

# Home & Away with Robert Walshe



MANTIS, a family-run collection of award-winning, privately-owned, five-star properties is now the only hotel group in the world to have a presence on all seven continents. The group has signed with a collection of unique bush camps in Australia, called Wild Bush Luxury, giving Mantis its seventh continental footprint. Mantis prides itself on working with hotels that represent the finest example of their kind and celebrate the culture, gastronomy, architecture and nature of the locations in which they are found. Continuing to expand their brand under the vision of "unearthing the exceptional" this year has also seen Mantis embark on the development of a five star hotel on the island of St. Helena, in the South Atlantic Ocean, 2,000km from the nearest major land mass. The business is also developing into other areas having identified an opportunity in the adventure travel market. [www.mantiscollection.com](http://www.mantiscollection.com)

## Weekend Hotspot – Ballyfin- Co Laois

[www.relaischateaux.com/ballyfin](http://www.relaischateaux.com/ballyfin)

Ballyfin is the finest stately home in Ireland and in its restored state the result is simply outstanding. By the turn of this century it was on the point of collapse. Restoring it to pristine condition has taken a decade. Steeped in Irish history was ancestral home in succession to the O'Mores, the Crosbys, the Poles, the Wellesley-Poles – the family of the Duke of Wellington – and later the Cootes. The Coote family was descended from Sir Charles Coote, an Elizabethan adventurer who came to Ireland in 1601. The house itself was built in the 1820s for another Sir Charles Coote to designs by the great Irish architects Richard and William Morris.

Relinquished by its Anglo-Irish owners during the 1920s Ballyfin spent the next 80 years as a school before new owner Fred Krehbiel, a Chicago-based electronics magnate with his Kerry born wife embarked on Ballyfin's meticulous restoration. The project has taken nine years – significantly longer than it took to build the house in the first place. Every single aspect of the house from the roof down required remedial attention. After this emergency work, a process of redecoration began with carefully selected paint finishes, papers and textiles. Conservation experts were called in to examine the mansion's crumbling sandstone façade and determined that 60 percent of the stone needed to be replaced—a two-year project in itself. A 500-foot-long underground tunnel was installed, running from the estate's 18th-century stables to the mansion's basement, so as not to blight the landscape with commercial vehicles.

Sir Christopher Coote on a visit to Ballyfin offered to sell Krehbiel 17 of his family portraits so they could again grace the walls of Coote's ancestral home. The portraits are now installed in the Stair Hall, an ornate space with turquoise walls and a cantilevered staircase. London interior designer Colin Orchard oversaw the interiors with all the carpets, wallpapers and fabrics based on specific Regency designs.

The entrance hall contains an ornate mosaic floor brought back from the Grand Tour. The saloon and library are dominated by towering scagliola columns. The Gold Room takes its name from the gilded plaster ceiling and silk-covered walls.

The rotunda has an in-laid wooden floor inspired by the Alhambra Palace. Of the 15 guest rooms and suites, one of my favorite is



Ballyfin Demesne Co Laois.

the Westmeath room exquisitely decorated in richly patterned wallpaper with a wonderfully carved French bed positioned prominently in the centre of room. The Lady Caroline Coote Room is equally elegant perfectly reflects the interiors of the Empire period. All meals, snacks and coffees are included in the room rate and a wide choice of dining options is offered.

The cocktail hour at Ballyfin, ushers in dinner where you choose from the formality of the state dining room or the intimacy of the Van Der Hagen private room. Alternatively, something simpler can be served in the Library, the Bar or in the period conservatory.

New Yorker Ryan Murphy the new Head Chef arrived at Ballyfin from The Lowry Hotel in Manchester having previously been Chef de Cuisine at The Savoy's River Restaurant as part of the opening team. In addition to a stint at the Vineyard at Stockcross in Berkshire, his career as a chef has seen him further develop his varied restaurant and hotel experience in Austria Sweden & California. His creative food genius at Ballyfin is classical in style, the presentations elaborate with the offering remarkable. Those after a complete sense of theatre

might opt for dressing up in Georgian and Regency finery with the availability of the hotel's highly popular dressing-up suite packed with authentic period costumes, plus accompanying accessories, acquired from Chicago's Lyric Opera Company.

