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Articles by Jessica Colley

How Sweet It Is - Ireland's Sugar Loaf Mountain Palace

- By Jessica Colley



The fairytale forest of the Powerscourt Estate was lit by a bright twinkling of stars. Our twilight arrival to the 1,000-acre estate was a romantic beginning to an active weekend for two. This Irish country escape specializes in bringing guests back to nature – and we couldn't wait to stroll along the river by ancient trees, take a bike out for a leisurely cycle, and investigate the contents of a gourmet picnic basket. We would soon discover that the cuisine and country activities of Ireland have received a luxurious upgrade: Ritz-Carlton style.

The Garden of Ireland, County Wicklow, is home to this country retreat with 200 rooms including 124 suites. Located just 30 minutes south of the capital city of Dublin, The Ritz Carlton Powerscourt offers some of the most spacious accommodation in the country (rooms average over 700 square feet). Our mountain-view suite was Georgian inspired and stately; with soft blue and gold tones, a spacious dressing room, and a bathroom fit for a king. Settling into the drawing room with a selection of cheese and fruit, we began to unwind in a way that only the country can inspire.



Photographs can't do the Sugar Loaf Mountain justice. From our expansive balcony the peak resembled a

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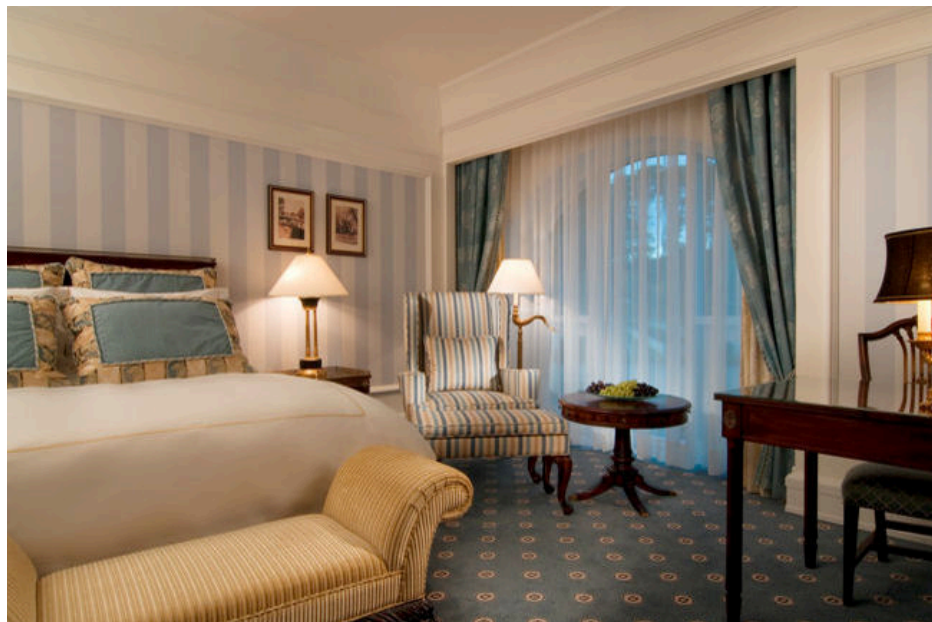


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Sir Richard Branson's private island paradise situated in the British Virgin Islands.



classic landscape painting. Set against the indigo sky, this view has been admired since the area was settled in the 12th century. A rich history is felt throughout the hotel, from antique photographs to an authentic Irish pub. McGill's is the perfect place for a nightcap – guests can embrace the local flavors and sip a pint of creamy Guinness or an Irish whiskey before bed.

The suite was flooded with sunlight the following morning. With one tap of the finger on our bedside keypad, (which also controls the lights, do not disturb status, and temperature) the curtains opened to reveal a golden glow. On this Saturday morning, we were eager as children to get outdoors and enjoy the sunshine and fresh air. After a romantic rainforest shower, we left the suite behind to begin our day with a Gordon Ramsay breakfast.



The Ritz Carlton Powerscourt boasts the only Gordon Ramsay restaurant in the country. While Dublin is home to many upscale eateries (including restaurants by Marco Pierre White and Patrick Guilbaud) the Powerscourt Estate is the single place in Ireland to sample Ramsay's creations. Over a carefree breakfast we feasted on artisanal Irish specialties including rich smoked salmon, nutty soda bread, and local cheeses. Through the French doors, the rolling countryside was tempting us outside. With one final sip of tea, we set out for one of the estate's most secluded locations.

The winding paths and rolling hills of the Powerscourt Estate beg to be explored on foot or bicycle. The concierge opened the gate to the private oasis of the River Walk, and we set off on a path towards the gurgling River Dargle. We strolled passed a field with grazing horses, an ancient stone house, and the first colorful buds of spring. A morning spent on the trails will work up an appetite, and the Ritz Carlton provides the perfect excuse for a break. Gourmet picnics bring a touch of indulgence to the tables beneath redwood trees along the River Walk.



