

From Times Online

October 11, 2006

Thumbs up for County Down spa

Rachael Scott visits Northern Ireland's largest spa - a new gothic and golfing paradise overlooking the Irish Sea

The Slieve Donard Resort and Spa in County Down overlooks the Irish Sea with gothic presence. Sitting at the foot of the Mourne Mountains in Newcastle Bay, it was built in 1898 as an 'end of line' luxury holiday destination. This year the hotel underwent an exhilarating face-lift to the tune of £15 million. It's now known as 'the Gleneagles' of Northern Ireland. Its new spa is now Ireland's largest. Built from Mourne granite, stone and sea-washed pebbles and decorated in earthy tones, ESPA oversaw the two-storey construction of 16 treatment rooms and a 20 metre indoor pool where loungers double up as deck chairs looking out at the sea views. The beach might be misty and the Irish weather more drizzly than sun-drenched, but what Newcastle Bay lacks in exoticism it makes up for in atmosphere. After all, Northern Ireland is home to artists and writers with fevered imaginations, rather than heat exhausted brains from excess sun.

Even during Queen Victoria's rein the Slieve Donard was a resting place for the health-conscious. Visitors indulged in Turkish baths provided by an electric pump straight from the sea and then relaxed on Chippendale furniture in front of an open fireplace in their rooms.

Victoria's love of Ireland would have been sealed if she'd attended the 4-star's opening celebrations. A who's who of Northern Irish dignitaries enjoyed highlights from well-known operas sung by some of Europe's finest sopranos and tenors while they drank champagne on tap and tucked into salmon en croute. The leg of beef, so large it dwarfed the chef, certainly amused me.

Having a treatment in the breathtaking new spa is kind of otherworldly. After leaving my belongings in a digitally coded locker I made my way across a glass bridge and waited for my therapist in a room with mood lighting, burning oils and Condé Nast Traveller to read. My ergonominc bed had its own radio, spotlight and remote control for preferred positioning and I was having so much fun playing with it I hoped they were running late.

Little chance of that. Elfin-like Isabella led me to another room similar to the one I'd been waiting in, except there was only me in it this time. She sat me down, asked me how I felt and how I would like to feel after my treatment. When I asked for the Muscle Relaxing Massage she was concerned that I had a hectic evening ahead and would be far too chilled to properly participate. I reassured her that a calm state of mind was exactly what I needed before I got on a plane.

ESPA massages are bespoke to the clients' requirements. More pressure here, please, and a little bit softer there, thank you. That suits me perfectly as I have a problem with my left foot and too much pummelling on my anklebone could leave me hobbling for days. Isabella was also resolutely respectful of my modesty and despite her size managed to master the huge fluffy towel like a magician every time I turned over.

Unfortunately, I didn't have enough time to try the Rock sauna with a sea view and twinkling lights embedded in the ceiling, or the steam room with its magnificent Amethyst in the back wall. Apparently Archbishop Tutu stayed at the Slieve Donard once and I bet he would have benefited from a Muscle Relaxing Massage. Like I said, there's an ethereal quality to the place

TIMES RECOMMENDS

- At last! A hotel built for toddlers
- Helsinki's bounty
- A golfing break across the Channel

SPA SPEAK



“The four-hand rub was divine but the breast massage came as a bit of a shock” [More..](#)

Jo Giles

Post a comment

MOTHER'S DAY SPAS



Champneys, Henlow

Mother's Day comes early for Claire McDonald's mum

GOOD SPA GUIDE

New Forest retreat

A ranch spa with special offers for mum plus one

ENGLAND

Energised in Leeds

A day spa leaves Jayne Dowle ready to play mum again

GOOD SPA GUIDE



“Who would be a soldier these days?” Simon Jenkins

Send your views

OUR PAPERS AUDIO / VIDEO CLASSIFIEDS

Sponsored by Windows Live

SEARCH

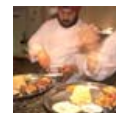
MY PROFILE | OFFERS | SITEMAP

MOST READ MOST COMMENTED MOST CURIOUS

TODAY

- 59 things that would have stayed secret
- Thousands face pay cut under new equality law
- Europe agrees to embrace nuclear option in battle to save the planet
- Catt revels as fearless England keep title hopes alive

FOCUS ZONE



Cook India

Explore the authentic food of India and be in with a chance to win a cooking holiday

- Upfront Rugby
- Identity Management
- Cruise Revival

- Lives Back
- Your World
- Business Travel
- Entrepreneurs

QUICKLINKS

SU DOKU



Now Interactive

Do you Su Doku? Solve puzzles on screen with our unique interactive games

Su Doku
Travel

Driving
Podcasts

Career & Jobs
Photo Galleries

TRAVEL PARTNERS



Travel Intelligence

Style Hotels - free upgrades and nights at the world's best hotels



Holiday Rentals

massage. Like I said, there's an ethereal quality to the place.

