



ONE BOYNE DAY

Fun, adventure and culture awaits families in Ireland's beautiful Ancient East...

SWEET VALLEY HIGH: Siobhan and her family enjoyed a stay in the Boyne Valley where her girls (insets) tried their hands at archery at Navan Adventure Centre and learned all about Hugh De Lacy in Trim



Fact file

- Navan Adventure Centre: See navanadventure.ie or call 085 236 6322.
- Trim Castle: For tickets, see heritageireland.ie.
- Knightsbrook Hotel: See www.knightsbrook.com.
- Funtasia, Drogheda: See www.funtasia.ie. For more, see discoverboynevalley.ie

WELCOME to the Boyne Valley – your one-stop shop where adventure is found everywhere.

A stone's throw from Dublin, the Boyne Valley is nestled in Ireland's Ancient East and is ripe for family discovery.

During a recent visit to the region, our first family exploit was at the Navan Adventure Centre, which offers a unique range of 10 fun, muscle-powered activities, games and challenges, situated on Navan Racecourse.

My two girls were like bees to honey running towards the obstacle course, which had everything from tyre hoops to climbing walls which we had a ball navigating our way through.

Next up we tackled archery and my youngest proved particularly adept at using the bow and arrow.

Mini golf, meanwhile, gave the whole family a laugh. But if all that doesn't tickle your fancy, there's footgolf, pedal go-karts, inflatables and miniature pedalo boats, too! Perfect for a daycation or a staycation.

After all that activity we were utterly ravenous so we headed for Navan town for a

gorgeous bite to eat at the Central Bar. Then, on route to our accommodation, we navigated the Boyne Valley Drive, stopping at Trim Castle where I was mesmerised by the hordes of overseas visitors.

In the Boyne Valley you can wander through time by visiting thousands of years of history in one valley.

Abbey

From Trim Castle, famed as the location of the famous movie *Braveheart*, erected in 1172 to Mellifont Abbey, which we found so romantic and mystical, not to mention the Hill of Tara, the Boyne Valley is a trove of history and culture.

As the girls played hide and seek, I set about Googling Hugh De Lacy to learn more about the Lord of Meath.

Afterwards, we checked into Knightsbrook Hotel and Golf Resort in Trim which boasts an 18-hole championship golf course designed by the late former Ryder Cup legend Christy O'Connor Junior.

We had interconnecting rooms, but there's also a great option of 28 self-catering houses

on the resort too, perfect for families.

The leisure facilities at Knightsbrook are a real draw – hitting the pool was a must for my crew.

And for the adults, we had a five-star dining experience at Zucchini's. I went for the halibut with tomato and asparagus salsa and was in awe at the quality.

The kids, meanwhile, loved the homemade ice cream.

The next morning we headed off for Funtasia in Drogheda where we could have spent at least two days.

The kids were in heaven in the water park while I was like a big kid, bombing down the big slides.

There's also an indoor skyclimb aerial assault course that our teen James loved conquering.

Myself and the smaller kids stuck with the bumper cars and bowling.

Having built up an appetite, we headed to The Punt pub in Drogheda, run by family man Philip.

With live music every weekend, The Punt is synonymous with warm Irish hospitality and the best sourdough toastie in town.

After a hearty lunch and copious amounts of tea and chats with the lovely Philip, it was off to Newgrange Farm.

David and his family run this working farm in Slane, Co Meath where puppies, kittens, rabbits, day-old chicks, pet lambs, pet calves and pigs all live.

The farm allows children a hands-on experience and the highlight for us was getting to feed sheep and hold baby chicks.

There are also other facilities, both indoor and outdoor – we had such craic in the hall of mirrors and playing giant Connect Four.

Picnic

There's a water play and sand-digging area, too, and families can bring a packed picnic and spend the full day here.

For dinner, you can't beat Monasterboice Inn for some pub grub. But my advice is to split a scampi and chips between two – the portions ain't for the faint-hearted.

After another night of cosy slumber at Knightsbrook, it was homeward bound – but we will be back soon to explore some more of Ireland's Ancient East.

If you're heading soon, you're in for a real treat.

■ Siobhan O'CONNOR