Once you're in historical character, Ballyfin's photographer will be on hand to capture the moment just before or during pre-dinner drinks with guests photographed either individually or in group shots. Costume hire is priced at €50 for ladies and €35 for gentlemen. The cost of musical and any other specific entertainment is available on request while the charge to hire a photographer is €250 (with all photos supplied on a disk to Ballyfin by the next morning). Wandering through the grounds, you come across walled gardens, grottos and



The Gold Room at Ballyfin.

a six-storey stone tower. The landscape, laid out in the mid-eighteenth century, is among the finest examples in Ireland of the natural style of gardening inspired by 'Capability' Brown. The hotel also features two beauty treatment rooms, a gym and indoor pool. Established in France in 1954, Relais & Châteaux' mission is to spread its 'art de vivre' across the globe by selecting outstanding character properties for its unique portfolio. Today, Relais & Châteaux has an exclusive collection of 520 of the finest charming hotels and restaurants in 60 countries across the world, four of which are located in Ireland: Ballyfin Demesne, Cliff House Hotel, Marfield House and Sheen Falls Lodge & Spa.

This outstanding quartet has joined the Relais & Châteaux family of elite hoteliers and exceptional chefs who share a common passion for their work and a personal commitment to making every guest's visit an unforgettable treat for the senses. Relais & Châteaux rates for Ballyfin start at Euros 1200 for rooms (975 in low season) and 1485 for suites all year-round. For full details on Ballyfin and all Relais & Châteaux properties. [www.relaischateaux.com/ballyfin](http://www.relaischateaux.com/ballyfin)

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## Home and Away Deal of the Week

Relax in style with an overnight stay in the Slieve Donard Resort and Spa in Newcastle from only £55pps\* including full Irish Breakfast. Guests can enjoy a wonderful nights' sleep on the hotel's new Cloud Beds. Book now and receive a £10 voucher per person for the Spa to be redeemed during your stay off a minimum one hour

treatment! And there's more, enjoy a complimentary bottle of New World Wine when you spend a minimum of £20pp in the magnificent Oak Restaurant. Guests can also avail of complimentary Wi-Fi in the public areas and parking at the hotel. Room upgrades are available on request. [www.hastingshotels.com](http://www.hastingshotels.com)



## Pet's Corner... with Kathleen Murray

# How to negotiate the beach in summer

WALKING in the summer is very different to walking in the winter. In the cold weather there are not so many beach goers. It's easier to pick a time and possibly not meet anyone during the course of the walk... or maybe just a few that you know already from being a beach walker.

In the summer it can be more hectic. There are children playing in the sand and in the water. There are games of frisby or football and worst of all for the dog walker.... there are picnics.

Lots of people are on holiday and take their dog with them

so there are unfamiliar dogs to get past as well. When you know a dog you know if it's friendly or not but if you meet a dog that you don't know then you don't know whether it will be friendly to you and your dog or attack you. The best way to stay safe and stay out of trouble on the beach in the summer (in general) is to start off in the right way. It all starts before you leave the house.

Take your dog out to the garden to do its toilet business. If it doesn't want to go then maybe try playing a game with it so that the excitement will make it stop in the middle of

the game and do it's business. Excitement is mostly what makes dogs go to the toilet on the beach. There is no need for a dog to go to the toilet at the beach in general but if you get caught out then it is vitally important that you clean up after your dog. There are little poop bags on a roll that attach to your lead that are very handy. You can buy them in a pet shop. Alternatively, you can just bring any plastic bag with you in your pocket. You may need to bring a couple just in case. It's your dog so it's your poo.

As there are still no bins at

many beaches you can put the bag in any public bin you find or take it home with you (which is disgusting and there should be no need to do that). This does not only apply to beaches. Anywhere you take your dog for a walk should be left the same way it was when you arrived. No rubbish and no poo.

There is nothing more upsetting or offensive to people than to see a dog go to the toilet on a grassy or paved area that is shared by others and then to see the owner just leave what fell out of the dogs behind lying on the road behind

them as if it was totally acceptable. Leaving poo lying around spreads diseases for animals and people alike. Pick up your dogs poo. People notice these things even though they may not say anything at the time to the person that walked off from the scene of the dump.

This is something that gives dogs a bad name. Back to the beach. Make sure your dog is calm when it gets out of the car, this may take a while in the beginning. Keep it on a lead if it is not 100% under your control. If it does everything you say then keep it beside you for the first 5 mins or so and then



■ Clean up your dog's business - pet shops sell poop bags.

give it permission to have a run around.

If you see another dog or a person out for a walk then call your dog back and put it on the lead until the other person has passed or just keep the dog beside you. Release it when the others have passed and then you and your dog will enjoy your walk and other people will feel respected.