

Lucinda O'Sullivan's restaurant review: At **Dromoland** Castle you can eat like royalty without paying a king's ransom

From nine-course tasting menus at the fancy **Earl of Thomond** dining room, to posh sandwiches at The Gallery or delicious curry at the Fig Tree Restaurant, our critic was spoilt for choice

Lucinda O'Sullivan

Having enjoyed a Hawk Walk around the grounds followed by a fab revitalising facial in the spa, my appetite was suitably stirred and I was more than ready for dinner in the superbly atmospheric **Dromoland** Castle. And, what a castle it is. Its history goes all the way back to 1014 when Donough O'Brien, a son of Brian Boru, held it as a defensive stronghold, and, for the next 900 years, a branch of the O'Brien's lived there and ruled the demesne. Sweeping forward to 1948, in an effort to make the estate self-supporting as a dairy farm, the then financially hard-pressed 16th Baron of Inchiquin, Sir Donough O'Brien began taking in tourists as guests.

This began a new lease of life for **Dromoland** and, in 1962, Lord Inchiquin sold the castle, surrounding lands and the hunting and fishing rights to an Irish American industrialist, Bernard McDonough. Having undergone major renovations to transform the property into a luxury hotel, it's been a popular destination for visitors from all over the world. Nowadays, it's owned by a consortium of mainly Irish-American investors, including the very hands-on managing director **Mark Nolan**.

There are three dining options at the castle, the formal **Earl of Thomond** dining room, which offers an a la carte or a nine-course tasting menu (€105) and The Gallery, which serves light bites, posh sambos, and so on, and where we had a club sandwich (€23) and a bowl of Tom Yum Kai soup (€17) at lunchtime. For dinner, however, we chose the in-between level of high-end casual dining in the buzzy uber-comfortable East Hampton-style Fig Tree Restaurant located in the adjacent Golf & Country Club.

Open throughout the day from Monday-Friday, 11am-8pm and Saturday/Sunday, 10am-8pm, it's also open to the public, but I'd recommend booking in advance as it's popular with both hotel residents and golfers.

The all-day menu (€7.50-€38) included spicy and sweet chicken wings, a classic Caesar salad, huevos rancheros, a slow cooked beef and Guinness stew, an Irish Angus beef burger, or an Irish Angus sirloin steak, as well as a quartet of stone-baked pizzas (€18-€24), not to mention gluten free and vegan options also.

My fellow traveller, Carmel, thoroughly enjoyed her plentiful bowl of Wild Atlantic Way chowder (€14), served with soda bread, which was not only bursting with flavour but was a meal in itself, brimming with fish, shellfish, leeks, potato, peas and scallions. My starter was also excellent and equally tasty — a bowl of garlic and chilli prawns (€16) tossed in olive oil with slices of chorizo, along with some gluten-free bread.

Paddling into deeper waters, Carmel followed up with fish and chips (€24) — a delicious chunky fillet of wild hake in a **Dromoland** pale ale beer batter, with minty mushy peas, and chunky chips. Dithering over a Walled Garden pizza with buffalo mozzarella, aubergine, artichoke, courgette and peppers, which looked great at the table next to me, I finally settled on a lovely butternut squash and chickpea laksa curry (€22), which came with the full battalion of basmati rice, chutney, raita, poppadom and naan; a lovely light dish to which you can add chicken (€5) or prawns (€7).

From a lush and utterly mouthwatering array of desserts (€11-€13), Carmel enjoyed a rich Callebaut milk chocolate tart (€13) with a cherry compote and pistachio ice-cream, while I had an affogato (€8) of vanilla pod ice-cream, a double espresso and an almond biscuit.

There are cocktails (€16/€18) and drinks galore, and great wines too, with an entry level by the glass €9.50/bottle €42. Resisting the cocktails, we took the sommelier's advice and pushed out the boat with a superb bottle of the aromatic New Zealand Craggy Range Sauvignon Blanc 2022 (€65) with notes of passionfruit pulp and kaffir lime leaf.

All in all, good value, lovely food, and wonderful service, as well as excellent menus showing great support for Irish food producers.

The Fig Tree Restaurant, **Dromoland** Golf & Country Club, Newmarket-On-Fergus, Co Clare; (061) 368-144; [Dromoland.ie](#)

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Caption: Caption:

Garlic and chilli prawns, chorizo and olive oil starter at Fig Tree Restaurant. Photo: Lucinda O'Sullivan