

LIVE LIKE ROYALTY IN MAJESTIC BOYNE VALLEY



BUZZ ...
Bee Wise



GOOD CAUSEY ...
Dylan, Layla, Holly
and Kelly at farm



COSY ... Decoy
cottages

IF, like me, Braveheart is one of your favourite films, a trip to the Boyne Valley comes with a helping of Hollywood sparkle.

First on my "to do" list was a visit to Trim Castle, a huge and impressive medieval fort on the edge of the town from which it takes its name.

Boasting a 20-sided tower and the thickest walls you can imagine, it's little wonder this was chosen as the location for some of the scenes in the Oscar-winning film.

The bustling and busy town is on the River Boyne, giving it a lovely holiday vibe.

Sitting in the shadow of the castle, Stockhouse Restaurant offers great food at affordable prices and is just as accommodating to young children and families as it is to groups of friends who are out for the night.

We stayed a short drive away at Decoy Country Cottages, nestled into Lismullin in the Meath countryside, about 13 minutes from Navan and 17 from Trim.

Made up of eight self-catering dwellings, ranging from one to four bedrooms, it provides unspoilt surroundings (and some very friendly farm animals) on your doorstep. But there are also smart TVs with Netflix and Amazon Prime, free wifi, a day spa and treatment rooms, plus a fully equipped gym and games room.

Myth and legend

For the kids, you will find a den full of toys, a Playstation, DVDs, books and music. There is also an outdoor barbecue area and a playground, complete with a trampoline. So, plenty for everyone.

After a wonderful evening in the Parlour Cottage, we set off to check out Causey Farm, vowing not to let the Irish summer rain dampen our spirits.

Its mission is simple: Let people experience life on a working family farm.

We opted for the farm's ice cream adventure, where along the way to the Cow's Lick Ice Cream Parlour, you visit the cows and sheep, ponies, pigs, hens, ducks, goats, llamas and alpacas.

You can take some pictures on the tractor, sit on the hay in the trailer and even ride the train while listening to stories of Irish myth and legend.

Dotted along the trail are many things to marvel little minds, such as the mineshaft tunnels, fairy village and even the Wishing Chair (just make sure you keep that wish a secret).

At the end of the visit, you will come to the lovely farmhouse coffee shop, packed to the rafters with cakes and treats. Legend has it owner Lily Murtagh has baked as many as 500 scones in one day.

Messy wellies and happy faces later, it was on to Kells (about ten minutes away) for a leisurely stroll and that evening's sustenance. The

Boyne to entertain



FAMILY FUN ...
Causey Farm

MEDIEVAL MARVEL
... Trim Castle

GO: BOYNE VALLEY

FOR information on where to stay, what to do, food and drink and upcoming events, visit discoverboynevalley.ie.

With Halloween in mind, the Spirits of Meath festival will run from October 1 - November 6 and the Púca Festival will run from October 28-31.

Check out Decoy Country Cottages at decoycountrycottages.ie. The Stockhouse Restaurant at stockhouserestaurant.ie. Vanilla Pod Restaurant at headfortarms.ie/vanilla-pod-restaurant.html.

Causey Farm at causey.ie (now booking for The Christmas Experience). Bee Wise Nature Trail at beewise.ie (now booking for Halloween events).

heritage town is steeped in history. But old exists harmoniously alongside new, as it's also packed with trendy bars and restaurants and a wonderfully quirky array of shops, from boutiques and antiques to thrift stores and trendy gifts.

At every turn you are met with a piece of history, perhaps unsurprising since the town's origins go back to the times of High King Cormac Mac Airt, who died around 260.

These days, a gentle ramble around the town will bring you to interesting attractions such as St Columb's Church (the town's first church, founded around 814), the Spire of Lloyd (an 18th-century lighthouse) and Kells round tower, which, though roofless, still stands at 25m.

For those not yet interested in history, there's also lots of modern attractions such as The People's Park, complete with playground.

While there are lots of dining options, you won't go far wrong with the award-winning Vanilla Pod restaurant, which is located in

The Headfort Arms Hotel. The contemporary venue offers a great range of international cuisine, all sourced carefully from local suppliers. The black pudding, red onion marmalade starter and the free-range chicken wings went down a treat, as did the sea bass jambalaya and 10oz sirloin.

There's also a great selection on the kids' menu and, while it's certainly an upmarket establishment, you don't feel uncomfortable or under pressure being there with noisy little ones.

After another great night's sleep in Decoy (and another gloriously peaceful stint in The Den) it was on to our final stop in Boyne Valley - Bee Wise Nature Trail.

Bee Wise was the winner of the Best Tourist Experience at the Meath Tourism and Business Awards last year, and it is quite easy to understand why.

Run by Paddy Gorman and his family, the aim is to give people the chance to experience the wonder of nature close up, and educate visitors of the importance

of biodiversity and the wildlife around us.

But fear not, there's nothing boring about this experience and the way in which Paddy and his family tell the bees story is quite remarkable.

Comprised of five acres of woodland, the highlight has to be the chance to observe a working hive and view the fascinating life of the honey bee up close.

Paddy offers an educational woodland walk, telling you all sorts of amazing facts about the little creatures who make up part of our everyday lives, and along the trail there's a fairy village, wildlife pond, sensory area, a maze and outdoor games and swings.

There's a lovely picnic area and a little tea and coffee stand, which also sells delicious Bee Wise honey, jams and honey-based beauty products. At the moment, the Bee Wise

folk are preparing for their Halloween "Bee Tricked or Bee Treated" event and the spooky "Forest of Doom" trail.

A fantastic day out for kids and adults alike, you leave with a renewed appreciation for those wonderfully busy bees and at least a little bit of knowledge about how to make the world a more hospitable place for our buzzy friends.

Boyne Valley is home to the rolling countryside and waterways of Meath and Louth.

And there's a huge array of things to do for visitors of all ages and inclinations.

From adventure and history to art, culture and family fun, the accommodation on offer is top class and there's something for all tastes and budgets.

The only Battle of the Boyne you'll experience is where you should go first.

FIONA WYNNE



HIT FILM ... Braveheart