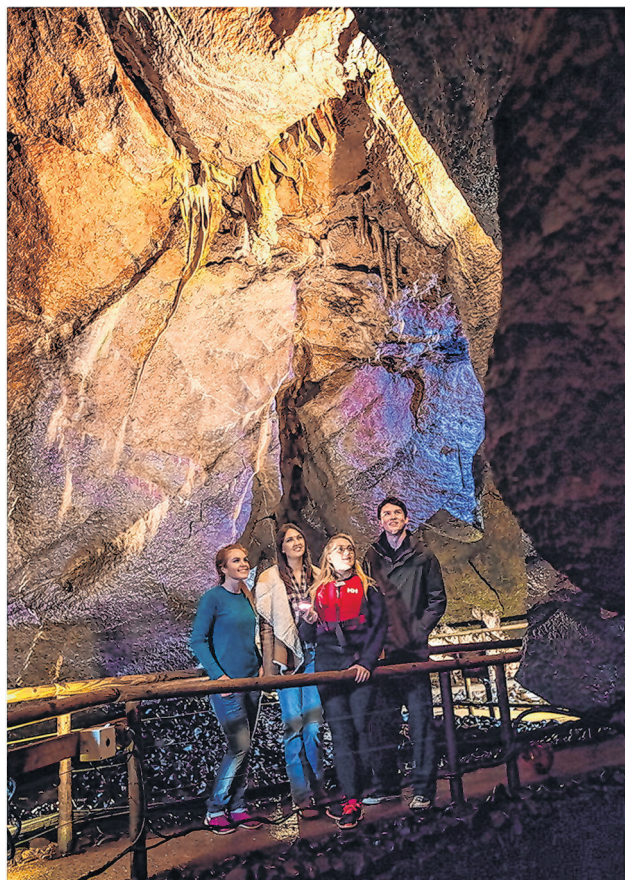
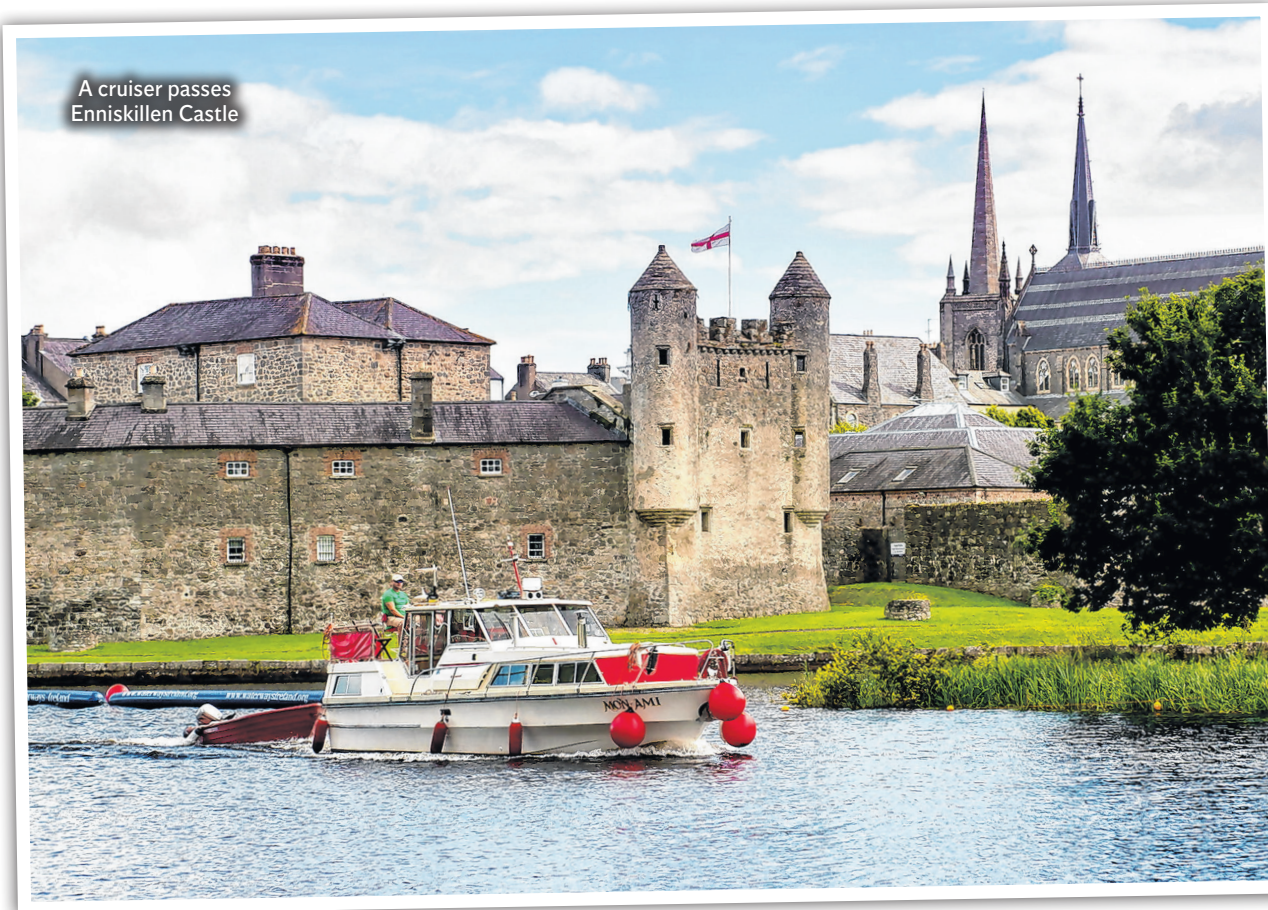


