takes place on 12 Nov 2011. Will or won't I, I thought? Take pictures of the competitors that is! You hardly thought I'd compete!

For more information and rates, visit: www.castlecourthotel.ie



SurfHolidays.com – Casa Offshore

Heather Irvine

If the idea of spending hours on end in the chilly Irish waters perfecting your surf technique doesn't quite float your boat, then why not think about heading away to sunnier climes with SurfHolidays.com?

One of their finest offerings is Casa Offshore, in Lagos, Portugal. Situated a couple of kilometres outside the historic town of Lagos, this villa provides the perfect getaway for both solo travellers and groups. The four-bedroom luxury surf house can sleep 13 with private, twin and shared en suite rooms. It also has a large garden, complete with hot tub and lounging area to relax in after a long day surfing.

A week costs €425 in high season and just €285 in low season. This price includes accommodation, breakfast, lunch, five days of surf lessons (two lessons per day)

and the loan of all necessary equipment. SurfHolidays.com caters for both beginners and intermediate surfers. Each day the jeeps will drive you to different beaches depending on the swell in each area.

For further information, tel. (01) 4822828; email: info@surfholidays.com; web: www.SurfHolidays.com