Travelers can easily combine exploring this peaceful scenery with the bustle of neighboring Dublin. It is possible to spend the day horseback riding on the estate, and attend the theater in the evening. A bicycle concierge can arrange a personally-tailored excursion, and afterwards Dublin's boutiques and upscale department stores are a short drive away. However, many guests may never want to leave the Powerscourt

Estate at all – from a round of golf on one of the two 18-hole championship courses to exploring the Japanese garden or a 400-foot waterfall – your days will be full, rain or shine.

After our invigorating walk, the perfect reward was late-afternoon spa treatments. First we stopped in the plush Sugar Loaf Lounge to read the newspapers over afternoon tea, and then continued on to a private spa suite. We had some time to soak in a tub for two and enjoy the steam shower before our treatments. One hour later I could have fell blissfully asleep – and my massage hadn't even begun. After our treatments, ordering room service and staying in our fluffy robes crossed my mind, but we had reservations at Gordon Ramsay.



A refreshing glass of rosé began our 7-course Prestige menu. The celebrity chef's dishes were impressive from the start: pressed foie gras served with Waldorf salad, spiced bread, and grape gelato. Excellent head-waiter Greg Piekar paired wines for us throughout the evening. For this course, he expertly chose a sweet Gewuerztraminer from the Alsace to cut through the richness of the foie gras.

A signature dish of the English chef followed: lobster and salmon ravioli. These delicate, handmade ravioli were drizzled with a fragrant lemongrass sauce at the table. Snowflakes began to fall on the balcony outside as our main course of Hereford beef rib eye with potato fondant, poached quail's eggs, wild mushrooms, and Madeira sauce was served. The poached quail's egg was a decadent touch to the tender beef. These sophisticated dishes will convince even the most skeptical guest that the cuisine of Ireland has come of age.



Throughout the evening, the outstanding service consistently impressed. Cedric, Frenchman and resident cheese expert, wheeled over the cheese cart. A selection of fine Irish and French cheeses was served with local honey and apricot compote. After dessert, Petit Fours were brought to the table, and with the suggestion of the waiter, we had them sent upstairs. With the cozy dining room just steps away from our suite, we decided to savor this last treat in bed.

The Ritz Carlton Powerscourt offers the Ireland that foreigners long for: emerald green landscapes, the charming countryside, and refined yet locally-sourced food. Focused on Irish heritage and exquisite service, the Ritz is just like the Irish: friendly, welcoming, and soulful. A weekend was barely enough time to see it all: we

could have happily spent the week wandering along the trails, visiting nearby historical attractions, and hitting the golf course. Seduced by Powerscourt's charms, we wondered as we checked out if it was too soon to make another reservation.



Photo Tour: [The Ritz-Carlton Powerscourt, County Wicklow](#)

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Special Offer for Luxury Travel Magazine Readers:

The Ritz Carlton Powerscourt **'Peace of Mind' package** includes accommodations, daily breakfast at Gordon Ramsay for two, daily Internet access, Welcome glass of Guinness or soft drink, local calls, parking and up to three complimentary nights. The Ritz Carlton knows once you arrive you will want to stay longer – so with this package enjoy up to 3 complimentary nights:

Stay 3 Nights, Pay for 2
Stay 5 Nights, Pay for 3
Stay 7 Nights, Pay for 4

This package offers fantastic value and starts from EUR 250 per couple per night.

When to Go:

The mild weather in Ireland makes it possible to hit the golf course or hiking trail year-round. Travel to Ireland during May and June to experience days where sunshine lasts well into the evening. To see the spectacular fall foliage, plan your trip for September, October, or November.

How to Get There:

The Ritz Carlton Powerscourt is located 30 miles south of Dublin International airport. Some visitors choose to rent a car, or take advantage of a transfer arranged by the Ritz. A rental car can be delivered at any time during your stay. Limousine service can also be arranged.

Where to Eat:

- Sugar Loaf Lounge: Take a seat by the crackling fireplace and read the newspapers over afternoon tea in this cozy lounge.
- McGill's Pub: Grab a Guinness and some hearty pub fare in this authentic Irish pub, located right in the Ritz Carlton.
- Gordon Ramsay: Let this celebrity chef impress you with his creativity. If you're traveling with a group, book the 10-seat Chef's Table and learn some tricks as your meal is prepared in front of you.

What to Do:

- Championship Golf: A 36-hole championship golf complex tempts many golf-enthusiasts to Powerscourt. Designed in 1996 by Peter McEvoy, the East course and the West course are both easily accessible from the Ritz Carlton.
- River Walk: Hidden deep within the private walls of the Powerscourt Estate are 2 miles of winding pathways along the River Dargle.
- Bicycle Concierge: Complimentary bicycles and a bicycle concierge are available to guide experienced cyclists through the Wicklow Mountains.
- Powerscourt Gardens: 47 acres of 18th and 19th century gardens are one of the highlights of the area. Some of the most striking features are the Japanese garden, Italian terraces, and the fish pond.
- Powerscourt Waterfall: A 400-foot cascade of fresh water nearby on the estate.
- Glendalough: This ancient monastic settlement was founded in the 6th century. Explore the ruins and take a walk along the shores of a peaceful lake.

Jessica Colley is a published poet, freelance travel writer, and the European Correspondent for Luxury Travel Magazine. She currently spends 10 months a year exploring the culture, cuisine, and history of Europe. Read

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