# Herald Travel

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The Marble Arch Caves are one of the North's natural wonders



A cruiser passes Enniskillen Castle

# Fermanagh a firm family favourite

IKNEW swans hissed, but I had no idea cygnets sniggered until I found myself pedalling around Enniskillen – Ireland's only island town – on a **hydrobike**.

Cycling on the water looked fun and far from energetic, a winning combination for a relaxing weekend in Fermanagh's lovely county town, a two-and-a-quarter-hour drive from Dublin.

The last time I navigated Lough Erne, I was at the wheel of a cabin cruiser – a floating holiday home with an engine – and swans and ducks got out of my way.

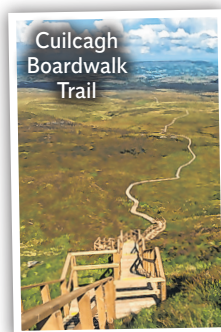
This time, while I pedalled, they paddled right past me as I struggled to get the hang of a bicycle frame on twin floats, like a catamaran. That's when I suspected I heard a

## David Gordon checks out the many attractions in and around Enniskillen during a relaxing weekend in the lovely Fermanagh Lakelands

snigger. They must have thought I was great quack.

As a slightly larger framed chap who wasn't built for buoyancy, I was a wee bit afraid that the slightest wobble would severely test the claim that hydrobikes ([erneadventures.com](http://erneadventures.com)) are unsinkable, unlike a certain vessel built in Belfast.

I needn't have worried. For one thing, there are no



Cuilcagh Boardwalk Trail

icebergs on Lough Erne; for another, you're accompanied by a safety boat on the one-hour circumnavigation of the island, on which sits **Enniskillen Castle**. The castle ([enniskillencastle.co.uk](http://enniskillencastle.co.uk)) was built in the 1420s by chieftain Hugh

Maguire, who was known as The Hospitable, which is appropriate, as the town takes great pride in welcoming and

looking after its visitors. While the castle is an attraction in itself, it also houses **Fermanagh County Museum** and, for military buffs, **The Inniskillings Museum**, which tells the story of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and the 5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards. Enniskillen is the only town in the UK and Ireland to have given its name to two army regiments. Although both no longer exist, the Dragoons are immortalised in the song

*Fare Thee Well Enniskillen*, most famously recorded by Tommy Makem with the Clancy Brothers.

Talking of famous, Oscar Wilde, Samuel Beckett and, more recently, Neil Hannon of The Divine Comedy went to Portora Royal School, which was founded in 1608 in Lisnaskea (the present building in Enniskillen dates from 1777).

Another former pupil was naval surgeon, zoologist and botanist Dr John White, who achieved great things in Australia but is best remembered as the man who sent the first kangaroo ever seen in England to 'Mad' King George III.

*Line of Duty* star Adrian 'Ted Hastings' Dunbar is

from Enniskillen, as is his pal Quintin Charles Devenish Lawson – Charlie Lawson to you and me and better known as Jim McDonald from *Coronation Street*.

A trip to **Devenish Island** monastic site is a must, and part of the fun is getting there on the distinctive yellow **Erne Water Taxi** ([ernewater-taxi.com](http://ernewater-taxi.com)), which skims across the lough at a fair old rate of knots.

