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2 BALLYFIN DEMESNE *Ireland*

The lavish restoration of Ireland's most significant Regency country house was a work of devotion, bringing to the Irish market a gloriously, unapologetically luxurious hotel that, a year and a half on, is still garnering awards and prizes. An hour's drive from Dublin in County Laois, Ballyfin makes for a perfect weekend bolthole. You can surround yourself with 600 acres of walled parkland, glades of bluebells and ancient, fern-filled woodland. The interiors have the feel of a private house and, despite the formal decor, the warmth of a true Irish welcome. Roaring log fires crackle at both ends of the library. The salon features Chippendale mirrors, parquet floors and stucco ceilings. Antiques, carved griffins, de Gournay wallpapers and oil paintings lead up to 15 stately bedrooms, many with four-poster beds and huge bathrooms. Here you can soak in a hot-tub with views of the lake, Irish whiskey in hand, and restore and revive flagging spirits.

Ballyfin Demesne (+353 (0)5787 55866; www.ballyfin.com), from £610 a room a night full board.