

Jenny Lee takes her family on an adventure to the Boyne Valley filled with history, folklore and fun

History, fun and laughter in stunning Boyne Valley

THE Boyne Valley in the counties of Meath and Louth contains some of Ireland's most historic sites, including the prehistoric tombs of Newgrange, Unesco World Heritage Site at Brú na Bóinne, the Anglo-Norman Trim Castle and the mythical Hill of Tara.

Ireland's Ancient East also has a host of attractions for all of the family, from toddlers to adrenalin junkies, and plenty of impressive foodie spots too.

As my family set off for an overnight stay in the region, the hardest part was deciding what to do.

Our first stop was Monasterboice, whose tower dates from the 5th century when the monks used it as a refuge from rampaging Vikings.

The Monasterboice Inn, conveniently located just off junction 11 of the M1, is also steeped in history – being the home of Thomas, brother of General Patrick Sarsfield, at the time of the Battle of the Boyne.

For the past 55 years it has been serving traditional Irish dining and when we visited for Sunday lunch it was easy to see why their large car park was full.

Fine dining it may not be, but the food, and in particular their beef dinner, with good hearty Irish portion sizes was fine tasty. And that also goes for their delicious desserts. It certainly filled us up for our next adventure.

They say stories of Ireland flow in the waters of the River Boyne, and what better way to explore than in a hand-crafted Irish traditional Kerry Naomhóg currach.

Boyne Boats is run by Ross Kenny, a wealth of knowledge about the facts, myths and legends of the area.

Once we were all safely on board, Ross handed us all a traditional wooden paddle to use. There were lighter aluminium ones available, but my nine-year-old daughter was fine with the heavier wooden paddle.

In fact Abigail, and her 11-year-old brother, Noah, ended up being the most enthusiastic and energetic paddlers in our boat of eight.

Ross told us how this beautiful boat had starred in the *Game of Thrones* TV

series, including when Yara rescued Theon in season six and when Jon Snow was banished in season eight.

I must confess I'm not a *Game of Thrones* fan – but listening to the behind-the-scenes gossip and insight from Ross, who also appeared in the programme, made me tempted to see what it's all about.

Meandering along the Boyne Canal, enjoying the surrounding nature, and listening to stories of our past was highly enjoyable.

Boyne Boats is located just a 10 minute walk from the site of the Battle of the Boyne Visitor Centre.

Established following the Good Friday Agreement, the Visitor Centre is housed in the restored 18th century Oldbridge House on the battlefield, where the frantic action took place in July 1690 between King William III and King James II.

My kids, unaware of one of the most significant events in the history of our land, sat glued to the audio visual film which gave a good overview of the events of the battle and the religious rivalry, and European politics that led to it.

Costumes, artefacts and replica weaponry associated with the battle can also be viewed, as well as enjoying Oldbridge's Victorian gardens, tea-rooms and battle site walks.

History lesson completed, it was time for some fun and where better than the aptly named Funtasia in Drogheda.

Best known for its 30,000 square-foot water park, there is so much more to do within the centre.

Funtasia have adopted a Covid-friendly cashless card system throughout, including their arcade games.

My pair's eyes popped out of their heads as we went to explore – they only thought

Meandering along the Boyne Canal, enjoying the surrounding nature, and listening to stories of our past was highly enjoyable



that Portrush's Barry's/Curry's Fun Park was big...

We enjoyed a mix of the traditional arcade shooter and car racing games as well as the simulator roller coaster, mechanical horse riding and a train that takes you around the upper floor.

The Skyclimb area is located at the back of the building on the ground floor, with climbing walls, 60ft aerial assault course and a dual zipline. We had psyched ourselves up to become action movie stars whizzing across the arcade on the zipwire, but unfortunately the attraction was down for maintenance during our visit.

Instead we opted for what I thought was the much calmer option of crazy golf – that was until dad started to argue about scores and cheating.

Funtasia is like a tardis of fun waiting to be explored. With dinner booked at our hotel, the kids had to be almost dragged out.

With cries of "we haven't been to the soft play area" and "why couldn't we go bowling", we ventured back onto the M1 towards our accommodation, CityNorth Hotel.

Yes, that's the huge multi-storey hotel on the left as you head south towards Dublin airport.

The four-star contemporary hotel has a play park if you are bringing little ones, as well as family and interconnecting rooms.

After a carvery tea in the hotel's Tara Lounge, and to ensure we all had a good night's sleep, we went on a short drive to explore one of the region's many beaches,

with an evening stroll along Laytown beach.

A family adventure in the Boyne Valley wouldn't be complete without a trip to Tayto Park, so next morning we travelled the 20 minutes journey to nearby Ashbourne.

It's not our first visit to the 22-hectare theme park and zoo, but now the kids are older it was interesting to see how they would get on with some of the more adventurous rides.

The Cú Chulainn Coaster, Europe's largest wooden rollercoaster, was a big hit – though I failed to be persuaded to give it a go. Equally, I looked on in awe as my little daredevils happily hung upside down and spun in the air on the Air Race.

Much more my pace was Tayto Park's new dinosaur-themed rollercoaster Dino Dash.

Built in the former Dinosaurs Alive area of the park, you get up close and personal with Raptors, T-Rex and Triceratops whilst twisting and turning at speeds of 50kph in this gentler paced, yet thrilling, ride.

Also new for this spring was *The Magic Show* by Robert Fossett in the big top circus tent. This follows the adventures of playful clown Mathieu the Magnificent on his quest to become a magician, alongside illusionist double act, Duo Massot.

The 30-minute show, which runs every weekend until June 19, was a good opportunity to take a rest from the crowds and queues and gasp in awe at the magical illusions.

Despite my kids growing up far too fast, it was nice to see their delight in still enjoying the pony trail ride and Nissan Driving School in the Junior Zone.

Still the firm favourite with all the family is Windstar push/pull hand glider – oh, and the hot lunch in the Lodge Restaurant.

■ For more information on what all is available in the Boyne Valley area visit Discoverboynevalley.ie.