The site, one of the most important in Ireland, was founded in the sixth century by Saint Molaise and is a major tourist attraction, but not all visitors have been welcome – the Vikings dropped by in 837AD, and it wasn't for a picnic.

A private 90-minute boat trip and tour of Devenish, with its church ruins dating



David tries a hydrobike

## NEXT WEEK: DOLOMITES

The peaks and valleys of northern Italy are ideal for hiking and biking



The Fermanagh Lakelands are famed for coarse fishing

from the 12th to early 16th centuries and the 12th century round tower, is available for parties of up to eight and costs £120/€140, which is €17.50 each with a full complement.

The 52-seater **MV Kestrel** water bus ([ernetours.com](http://ernetours.com)), which offers public cruises (adults £10) to Devenish and allows dogs on board, is being refurbished at the moment, but the operators are aiming to relaunch next month.

In the foothills of Cuilcagh Mountain – well, deep beneath them – are the marvellous, 340-million-year-old **Marble Arch Caves** ([marblearchcaves.co.uk](http://marblearchcaves.co.uk)).

Part of the Marble Arch Caves Unesco Global Geopark, this system of underground limestone chambers, passages, rivers, waterfalls and stalactites (they grow at a rate of 1cm every 1,000 years) is fascinating.

The one-hour guided tour (adults £10), which involves a 1.5km walk, should be no problem for people

who are claustrophobic as the chambers are large. Unfortunately, the 10-minute underground boat ride has fallen victim to Covid restrictions.

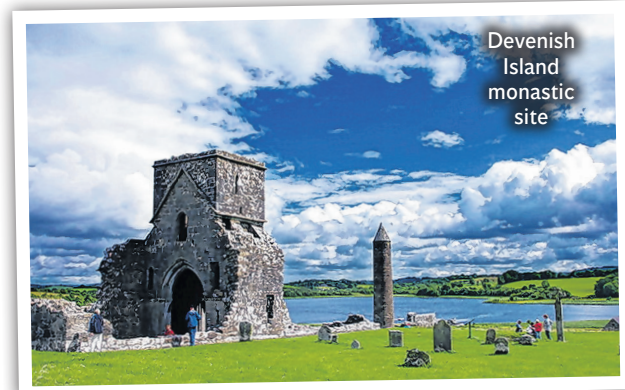
The **Cuilcagh Boardwalk Trail**, better known as the Stairway to Heaven, is in the geopark and meanders for 6km through Northern Ireland's largest expanse of blanket bog.

It's a bit of a steep climb to the scenic platform on the side of Cuilcagh Mountain, but the views are well worth the huffing and puffing.

You need a base for all that exploring, and I rented a courtyard cottage for a weekend on the **Belle Isle Estate** ([belle-isle.com](http://belle-isle.com)) just outside Enniskillen, which has an on-site bistro.

However, I chose to show off my barbecue skills, and quickly discovered each cottage is equipped with a very loud smoke alarm.

For a totally relaxed break, Enniskillen came up trumps, so it did, as local lad Charlie Lawson would say.



Devenish Island monastic site

## EAT

**Dollakis** puts a local spin on classic Greek cuisine. A super-popular restaurant run by husband and wife Giorgios and Sarah that gets rave reviews from regulars and tourists alike. There aren't enough Greek restaurants on this island, so if anyone's thinking of opening one, they'd be wise to take tips from Dollakis. 28 Cross Street, Enniskillen, FB @DollakisRestaurant

**Between the Bridges:** This fabulous food hall and deli is a showcase for many Fermanagh food producers and the perfect place to stock up for a picnic. 12 Townhall Street, Enniskillen, FB @betweenthebridgesekn

**The Firehouse:** Everyone is full of praise for the friendly staff at this always busy (always a good sign) restaurant that's a big favourite with families. Try the meat feast pizza – if you're able for it. 26 Townhall Street, Enniskillen, FB @thefirehouseenniskillen

**Cafe Merlot** offers modern cuisine that gives established, classic dishes a global twist that makes all the difference. Locally-sourced and farmed



Families love Firehouse. Right, feast your eyes on Watermill Lodge, then feast in its restaurant

beef, poultry, cheeses and charcuterie feature heavily and are always beautifully presented in a room featuring a vaulted ceiling and exposed stonework. 6 Church Street, Enniskillen, [blakesofthehollow.com](https://www.blakesofthehollow.com)

