

# After lockdown, we all need a little pampering

You deserve to try at least one of these new hotels, writes **Catherine Murphy**

**W**hile the country has been in lockdown, the hotel business has been busy with refurbishments, relaunches, and even some brand-new openings. We've checked out the freshest new stays across the island that have great offers for November and December.

## **1 WREN URBAN NEST, ANDREW'S LANE, DUBLIN 1**

Tucked into the old Andrew's Lane Theatre site in the heart of Dublin city centre, Wren is aptly named, with 137 compact bedrooms (aka 'snug' and 'cosy' nests) over nine floors, and the capital's attractions right on its doorstep.

This capsule hotel is also tagged as Ireland's most sustainable place to stay; it produces net zero carbon and complies with World Green Building Council standards. Thanks to the work of sustainable building designer Patrick Kavanagh, the Wren burns no fossil fuels, recycles and heats air using thermal wheels and operates a zero-waste kitchen under the watchful eye of head chef Renato Palmer.

Think of it as no-guilt luxury.

Wren opens smack in the middle of the debate about Dublin's arts venues being replaced by hotels – but, in fairness, it does pay homage to Andrew's Lane Theatre, with its ALT space and it plans to be a space for the arts.

"We want the hotel to have a cultural heartbeat," says general manager Phoe-

be Fairbairn, a Bondi Beach woman who moved to Ireland 15 years ago and has a background in festivals like Bodytonic.

"We want it to be a place where people meet, eat, sleep and even create – so watch out for acoustic gigs and other cultural events. Wren is a calm, elegant space, but also a bit rock'n roll.

"Our bedrooms are small – we don't hide away from that – but they've got lots of smart features, fridges stocked with Irish treats, and really comfy beds, perfect for a busy city visit."

*Run by Moran Hospitality. Introductory rates, from €99 per room; wrenhotel.ie*

## **2 THE DEAN, GALWAY CITY**

You might be thinking "oh no, not another branded hotel", but The Dean Galway general manager Cian Ó Broin would convince you otherwise.

Set on the site of the old Connaught laundry, less than 100m from Eyre Square, the newest Dean arrival is full of stories and character. As well as featuring a two-storey building dating back to the 1830s, the hotel incorporates a railway tunnel from the old Galway to Clifden line, which operated from the 1890s up until 1935.

Fast-forward to December 2021 and guests staying in this 101-bedroom hotel can take part in power-gym classes in a section of the preserved tunnel, then they can peruse 300 works of art by local artists, admire views of Galway city from

Sophie's Rooftop Restaurant or relax in Peg's Bar – formerly Hogan's pub, a favourite hang-out of former Galway GAA player and manager Bosco McDermott, and a stop-off for every musician passing through Galway.

The branding and features may be familiar from the Dean's sibling hotels in Dublin and Cork – turntables and vinyl, Marshall amps, and Smeg fridges in bedrooms. But the design incorporates local features – the hotel facade, for example, has been built to resemble the stone walls of Connemara.

The Dean will bring the first Elephant & Castle Restaurant to Galway and is home to a penthouse, rates for which will be "reassuringly expensive", says Cian. *Opens on a phased basis from December 9, with lead-in rates from €150 per room; thedean.ie*

### **3 THE RABBIT HOTEL & RETREAT, CO ANTRIM**

Set in affluent Templepatrick in Ballyclare, The Rabbit Hotel & Retreat may be named after local wildlife, but it aims to bring a touch of boho glamour to rural Antrim, especially in its 'relaxation burrow'.

While the hotel – part of the Galgorm Collection – opened a few months ago, its spa is brand new and promises a laidback Balearic vibe with a playlist to match. Conceptually, it has its eye firmly on a younger market, with a halotherapy salt chamber, a Swedish sauna, Roman bath, and relaxation cabanas. It also offers private pool parties for up to 50 people, with dinner, champagne bubbles and DJ sets. Millennial pool-side wedding party anyone?

Just a 20-minute drive from Belfast city centre, it has a lakeside setting with 33 Scandi-inspired bedrooms in four styles – luxe, snug, cosy and attic – equipped with Dyson hairdryers, Nespresso machines and in some cases, outdoor bathtubs.

As well as opening The Rabbit Hotel, the Galgorm Collection has just announced a £10m luxury outdoor accommodation investment plan at the Galgorm Spa & Golf Resort in Ballymena, phase one of a £30m project that has introduced shepherd huts and cottage suites in its 'secret meadow'. *The Rabbit Hotel & Retreat rates from £180 B&B per room midweek (approximately €213); rabbitohotel.com; galgorm.com*

### **4 THE LANSDOWNE HOTEL, KENMARE, CO KERRY**

Irish TV's most popular brothers – Francis and John Brennan – drove past the iconic

Lansdowne building almost every day of their lives, en route to their five-star property at The Park, Kenmare. When the historic building came on the market, they decided to buy it and breathe new life into an old concept – the rural town hotel.

Dating back to 1790, the Lansdowne was the town residence of William Petty Fitzmaurice, second Earl of Shelburne. Today it's a 28-bed hotel which combines old-style chic with a modern flourish. Its LK Bar and LK Cafe are buzzing, its bedrooms feature Francis Brennan The Collection linens, and the ethos is encouragingly sustainable.

It's also minutes from Kenmare's pubs, restaurants, galleries and crafts shops, and makes a great base for coastal walks, hiking the MacGillycuddy's Reeks and exploring beautiful Gleninchaquin Park.

The Lansdowne opened in July but has a new treat coming soon – in spring it will open a stylish pub, complete with snugs, in what was formerly the Poet's Bar.

*In November/December, midweek rates, €135 per room, based on two people sharing, and there's a 'stay two nights get one free' offer available; lansdownekenmare.com*

### **5 ERRIS COAST HOTEL, CO MAYO**

Stonemason Michael Coyle left Mayo over 20 years ago "with a chisel in one hand and a hammer in the other", settling in California where he established a masonry company. But he never forgot his native county, nor the hotel in Geesala where members of his family had worked and he held his wedding reception.

When the old Talbot Lodge hotel came on the market, Michael convinced his friend John Joyce to come on board his Wild Atlantic Way project.

The old hotel was completely gutted, and on November 12 the new Erris Coast Hotel will open its doors, bringing welcome employment to the area around Belmullet. One feature retained in the 31-bed hotel is the Millington Bar which, according to general manager Liam McElhinney, houses the fireplace by which JM Synge sat as he wrote *The Playboy of the Western World*.

According to Liam, the hotel is designed to fit in with the local landscape and is just minutes from some of north Mayo's most beautiful beaches and awe-inspiring scenery. It's also close to Carne golf club (where actor Bill Murray has just invested in life membership), the Erris Loop Head walk, and Blacksod Lighthouse – from where



lighthouse keeper Ted Sweeney's June 3, 1944, weather report delayed the D-Day landings by 24 hours and changed the course of World War II.  
Introductory rates, €120 per room (B&B);  
[erriscoasthotel.ie](http://erriscoasthotel.ie)



Left, the Wren in Dublin city is no-guilt luxury; below, from left, the 'reassuringly expensive' penthouse apartment at The Dean Galway; pool parties at the Rabbit Hotel in Antrim; the bar at the Brennan brothers' new Lansdowne Hotel in Kenmare



Views to die for from the Erris Coast Hotel