

Top 10 waterside hideaways

Splash out in a lakeside mansion or a cottage by the sea. **Alastair Sawday** selects his favourite watery retreats in Ireland

The Crooked Cottage, Co Mayo
 Could this be the perfect retreat? Once here, you are alone in a rural dyl: a little huddle of buildings on 10 acres surrounded by trees, old walls and gorgeous views to lovely rough Conn.



The cottage is pleasingly ancient; not a right-angle in sight. The interior is nicely personal with books and painted floorboards, old stones and white walls, pine beds and a comforting lived-in feel. The main bedroom under the rafters has a huge bed. Along the passage where the wellies are kept you'll find the simple white bathroom and the smaller bedroom. The kitchen has all you need to prepare a good spread for the big old table in the open living room. **Details:** The Crooked Cottage, Terrybawn, Pontoon, Co Mayo (01-676 5011; www.number31.ie). Costs €500-€750 per week.

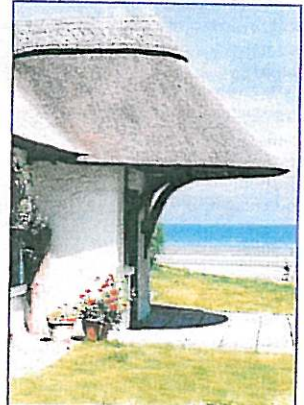
Coopershill House, Co Sligo
 Coopershill is out of this world. The long drive winds through beau-



tiful parkland to formal gardens where a muster of peacocks roams and you may glimpse Brian mowing in baggy corduroys. The house is one of the most handsome and distinguished examples of Irish Georgian. Despite

these fine looks, the welcome couldn't be warmer: this is a well-loved home buzzing with activity, not a grand hotel. Simon, and Alice the spaniel, greet you with friendly smiles before inviting you into the awesome stone-floored hall. Pause for a moment and look up at the flags, the stags, the marble figurines and the old parchment map of Ireland. That's just the hall! There are ancestors, antlers and antiques everywhere, fresh flowers and a chaise longue in every room, plush amazing high old beds with oh-so-fitting sheets, blankets and eiderdowns. Penny Parrott roams around, but only talks when alone. **Details:** Coopershill House, Riverstown, Co Sligo (071 916 5108; www.coopershill.com). Doubles €228-€284, singles €149-€177.

The Cottages, Co Meath
 Once through the 'village gate' you are secluded, safe in magical surroundings. Beautiful organic flower gardens wind through the



thatched hamlet and you can walk along the beach to pubs and restaurants.

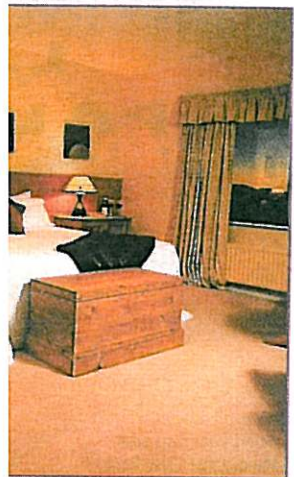
Liz's family has been letting cottages beside this safe, seven-mile, sandy beach since 1908 and her warm welcome, with hot scones from the oven and homemade jam, proves she inherited the hospitality gene.

With their quilted bedcovers on excellent beds, modern bathrooms with underfloor heating, double-ended baths and power showers, CD and DVD players, local art and pottery, comfy sofas and fully-fitted kitchens, you will surely be content. All you can hear is the sea.

There's even a thatched Wendy house for children, a barbecue, a gourmet farm shop at the gate and those head-clearing beach walks. The best antidote to city madness, 20 minutes from Dublin Airport. **Details:** The Cottages, Seabank, Bettystown/Laytown, Co Meath, www.cottages-ireland.com; 041 382 8104). €980-€2,900 per week, €70 per person per night.