**28 at the Hollow:** Head chef Glen Wheeler has worked at more Michelin-starred restaurants than you can shake a wooden spoon at. All that passion and experience has been brought to bear in the kitchen here. The finest local ingre-

dients are transformed into exquisitely prepared, cooked and presented dishes such as venison loin with spiced red cabbage and pheasant noodle with thyme jus. 6 Church Street, Enniskillen, FB @28AtTheHollow

**Saddlers:** The Coalter family have run this great bistro and wine bar attached to The Horsehoe Bar since 1967. A top recommendation. 66 Bellmore Street, Enniskillen, [horseshoeandsaddlers.com](https://www.horseshoeandsaddlers.com)

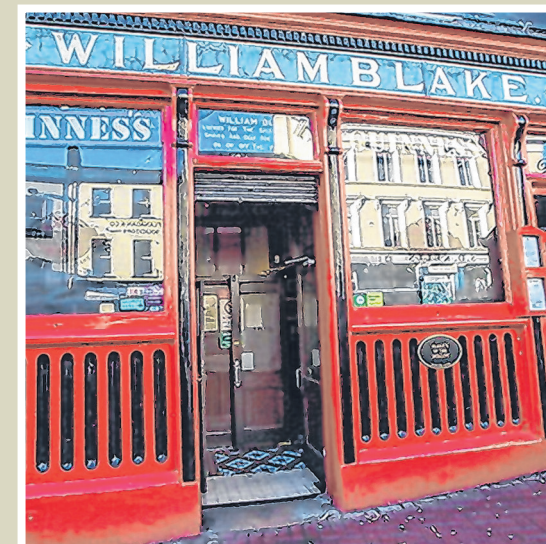
**Watermill Lodge:** If it was good enough for *Daniel and Majella's B&B Road Trip...* An accommodation option as well as an award-winning restaurant in Ireland's loveliest guesthouse. Enjoy the early bird or a la carte seasonal menu while taking in the views across Lough Erne. You could stay a couple of nights in Enniskillen and one or two nights here to make the most of a visit to Fermanagh. *Killmore Quay, Lisnaskea, watermillrestaurant-fermanagh.com*



## DRINK

**Blakes of the Hollow:** Established in 1887, Enniskillen's most famous pub – and rightly so – is one of the most enjoyable places to while away an hour or two over a pint of Guinness or locally-brewed beer. This beautifully restored and preserved Victorian building draws locals and visitors from miles around. The late novelist John McGahern considered Blakes "one of the happiest and most beautiful bars in the whole of Ireland" and fellow author Colm Tóibín described it as a "cathedral of a pub". While there's no church music, Friday night is trad night, when some of the finest singers and players have every toe in the place tapping. You can't visit Enniskillen without visiting Blakes. 6 Church Street, Enniskillen, [blakesofthehollow.com](https://www.blakesofthehollow.com)

**Granny Annies:** The decor is quirky, making you feel like you're visiting your granny's house, but this is the newest and trendiest bar in town and it serves a great range of classic and inventive cocktails. There's regular live entertainment in this sister bar of the Granny Annies in Belfast and Derry. 1 Townhall Street, Enniskillen, [grannyannies.co.uk](https://www.grannyannies.co.uk)



Enniskillen's best-known pub, Blakes of the Hollow. Top right, The Taphouse. Above, Pats Bar

**Pat's Bar:** Here's a good old traditional bar with regular live traditional music and great pub grub. For the more energetic, there's a nightclub upstairs. 1-5 Townhall Street, Enniskillen, [patsenniskillen.com](https://www.patsenniskillen.com)

**Crowe's Nest:** Another popular bar with a nightclub upstairs, the Crowe's Nest is one of Enniskillen's oldest pubs and prides itself on the food it serves. Musician Paddy Shannon is a local favourite

who always draws an appreciative audience. 12 High Street, Enniskillen, FB @crowesnest.enniskillen

**The Taphouse** has quickly established itself as one of the best gastro pubs in Fermanagh, providing tasty and filling dishes at reasonable prices. 46 Old Tempo Road, Enniskillen, [thetaphouseenniskillen.com](https://www.thetaphouseenniskillen.com)

**Boatyard Distillery** is a farm-to-bottle distillery on the



banks of Lough Erne. Local and internationally-sourced organic ingredients are chosen for each product – the gin botanical, Sweet Gale, is foraged from the family bog, while the wheat used in the vodka comes from the nearest fields. You'll find Boatyard gins and vodkas in bars and restaurants across Northern Ireland, and you can visit the distillery for a tour and tasting. Tullybay Marina, 346 Lough Shore Road, Enniskillen, [boatyarddistillery.com](https://www.boatyarddistillery.com)

