



# Great escape

The words spring and break took on a new meaning as Biddy White Lennon drove from north Wexford to **Westport**.

**A** strong wind buffeted the car and there were even flurries of snow. We arrived in dire need of pampering and TLC.

The golden couple were going on a weekend spa escape at the **Westport Plaza Resort and Spa Sula**. Arriving in dire need of the promised pampering, fine food and TLC, I'm glad to report the Plaza delivered in fine style.

I'd wondered how a resort could be located a two minutes' stroll from the central square of the town. Grouped around a pretty courtyard are two hotels, the spa and a good-sized swimming pool. The resort is owned and run by the Corcoran family. The complex grew from a B&B (on a large site) run by the matriarch of the family.

The B&B morphed into The Courtyard, a large four-star family-friendly hotel with a pleasant bistro-style restaurant and a lunchtime carvery in the bar.

The second generation developed the swimming pool, the Dome (which sports no less than three dance floors), the state-of-the-art Sula Spa and the four-star **Westport Plaza Hotel**. The latter's cool contemporary style is enhanced by some fabulous artwork (one of the family has a special interest

in art and handmade crafts).

Bedrooms are luxurious and spacious, many with balconies overlooking The Courtyard and some the Italian-style roof garden.

The Plaza offers fine dining in the restaurant Merlot and the Plaza bar has an all-day fairly priced bar menu and, if that sort of thing floats your boat, an extensive cocktail list.

Even in these harsh times when visitors are thin on the ground and many hotels all over the country are in deep trouble, **Westport** and its environs has a lot to offer and heaves with visitors in the summer months. In the low season, with half-a-dozen hotels in the town, the need to be creative and focused on offering good value to attract business is obvious.

The Plaza offers quite a range of two- to five-day breaks with bowling, bridge, dancing and spa escapes. Some of these themed breaks are targeted at "golden years" – the hospitality industry has grown coy of mentioning a qualifying age and golden has become a delicate way of saying you are anywhere between the very late summer and autumn of your allotted span.

Gold festivals offer five days' B&B and dinner at the most competitive price.

A number of these are run throughout the low season and the price includes lots of organised activities from cookery demonstrations to dancing in the Dome. Last but by no means least are the week and weekend spa escape breaks. I went as a spa escaper; my other half on a plain weekender.

On the first night we contented ourselves with a stroll around the lively town of **Westport**. (Walk, don't drive if possible, as the town's one-way system can snarl up traffic in an alarming way.) Before dinner we had a long soak in the jacuzzi bath in our room and opted to have what turned out to be an excellent dinner in the hotel's Merlot restaurant.

The menu was good. We particularly liked the fresh seafood and local cheeses. The servings were generous, the dishes attractively presented and correctly cooked, and the service genuinely friendly and professional.

Some years ago, at a time when installing hotel spas was beginning to catch on as an off-season and wet weather attraction, I was commissioned to write 10 monthly articles for a magazine. I went once every month to every corner of the island to experience and report on what each spa had to offer. By the end of the year my body was massaged and polished within an inch of its life, my skin was brightened and tightened. I thought I'd seen and experienced all the variations on spa treatments that exist, but Sula Spa had a few surprises in store.

## ZONING OUT

I had the comfort zone facial. The spa had just launched a new range of products and delivery style. Cleansed, exfoliated, soothed, moisturised, I also got a full face, head, shoulders, neck and arm massage. This was a genuine-

ly rejuvenating experience, leaving my vintage laugh-lines relaxed to the point I almost began to miss them and my skin looking like a spring chicken rather than a mature mother hen.

Seriously, though, this is as good a facial as I have ever had. Hands-on treatments are only part of the pleasure **Spa Sula** has to offer. There are a great number of interesting options from relaxing in their Orbit bed (it feels like being in a cocoon made of white paper), to a stimulating Balneotherapy. **CL**



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: The presidential suite, restaurant and spa at the **Westport Plaza Hotel**.