Gorman's Clifftop House and Restaurant, Co Kerry

Vincent and Sile have done amazing things here, turning their modest cafe and B&B into a luxurious restaurant with rooms. Their phi-



sophy is simple and reassuring: a genuine welcome, good food and an excellent bed.

You'll find wooden furniture crafted in Tralee, Louis Mulcahy pottery, arty sea-shell prints in rooms with warm colours where you feel you're almost walking into a Atlantic sunset ("a happy coincidence," says Sile) and organic fair-trade coffee at breakfast. The restaurant looks across Smerwick harbour to the Three Sisters and the giant ocean beyond. Vincent's robust and flavoursome Irish cooking uses local and organic ingredients where possible: Dingle Bay prawns, Irish Hereford beef, rrmhouse cheeses.

Details: Gorman's Clifftop House & Restaurant, Glaise Bheag, Ballyvrid (Dingle Peninsula), Co Kerry

(066 915 5162; www.gormans-clifftophouse.com). Double rooms €130-€190, singles €85-€125.

The Quay House, Co Galway

Everyone should visit the Quay House (main picture, left) at least once. Paddy is a hugely generous, big-hearted man with an enormous talent for mixing antiques, ancestral portraits and ornate mirrors with African shields, tiger skins, sculpture and stuffed anything. And Julia has a great eye for colour.

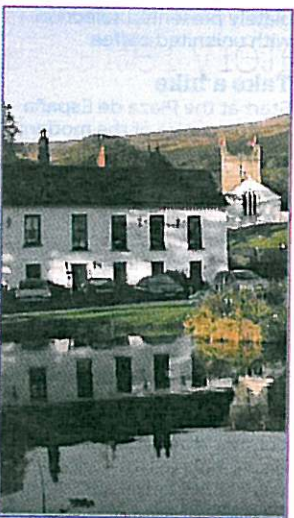
Yes, it's quirky, but it is also steeped in sybaritic luxury and style: big bedrooms are all different — perhaps with a four-poster, a grand view, a working fireplace — and there's not a whiff of meanness. All have soundproofed walls, deep mattresses, thick curtains, large fluffy towels, piping hot water and proper bathrooms with windows.

Sleep soundly to the clinking of boats in the harbour then breakfast slowly on home-baked bread, full Irish, devilled kidneys and even oysters, in a sunny conservatory. **Details:** The Quay House, Beach Road, Clifden, Co Galway (095 21369; www.thequayhouse.com). B&B doubles from €75 per person sharing, singles from €90.

Ghan House, Co Louth

This much-loved family inn is entered by a low beamed hall with a blazing log fire. Enter the low, beamed hall with its blazing log fire and know 18th-century Ghan House for the much-loved family inn that it is.

Enclosed within the ancient walls of Carlingford, the house overlooks the pond, the road and Carlingford Lough to the distant Mourne Mountains. Some guests prefer a room in the creaky, timeworn old house, others the peace and quiet of the



new annexe. There are arched doorways, mouldings, old-style velvet with tassels, proper bathrooms.

You'll find thick wool carpets, family antiques, personal bits, a

sense of deep comfort, plus books in the cosy little sitting room.

Details: Ghan House, Carlingford, Co Louth, (042 937 3682; www.ghanhouse.com). Doubles from €95, singles from €85.

Blairs Cove House, Co Cork

The centrepiece of this charming seaside idyll is a cobbled courtyard where modern sculpture stands by an old lily pond.

Outbuildings have been converted into one lofty, yet intimate, stone-walled restaurant and four beautiful two-storey suites, each with its own kitchen. The studio above the restaurant has sensational bay views.



Philippe (from Belgium) and Sabine (from Germany) De Mey are a cosmopolitan couple who believe in fabulous food and sophisticated comfort. Breakfast is delivered to you, a healthy spread ordered the night before. The restaurant serves seafood in season, laid out like sculpture; meat is grilled over logs; a pianist plays on Saturdays: a feast for all senses. In summer, you eat in the conservatory overlooking the courtyard. The De Meys know how to spoil you. **Details:** Blairs Cove House, Durrus, Co Cork, (www.blairs Cove.ie; 027 61127). Doubles €150-€230, singles from €100.

