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Where the Grass is greener

Written by Gentl & Hyers

Our family journeyed to County Cork to photograph south-western Ireland. After a full day of travel, our car finally came to a stop at Hayfield Manor's gate, where a handsome blue-eyed Irish-man greeted us at the front door, tipped his hat and welcomed us by name. We stepped onto the warm light of the lobby and grabbed a seat by the fire. The adults ordered espresso and tea, the kids hot chocolate. For the rest of our stay, every server knew what we drank. They remembered that our daughter Lula prefers her chocolate without whipped cream and our son Sam can use a little extra chocolate in his. You might expect this kind of hospitality of top hotels, but it's merely typical of the welcoming service we encountered throughout the Emerald Isle.

History is everywhere you look in small Irish towns-not the kind of history that's viewed through glass showcases, but the history that's experienced by having stone pathways beneath your feet, by running your hand along centuries-old walls, and by pulling over on hillsides topped with crumbling family castles. Memorable settings filled our road trip, such as the sunny day on Cape Clear Island, Ireland's most southerly point, a 45-minute ferry ride from Baltimore and home to just 120 residents. We caught the sunrise from Healy's Pass on the border of counties Cork and Kerry, where sheep wander the crooked roads freely, reluctantly moving for the occasional motorist. And then there were County Clare's Cliffs of Moher, a must-see highlight of the west coast, where seabirds soar on updrafts and daring visitors can peer down at waves foaming 700 feet below.

After a turn through Galway we headed east, wrapping up our trip at a Georgian mansion outside Dublin. Irish food has long been underappreciated, but our meal of locally sourced cuisine, served in converted underground chapel, could hold its own on any table. Likewise, the crowd socializing at the bar seemed imported from a place a little cooler and a little more beautiful than you'd expect. We drank and ate our last night away with a dozen or so other travellers. As in the other towns we'd visited, the bar staff was in no hurry to see us go-and neither were we.

Well-Manored

At Home in the City

With two acres of gardens and an aviary surrounding this country house retreat, it's easy to forget that **Hayfield Manor** is in one of Ireland's largest cities, Cork. The mahogany warmth of the bar leads into the airy, conservatory-style Perrotts Garden Bistro, and an expansive **indoor pool and atrium** adjoins the Beautique, where nine chandeliered rooms offer the latest Elemis spa treatments. All 87 guest rooms feature antique furnishing, along with putters for guests to practice with on the property's green before tee times at area links.