

# TRAVEL CURATOR



When people speak of Ireland, they tend to get misty in the eye. Perhaps it's because of familial connections, long ties that bind, or perhaps it's due to the landscape dotted with ruins seemingly pulled out of a fairy tale. Maybe it is the Irish's love of storytelling and music, or perhaps, as we would guess, it's because of the Emerald Isle's famed hospitality. Home to some of the most charming small hotels, family-run inns, and literal castles, staying in Ireland has the feel of moving in and out of a story book, where each day you can become something new, immerse yourself into a fresh page, another tale, and try it all on for size.

Here are six Irish country retreats worth traveling for.

## DROMOLAND CASTLE HOTEL, NEWMARKET ON FERGUS, CO. CLARE



Credit: Dromoland Castle Hotel

The seat of the O'Brien family for over 900 years, Dromoland Castle in County Clare has seen a thing or two. The blue limestone grand gothic fortress has undergone several iterations of redesign and rebuilding, having passed through eras of active resistance to British takeover and happier days as the home of the one-time wealthiest family in Ireland. Dromoland remained a private castle until the family, having fallen on times that made the financial realities of castle life increasingly a fantasy, began taking in paying overnight guests in the late 1940s. Today the castle maintains the air of its last heirs, with a mid-century chintz somewhere cozily between Fawlty Towers and a fashionable luxury hotel. The winding corridors are darkly carpeted, an army of long-term local staff await at seemingly every bend, and walls are lined with both Irish whiskies (of course) and Staffordshire dog figurines in equal measure. It was here in 1964, after the castle was reborn from an ancestral home into a fully-functioning hotel, that John Lennon and George Harrison, their wives disguised as maids in tow, took refuge from the prying eyes of Beatlemania. It's easy, in Dromoland's intriguing time warp, to image the Beatles roaming the grounds. Yet rather than encountering John or George, you're more likely to find yourself with young and extended families. The family-friendly nature of Dromoland is the estate's principal attraction and the 330-acre estate with falconry, boating, fishing, and paddle boarding on the private lake, archery, clay shooting, an 18-hole golf course, two restaurants, and a spa, is a world unto itself.

*Rates from \$554*