Mount Cashel Lodge, Co Clare

These pretty 18th-century stone lodges stand creeper-clung round a courtyard, the stables stand apart. Renovated with a light, sensitive hand, the interiors are done in a straightforward, modern country style for comfort and practicality with good pine kitchens, iron beds with excellent bedding and proper armchairs before open fires. French doors lead to private terraces stretching out to the limpid lake and moorland.

There are barbecues for guests to use and even baby-sitting services

(book ahead).

The beautiful lakeside position, its paths, boats and rich fishing are



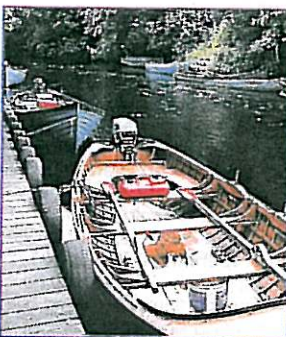
yours for the duration. Pat has built a jetty, provides safety equipment and is ever willing to guide and advise.

Details: Mount Cashel Lodge, Kilmurry, Sixmilebridge, Co Clare (061 369 142; www.mtcashel.com). From €660-€1,750 per week.

Camillaun, Co Galway

It's so quiet and peaceful down here by the river Owenriff, no wonder Greg and Deirdre chose the site to build their cosy new family house. Walkers, nature lovers, fishing fans and birdwatchers will be in their element.

Deirdre's breakfasts set you up for a hearty day out in this beautiful countryside; return to a roaring fire in a comfy sitting room or a game of pool on the full-sized table. Dinners are scrumptious and



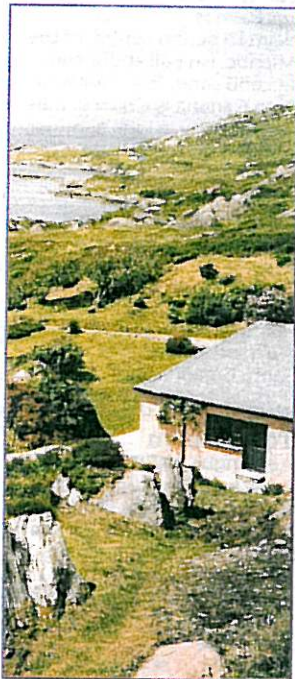
impeccably delivered by Deirdre in a proper chef's outfit, including hat! Bedrooms look out over the neat garden and are simply and attractively furnished with antiques, while bathrooms have lots of towels and piping hot water.


You can fish straight from the house — a gillie can be arranged and Greg is an expert so he can give advice. Should you prefer to swing a racket, there's a tennis court in the garden. For less active souls there's a hot tub in a gazebo.

Details: Camillaun, Oughterard, Co Galway (www.camillaun.com, 091 552 678). €40-45 per person sharing, €12-13 single supplement.

Iskeroon, Co Kerry

This is the place where the road runs out... in every direction there are views of a blue, sparkling sea. David Hare knew the house as a child: his grandfather lived nearby and he'd sneak up for a glimpse. He and Geraldine, an easy-going couple, have renovated marvellously. There are natural wood floors, skylights in the ceiling, bathrooms with azure blue tiling, super kitchenettes and first-floor balconies for the views (one of the sea, one of the hills).



Spellbound by the view, you can breakfast deliciously while watching the locals pass by: seals, seagulls, the odd boat. Follow the path to the pub (20 minutes), or take the boat to the Skelligs for immense vistas and walks in the wilderness. **Details:** Iskeroon, Bunavalla, Caherdaniel, Co Kerry (066 947 5119; www.iskeroon.com); Doubles from €160, apartment €500-€550 per week. 

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