



## Come West along the road

Superb scenery, plenty of activities on offer and fine food combine to make Westport in Co Mayo a thoroughly family-friendly destination, writes **Michael Brennan**

**W**estport has been a favoured destination for Irish families for years. But it was not always that way.

The town had very little of a tourism trade until the owner of Westport House decided to open his stately mansion to the public to help pay inheritance taxes in 1960. Lord Altamont set up a zoo in the grounds – unheard of at the time – as well as a children’s adventure park.

Minister of State for Tourism Michael Ring said that Lord Altamont, who died last year, had put Westport on the tourism map. “He did more for tourism in Westport and the West of Ireland, than either Bord Fáilte or Fáilte Ireland,” Ring said.

Westport House is still a big part of the town’s tourism offering. But it



**Westport House, Co Mayo; below left: the rope walk at High Ropes Adventures in Westport**

has expanded hugely since then, due to a strong community spirit, clever planning and leadership from local influential business families.

The town’s traditional shopfronts are still a joy to behold, but there are new attractions like the Great Western Greenway.

We visited recently with our two young children as guests of Destination Westport, the group set up by local businesses to promote tourism in the town – and started off with a visit to the grounds of Westport House, where you can visit the “big house” itself, tour the estate on the train or go around the lake on its swan pedalo boats.

The Adventure West company has a custom-built High Ropes structure in the grounds, which is suitable for children aged six and upwards. If you miss a step on the swinging bridges, nets and beams, there are safety harnesses which ensure that the worst that can happen is that you will be left suspended embarrassingly in mid-air. Much more physical than you might think, the High Ropes can take up to 20 people at a time and finishes with a freefall jump from 20 metres.

For those who want an instant adrenalin rush without as much effort, Adventure West also have a 270 meter zip wire and a zorbing ride. As well as “dry” zorbing, there is a “wet” zorbing ride where you hop inside a giant ball filled with warm water and are flung around as it rolls down the hill.

Westport itself is a pleasure for fam-

ilies to stroll around, due to its unique system for favouring pedestrians. There are large mounted walkways across every main road in the town centre, where drivers stop automatically to allow you to cross.

There is a huge variety of accommodation in Westport to suit every budget. We stayed in a family suite in the Wyatt hotel, which began over 200 years ago as a merchant’s house. It was then a coach house for weary travellers, and is now a charming hotel in the center of Westport town.

A boon for families is the playground located just behind the hotel, as well as Westport’s modern public swimming pool, which is free to access for hotel guests.

We ate in the hotel’s tastefully decorated JW Brasserie, which is good value at €60 for three courses and a bottle of wine. But visitors to Westport have plenty of choice when eating out because the town is blessed with a variety of excellent restaurants. We were impressed by the authentic Italian cuisine on offer in La Belle Vita on High Street, a two-storey restaurant with lots of character.

For those interested in seafood, Mango’s restaurant on Bridge street is well worth a visit. Not only did we get some excellent fresh mussels, hake and chowder there, but it was also very family-friendly. Owner Pat Kelly provided customised half- portions for our children and could not have been more accommodating in general.



### FACTFILE

The one-stop shop for all information on Westport is [destinationwestport.com](http://destinationwestport.com)

#### To do in Westport

Climb Croagh Patrick

Cycle the Great Western Greenway

Visit Westport House and Pirate Adventure Park

Explore the selection of Blue Flag beaches

Experience the Blueway waters of Clew Bay

Zip, zorb or scale great heights with some of the many activity sports available

Enjoy 18 holes of championship golf

#### Places to stay

The Wyatt Hotel (3\*), [wyatthotel.com](http://wyatthotel.com)

Castlecourt Hotel (4\*), [castlecourthotel.ie](http://castlecourthotel.ie)

Westport Plaza Hotel (4\*), [westportplazahotel.ie](http://westportplazahotel.ie)

Hotel Westport (4\*), [hotelwestport.ie](http://hotelwestport.ie)

Clew Bay Hotel (3\*), [clewbayhotel.com](http://clewbayhotel.com)

Mill Times Hotel (3\*), [milltimeshotel.ie](http://milltimeshotel.ie)

Knockranny House Hotel (4\*), [knockrannyhousehotel.ie](http://knockrannyhousehotel.ie)

Westport Woods Hotel (3\*+), [westportwoodshotel.com](http://westportwoodshotel.com)

Westport Coast Hotel (4\*), [westportcoasthotel.ie](http://westportcoasthotel.ie)

Harbour Mill Apartments (4\*), [theharbourmill.com](http://theharbourmill.com)

#### Activity providers

Westport House and Pirate Adventure Park, [westporthouse.ie](http://westporthouse.ie)

Clew Bay Bike Hire, [clewbaybikehire.ie](http://clewbaybikehire.ie)

Adventure Islands, [theadventureislands.com](http://theadventureislands.com)

Adventure West, [adventurewest.ie](http://adventurewest.ie)

Westport Golf Club, [westportgolfclub.ie](http://westportgolfclub.ie)

For families who want a day at the beach, there are plenty of options when staying in Westport. The crescent-shaped Bertra beach, outside Louisburgh, is within easy reach and has stunning views of Croagh Patrick. If you have time to go a bit further, Silver Strand is a beautiful secluded beach around 38km from Westport with amazing sand dunes.