The brightly coloured Lighthouse Lounge with its range of exotic smoothies is designed as a relaxing area you'd feel comfortable in wearing only your dressing gown. For those more physically inclined there's a state of the art gym. I can truthfully say I've only ever been in one gym during my entire life, and that was to find my fitness fanatic friend. So I had little idea what any of the equipment I was shown actually did. I was told though that the 'Cardio Wave' machine would be brilliant for my glutes – whatever they might be. Your fitness records can be input into its computer and it calculates how many miles you should run at your optimum speed. It also had a built in television and radio. Now I could see the appeal.

Early next year there are plans to build two tennis courts, and cycle rides, mountain biking and organised jogs are all in the pipeline. With the Royal County Down Golf Club backing on to the hotel the Slieve Donard is making a concerted effort to be Northern Ireland's one-stop health retreat.

Page 2: read about this spa in brief()

In brief

USP A pampering paradise in what must surely be the spa of the moment.

AMBIENCE The helicopter is the chosen mode of transport for many of the hotel's guests jetting in for a round of golf at the Royal County Down.

EXPERIENCE A tasteful mix of old-world heritage and state of the art construction, this gothic mansion houses contemporarily designed rooms with marble bathrooms and granite surfaces.

FOOD Posh as posh can be the Oak Restaurant has a table d'hote and à la carte menu, while cosy pub-style dining can be had in The Percy French Inn where local bands often play live.

IN CROWD Recently named the Golf Hotel of the Year for 2006. If it's good enough for Tiger Woods....

WALLET WATCH Prices start from £70 for an Internet Classic Single to £205 for an Executive Double. ESPA Muscle Relaxing Massage: £65 for 55 minutes. Golfer's Recovery: £140 for 1 hour 50 minutes. One Day Spa Break. Overnight accommodation, full Irish breakfast, full use of spa facilities and one 1 hour spa treatment per person: £165

NEED TO KNOW Slieve Donard Resort and Spa, Downs Road, Newcastle, County Down, Northern Ireland BT33 0AH (028 4372 1066); www.hastingshotels.com) Belfast International Airport – 45 miles. Belfast City Airport – 30 miles. Ferry terminal – 30 miles.



Latest review: Bliss, San Francisco

Mark Frary chills, man, at a space-age spa in California

BEST READ FEATURES

- Paris on a plate
- At last! A hotel built for toddlers
- The summer 100
- The top 20 beach holidays
- The best hotels in Britain, 2006

ESSENTIALS



Book a cheap flight

Cath Urquhart, travel editor of The Times on how to get a good deal on flights

Cut the cost of hotels

The best hotel websites and how to safeguard your transaction online

RAIL TRAVEL

Plan your rail trip

The best websites for rail travel on the continent, and which tickets to buy

LONDON



Latest review: Hotel 55, London

A former brothel in a traffic-choked location

Find a holiday rental at Times Online, villas, apartments and much more

TRAVEL SPECIALS

Stunning Stavanger offers the best of both worlds with mountain scenery, stunning views and a lively nightlife

Explore by road, from rugged coastlines to lively pubs, Ireland's roads open up endless touring opportunities

A perfect break; relax, indulge, escape or explore, short breaks in Ireland offer something for everyone

Sovereign competition, enter our competition to win a 14-night luxury holiday for two people to Cyprus

Uniquely Québec, the ideal destination for spring and summer and under seven hours flight from the UK

Explore the delights of France, both on the path less trodden and the traditional with a twist

CLASSIFIEDS

- CARS
- JOBS
- PROPERTY
- TRAVEL

CARS OF THE WEEK

Aston Martin DB7 Zagato
2003/53
£108,000
The Midlands

BMW 735i SE Auto
2003
£18,000
SE England

Ferrari Superamerica F1
2006/06
£154,995
SE England

Jaguar XKR
2007/56
£73,995
NW England

Search for more cars and bikes

Search Ad Reference:

HAVE YOUR SAY

* Your View

1000 characters left

* Name * Email

* Town / City Country / State

* Required Field

Remember me

Terms and conditions

PRINT EMAIL POST TO DELICIOUS

POST TO NEWSVINE