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Real DESTINATION WEDDINGS





Ballyfin, County Laois, Ireland:

LIVE IN *Luxe,* YOUR OWN ESTATE

Words by Courtney Cox

As a diehard fan of the Emerald Isle, I went into my stay at Ballyfin Demesne in County Laois with the highest of expectations.

Luckily for me, this country-house-hotel (an hour outside Dublin and set at the foot of the Slieve Bloom Mountains) not only met my expectations, but far exceeded them. After eight years of meticulous restoration, the five-star Relais & Chateaux property reopened in 2011, with just 20 luxuriously appointed suites for the 600-acre property. The house dates back to the 1820s and is filled with priceless antiques, stunning architectural details and more than enough charming staff to make your destination wedding or honeymoon dreams a reality.

As soon as you pass through the moss-laden gates, you and your guests will feel as if you're traveling back in time. After cresting a curve in the road, Ballyfin, in all its Neoclassical glory, will come into view. The staff stands at the edge of the drive to greet each and every guest...giving you the feeling that you're arriving at your country home after a long time abroad. You and your guests will feel at home since you can come, go and do as you please thanks to the room rates including all meals, non-alcoholic beverages and activities.

After breakfast in the conservatory, spend the day exploring the house and surrounding grounds and gardens. Downton Abbey fans will rejoice and revel both at the chance to see how the other half lives and to spend a few days in their well-polished





shoes. True to a historic country house, activities abound in the form of horseback riding, carriage rides, fishing, shooting and much more. Visit in late April or early May to see the surrounding forests swathed in vibrant hues of bluebell purple.

For weddings, June through August are the most popular months and Ballyfin can accommodate up to 160 wedding guests. We recommend a rehearsal picnic in the shade of the tower – a folly of a medieval ruin built in the 1860s and meant to impress even the most astute of guests. For your ceremony, take your pick of gorgeous outdoor locations or exchange vows in the glow of the Gold Drawing Room or the drama of the Rotunda for smaller groups. For dinner, we envision candlelit, family-style dining on

the front drive overlooking the lake and in the shadow of Ballyfin's dramatic front. With so much space and so few guests, there are endless options for hosting an elegant wedding at Ballyfin.

With just 20 rooms, it's possible to buy-out Ballyfin for your exclusive use. Requiring a minimum two-night stay, you and 39 guests will have accommodations, activities and breakfast for €18,000 a night. Hosting a celebration at Ballyfin Demesne would be worthy of royalty, not only in appearance, but also in service. There's no doubt that each and every member of your wedding party would be treated as king or queen of this breathtaking estate.

Photos courtesy of (top to bottom, left to right): Courtney Cox (flat and 3rd) & Ballyfin (2nd)