

A TEMPLE OF TRANQUILLITY



Picture: Grace Heneghan

Need to retreat from the stresses and strains of work and life, to rejuvenate your mind and body? Grace Heneghan did just that recently when she combined treatments and tranquillity during a short break at Temple Country Retreat & Spa, and discovered a spectacular oasis of calm nestled in the midlands.

When I first arrived at Temple Country Retreat & Spa, I felt that a sense of calm and tranquillity seemed to permeate throughout the bright and airy two-storey building. Nestled deep in the countryside just outside Moate in County Westmeath, (less than one kilometre off the main N6 route), this destination spa proved to be a totally different experience to other spa centres I have visited.

If you want to find that special place to retreat from the stresses and strains of life and work, to pamper yourself or simply to unwind, then Temple Spa fits the bill nicely. And it's centrally located in the heart of Ireland. In fact, it's only a one-hour drive from Dublin via the new M6.

DESTINATION SPA

Temple Spa was established in 1992 by Declan and Bernadette Fagan, a few short years after the farming couple had first opened a farmhouse bed and breakfast in the late 1980s. The quietly-spoken Declan told me he and his wife are firm believers in the healing powers of yoga and meditation exercises.

With this in mind they introduced special

yoga and relaxation weekend packages, which became so popular that the family-run B&B quickly grew to become one of only three designated destination spas in Ireland.

Both Declan and Bernadette look upon wellbeing as a natural state of health and wholeness. Everything done by the Fagans and their Temple team is directed towards lowering stress levels, with all programmes contributing towards detox and relaxation.

The centre is designed around a central courtyard and garden, subtly echoing the site's previous existence as a monastic settlement. Temple is a modern uncluttered space, with 23 rooms, each having panoramic views of the Westmeath countryside.

The director of Temple Spa says there is one view that a spa visit is indulgent luxury, verging on frivolity, reserved for the privileged few. "I would take a wider view that the need is deeper and addressing the need brings universal qualities into play," he noted.

Declan is keen to get the message across that all of the spa treatments, including massage, reflexology, hydrotherapy, sauna/steam room, and yoga exercises, are very powerful and have a stimulating effect on circulation, energy flow and emotions.

COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES

Temple differs from other spa centres in that it's about more than the treatments, where a spa break is a fully-inclusive experience. Guests can enjoy gourmet spa cuisine and use of the facilities (including the vitality pool with therapeutic body jets, steam room, sauna, relaxation room and a fully-equipped gym with personal trainer).

In addition, there's a daily programme of yoga, t'ai chi, pilates, breathing class, walking, posture and relaxation classes and flotation tank (see opposite). There's even a hair salon, nail bar and a juice bar! Nothing is left out at Temple, with the emphasis firmly on relaxation for the mind and body at all times. The activities are designed to complement the spa therapies.

And yes, the longer you stay the more your mind and body unwind. I found it very easy to immerse myself shortly after I arrived, as did my sister Anne as she relished the prospect of facials, massages and some R&R time. She joined me during my recent 24-hour retreat to this midlands haven of peace and tranquillity to recharge the batteries. In fact, you could spend all day here in just robe and slippers, as many guests tended to do, and avail of the facilities and activities, in between treatments, or just simply spend time in the relaxation or lounge rooms.

TEMPLE TREATMENTS

With 18 treatment rooms and over 80 traditional and innovative treatments at Temple, there is something to suit every taste from massages, reflexology, hydrotherapy bath, Indian head massage, flotation therapy, the Yon-Ka range of facial treatments, in addition to various body wraps.

After a spot of lunch that nicely tickled the taste buds in the



Garden Room Restaurant, it was time for therapy. I had the pleasure of having a combination of the Vinotherapy and Chocotherapy body wraps, which are available exclusively in Ireland to Temple Country Retreat & Spa. Well I can only describe my treatment as the 'Rolls Royce' of body wraps. The vinotherapy essentially involved over two hours of an invigorating body toning and natural slimming treatment using grapes, whilst the chocotherapy provided an anti-cellulite and natural slimming treatment using plain and white chocolate.

The body wrap included a full body massage, and this was followed by a deep pore cleansing, restoring and relaxing 'Le Grand Classique' Yon Ka facial that left my skin feeling soft and supple.

Wanting to make the most of this mini-weekend break, I also indulged in a one-hour hot stone massage. 'La Stone Therapy' is the original hot and cold stone massage from Arizona, according to my therapist Mary (who Declan says is "an expert"). The treatment combines heated basalt lava stones, cool marble stones, traditional massage and hot oil treatment to warm, work and achieve a deeper sense of relaxation and wellbeing.

Meanwhile, my sister chose an Indian head massage, an experience which she said has to be repeated sometime soon. She also opted for 'Le Grand Classique' facial, and agreed that it was just the tonic she needed. To finish her spa experience, she chose a Yon Ka 'Hydralessence Corps' seaweed body mask.

This deep-hydrating treatment involves a plant-based soft gel peel that exfoliates and moisturises, with a citrus fragrance, which is followed by a full body mask of micronised seaweed rich in detoxifying anti-fatigue properties. Finally the body is moisturised with a combination of oils and creams. Pure bliss, she exclaimed!



TEMPTING CUISINE

Having sampled a tantalising tasty lunch, we were further spoiled at dinner time to mouth-watering gourmet cuisine that certainly lived up to all expectations. French head chef David Godin served up the most exquisitely flavoursome, healthy and wholesome food. There was an amazing choice of starters and main courses, not to mention an eclectic mix of desserts, on the menu.

A three-course meal at Temple Spa will only set you back €48 and it's worth every cent. For starters I had tender seared scallops with soya marinated fennel and cucumber salad, while my sister was rendered speechless as she tucked into 'Atlantic' Irish oak smoked salmon on avocado and mango salad.

The mains – a superb Chargrilled Irish Beef Fillet served with organic cheese and cashew nut pie, and Seared Sea Bass, served on a warm Spanish citrus salad, cheery tomatoes and cucumber and baby spinach – were in a word 'devine'. The artistic presentation of each dish should also be applauded. Finally, the desserts of white and dark chocolate mousse and a lemon tartlet with cream and ice cream was the perfect icing on the cake! In short, a gastronomic delight!

SMOOTHIE ENDING

After a mini-break that included treatments, gourmet spa cuisine, country walks, plus R&R time in the vitality pool, sauna and steam room, there was a unanimous agreement that time

permitting, we would have stayed for a second night. However, with no pressure to leave the place immediately after you check out, we decided to stay just that little bit longer. You can't beat relaxing outdoors, soaking up the rays on an unusually fine Sunday afternoon, and enjoying delicious smoothies before joining the rat race on the M6!

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SOME SPA SPECIALS AT TEMPLE

Included in each package is full board (breakfast, lunch and dinner for each night of your stay), the use of facilities and the option to join in the daily programme of activities.

ESCAPE:

One-night stay with dinner and 50-minute spa treatment, with choice of either full body massage, reflexology or a Yon-Ka Grand Classique facial – €215 pps and €245 single (midweek) and €295pps and €335 single (weekend). Available until 20 December.

RELAX:

Two-night spa break (half-board) during mid-week, includes two 50-minute spa treatments each – €375 pps and €395 single. Available until 20 December.

REVIVE:

Three-night spa break on a half-board basis includes two 50-minute spa treatments – €495 pps or €525 single (midweek) and available until 30 December; €575 pps or €595 single (weekend). Available until 21 December.



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