No visit to Westport would be complete without experiencing the Great Western Greenway. It has not only boosted tourism, but also provided a shot in the arm for local morale in the area. We went to the Clew Bay Bike Company, which has bike rental shops at five points along the 42km greenway – including Westport, Newport and Mulranny. For those who are healthy and active, it can be done in one go. But if you have children, you need to concentrate on one section at a time.

We opted to cycle the 18-kilometre route between Mulranny and Newport, bringing our two children behind us in a covered bike trailer. The Clew Bay Bike company's van – which was equipped with child seats – brought us from Westport to Mulranny, where our bikes and trailer were waiting.

It is impossible to exaggerate the beauty of the route on the old railway track, which begins with stunning views of Mulranny and Clew Bay. But the rest of the route through bogs, woods and picturesque bridges is just as impressive. It is a treat for adults and children alike, especially if you are lucky enough to have dry weather, as we were.

It took us about two hours to pedal to Newport, which has benefited from the increased bicycle traffic brought by the Greenway. There is also a warmth to the town which deserves a mention. For those who want home-baked brown bread and scones after their cycle, there is the charming Chambers shop, which has been going since 1902. It's now staffed by Charles Reilly, a young man who is running the shop with his father after his mother recently passed away.

We went on to Newport's great picnic spot beside the river, overlooking a 19th-century red sandstone viaduct. Another nice touch was that, when we had got our picnic sandwiches and milk in the local Centra shop, staff went to the restaurant across the road to get drinking straws for our children.

We were dropped back to Westport by Clew Bay company's van again. There was time for our children to enjoy themselves in the town's new Wild West indoor play centre – a great option if the rain is bucketing down. Later, we got time to call into one of the town's best-known pubs, thanks to grandparents who travelled to see their grandchildren and stayed to babysit. Matt Molloy's manages to provide space for conversation in the front, button-accordion and fiddle-playing in the middle and more music in the room at the back.

If you are looking for a town for a varied and enjoyable family holiday, Westport has plenty to offer. It's won plenty of plaudits for being the best place to live in, but it's also a great place to holiday in.

## GEAR CHECK

ROISIN FINLAY



Roisin Finlay is editor of *Outsider*, Ireland's adventure magazine; [outsider.ie](http://outsider.ie)

If you've a wetsuit on, you won't notice that it's raining. Here are three great items to help you make the most of our waters this wet Irish summer

### Islander Kayaks Paradise Tandem

Sit-on-tops are perfect kayaks for beginners or families, as they are very stable and much safer for the uninitiated than kayaks with spraydecks. The Paradise Tandem (€699) can be paddled solo from the centre, or by two people sitting front and back (with the option of having a small third passenger).

Available from or order through Great Outdoors, Dublin



### Vision Razor 42" Bodyboard

Bad weather brings waves, and they can turn a grim visit to the beach to an adventure to remember if you have a body board. The Vision Razor 42" Bodyboard (€39.99) is a sturdy board, thanks to an EPS core. It comes with a webbing coiled leash as standard, so it's great value for money.

Available from or order through Great Outdoors, Dublin 2; Dingle Surf, Dingle



### GoPro Hero4 Black

Record all your summer adventures – in or out of the water – on the GoPro Hero4 Black (€540). It features incredible high-resolution 4K30 and 2.7K50 video and high frame rate 1080p120 video to enable stunning, immersive footage. It is waterproof to 40m with 12MP photos at a blistering 30 frames per second and excellent audio.

Available from or order through Cotswold Outdoor, Belfast; Great Outdoors, Dublin 2; 53 Degrees North, Carrickmines, Blanchardstown, and Cornmarket, Cork

## Win a gourmet getaway at Faithlegg House Hotel, Co. Waterford



SBP Competition Time

Perennially popular and now even prettier than ever, The Roseville Rooms at Faithlegg House Hotel, part of FBD Hotels & Resorts, have just been refurbished, and head chef Jenny Flynn has created a brand new 'Food Journey' gourmet package to celebrate the stylish new look.

Continuing in her quest to source foods from the finest local makers and producers, Jenny brings guests on a foodie trip from the beaches of the county, up the coast and then inland.

Her Food Journey at Faithlegg House Hotel is the perfect way to get a genuine flavour for the surroundings in which this luxurious four-star hotel is set.

As part of this special Food Journey you will experience a luxurious two night stay with breakfast on both mornings and a delectable à la carte dinner on one evening of your choice in The Roseville Rooms Restaurant prepared by Jenny Flynn.

If you're not lucky enough to win on this occasion, the celebratory gourmet package at Faithlegg House Hotel is available from €139 for an overnight with breakfast and à la carte dinner in The Roseville Rooms per person.

To be in with a chance to win, call 1515415906 / TEXT POST to 57003 with your name, contact details and the correct answer to the following question, by Friday, August 21.

Where is Faithlegg House Hotel located?

- a) Dublin
- b) Cork
- c) Waterford



\*Transfers not included. T&C's: Subject to availability and excludes bank holidays. Prize not redeemable for cash. €1.00 an eircom landline. Calls from other networks and mobile cost more. €1.00 per text + standard network rates. 18+. Lines close midnight 21/08/15. Service Provider Phonovation Ltd. Helpline 0818 217 100 (ROI) 0800 028 3874 (UK) This is not a subscription service. Winners will be notified by phone. By entering this competition you may be contacted by The Sunday Business Post. To opt out text OPTOUT to 51000 (ROI Standard rate). Editors decision is final. Terms and conditions apply.