THAILAND  Four Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle
Phulay Bay, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve  Anantara Golden Triangle
Anantara Phuket Villas  Point Yamu by COMO  St. Regis Bangkok

MONTANA  The Ranch at Rock Creek
BALLYFIN

In and of itself.
WHILE BACK, one of our readers contacted us to ask if we would consider reviewing his hotel in the Irish countryside. Properties reviewed in ARW are chosen for all sorts of reasons, but requests from our readers—particularly when the reader is requesting a review of his or her own hotel—tend to take precedence. We made our way to Ballyfin on a stopover during our next trip to Europe.

The story of Ballyfin is that of a labor of love, an eight-year restoration of a majestic 1850s estate. With such attention to detail injected into an inventory of only 15 keys, something within tells us it may never turn a profit. After having visited, it’s apparent that the bottom line is most certainly no kind of priority at Ballyfin.

It’s about two hours from Dublin Airport to the gates that enclose the property’s 600 acres. Drama is the word for describing a Ballyfin arrival. Majestically manicured grounds flank a lengthy drive leading up to the neo-classical façade of the estate’s main house. As we approached, a pair of well-dressed gents stood at attention to welcome us home.

First order of business was a tour around the house with an introduction to all of the property’s wheres and what’s. More than that, this was an introduction to the story of Ballyfin. It doesn’t take long after arriving here to realize that the property and its story is the main draw of staying here. Most hotels and resorts are defined by their proximity to some other location. Ballyfin is all about being at Ballyfin, and contributing a few days to its history.

Every nook and corner has been lovingly restored with a mind for its original condition. Commanding attention to detail is visible in every line of sight of each of several sleeping rooms, sitting rooms, dining rooms, and so on. We don’t envy the artisans who painstakingly sought the grandeur of those incredible ceilings, but we
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could certainly appreciate their hard work every time we tilted our head back for a look upwards.

Although public spaces have been restored with a heavy hand for authenticity, accommodations have been realized with a bit more freedom. Classical finishes are ultimately tempered by the property’s history, but a certain 2000s interpretation is evident as well.

Staying at Ballyfin was a mostly comfortable experience, though there is something to be said about the historical nature of the bed. We came to adjust to the springy nature of the mattress, but couldn’t find a way to get used to the foot of the bed being ever-so-slightly higher. An inquiry downstairs was met with a most gentle way of telling us we were imagining things.

The culinary program at Ballyfin is a story of its own. Chef Ryan Murphy brings with him an impressive resume including a host of well-known kitchens and celebrity chef contemporaries. Dishes served are determined largely by what happens to be available locally with many of the ingredients sourced from the property’s own gardens.

Though there is only one kitchen, each meal is served in its own dedicated space. Monotony is smartly avoided with this decision as a few days of having three meals in the same space could get a bit boring.

Breakfast service at Ballyfin is a living picture of the property’s original day, leisurely, decadent, and served upon stunning china and silver. Selections are classical as well.

Lunches are simple albeit refined. Such refinement is not detached from the venue, an all-glass conservatory looking upon the estate’s rolling hillside.

Dinners are the gastronomic performance one would expect of a classic property vying for culinary recognition.

Activities at Ballyfin include property tours by horseback or carriage, fishing in the lake, shooting clay pigeons, and other such experiences. As stated previously, however, the story of Ballyfin takes precedence over any such doings. It might sound strange to become so enthralled in the history of a place you’d likely never heard of before this hotel opened its doors, but you probably will.

Overall, we thoroughly enjoyed our visit to Ballyfin and found the experience to be enriching, delicious,
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experience to be enriching, delicious,

and fun. As country retreats go, this is without doubt
one of the world's best. We imagine it would have been

even better had we taken all 15 rooms and suites for our
family and friends. •••

Ballyfin
County Laois, Ireland
General Manager: Aileesh Carew
ballyfin.com

**DOS & DON'TS**

DO sign up for the tour of the main house. You'll notice many of the wonders

on your own, but having an expert point them out adds significantly to the

experience.

DO consider Ballyfin for buyouts. With only 15 keys, it's a relatively easy

proposition, and we imagine that to be the ideal way to experience this

property.

DON'T expect a full spa offering. There is only a single treatment room

available for on-call massages bookings.

DON'T feel pressured to overschedule. The countryside life of leisure is best

experienced at leisure.