

A break in the Boyne Valley

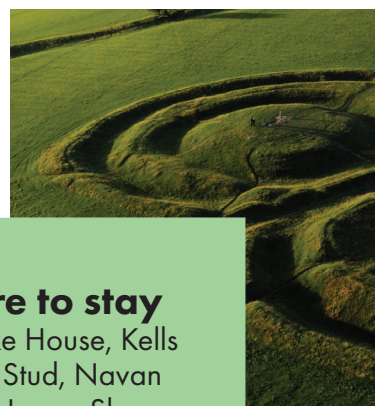
Bronwyn O'Neill on the joys of a holiday close to home.

There's something to be said for staycations. Na laethanta here-a, if you will. I could wax poetic for hours about my grá for Ireland. Where others find that coming home feeling when they step off the plane into a sunny country, I have never felt more settled in my bones than when I'm exploring Ireland. So a weekend spent in the Boyne Valley is my ideal trip. Especially as it's just down the road from my home. We have a rich history here in Ireland. So where better to learn about our majestic past than at the Hill of Tara? We were greeted by our tour guide, Michael Fox, who gave us a very insightful talk on the sacred spot. It has recently been adopted as a spiritual site for people who are leaning into their Celtic roots, myself included. And without sounding too airy-fairy, the feeling on the hill is truly mystical.

If history lessons aren't your game, big-budget blockbusters might be. Just a few minutes down the road is Bective Abbey. While it was once a working monastery and it does have a rich history throughout the year, it's now used to shoot movies, including the iconic *Braveheart*. More recently the surrounding fields were used in Matt Damon and Ben Affleck's *The Last Duel*. Y'know, the film that had Matt officially become a member of Irish society?

A morning of walking around had us absolutely starved so we headed to the Bective Tearoom for lunch. Then it was on to Bective Stud farm. Do I know a thing about horses? No! But there were alpacas and foals, so I was delighted.

Of course, a trip to the Boyne Valley wouldn't be complete without heading to Kells. Unfortunately, the Book of Kells isn't there anymore,



you'll have to travel to Trinity College for that. But there is plenty of pride in the town as well as stories about how that book came to be. Being a bit of a history nerd paid off because I was left absolutely enthralled by the history of the town that was founded back in Viking times.

After exploring Kells and stopping off for dinner, we were off again to reconnect with nature.

We popped into Loughcrew Estate where we explored the sprawling garden and forest. We got absolutely drenched, but walking through this gorgeous garden made it all worth it. Honestly, it's like being transported to a different world.

We spent the night at Tom Blake House, a B&B that had me thinking I was in a *Home Alone* film. The staircase alone was something straight out of a fairytale. Breakfast the next morning was an absolute dream with our lovely hosts cooking us a delicious meal. I opted for the staple of poached eggs, avocado and sourdough. If it's not broken don't fix it, says I. It was the perfect fuel to keep us going for our trip home.



Where to stay

Tom Blake House, Kells
Bective Stud, Navan
Boyne House, Slane

Where to eat

Lloyd Restaurant, Kells
79 West Street, Drogheda
An Stór, Baile Ghib

Where to visit for families

Newgrange
Beactive Abbey, Navan
An Gobha, Blacksmith of the Boyne Valley, Navan

Where to visit for couples

Slane Whiskey Distillery, Slane
Trim Castle, Trim
River Spa, Trim

Where to visit for nature lovers

The Royal Canal Greenway
Loughcrew Cairns and
Loughcrew Estate, Oldcastle
Hill of Tara, Castleboy