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# ESCAPE

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**IF YOU'RE** getting married abroad or are looking for some inspiring honeymoon ideas then head to the Wedding and Honeymoon Show in Dublin's RDS on September 3 - 4. The Cassidy Classic Resorts stand will have dozens of exotic destinations and deals, like a week in the the 5\* Dreams Riviera Cancun, all inclusive for about €1,600.



**OPULENT:** Barony's Restaurant in The Talbot Hotel

## WHAT A WELCOME IN MAJESTIC MAYO

by Niamh Byrne

"OH the Green and Red of Mayo, I can see it still, its soft and craggy bog lands, its tall majestic hills.

"Where the ocean kisses Ireland, and the waves caress its shore, oh the feeling it came over me to stay forever more."

The Saw Doctors may have been proud shams from Tuam, County Galway, but even they couldn't resist the allure of arguably the most beautiful county in Ireland.

Having never visited the region I packed my suitcase and trekked seven hours across the country to the far westerly tip of Ireland - Belmullet, to delve deep into the Mayo experience.

Nestled in the heart of the Gaeltacht in Erris, Belmullet is an area of unspoilt beauty.

When I stepped inside Belmullet's Talbot Hotel, I felt like I had been transported to a boutique Parisian establishment.

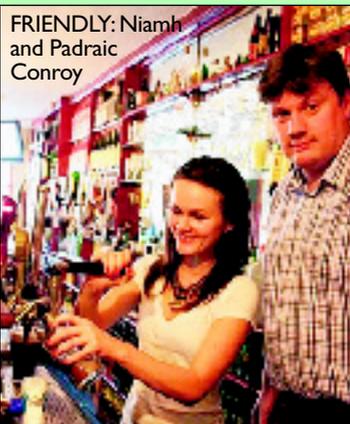
Opulent and luxurious, each of the 21 rooms has its own charm. Perfect for romantic getaways, the suites include four poster beds and twin rain showers.

I headed down to the hotel's Barony restaurant, the ultimate fine dining experience.

Decked out in pink, purple and red velvet dining chairs, gold gilded mirrors and chandeliers, the restaurant is uber plush, while the friendly staff offer a fresh, unpretentious approach to top quality dining.

Filling up on a hearty seafood chowder and a lobster main (which I was able to pick from the tank) I headed down the road to McDonnells

**FRIENDLY:** Niamh and Padraic Conroy



pub for the tastiest pint(s) of Guinness I have ever had.

Walking into the bar, publican Padraic Conroy shook my hand and greeted me like an old friend - this is another thing that makes Mayo so appealing, the people are incredibly welcoming.

I took to Carne Golf Links the next morning for 18 holes surrounded by the most magnificent sand dunes overlooking Blacksod Bay and the legendary islands of Inis Gloire and Inis Geidhe.

**Stay & Play Offer at the Talbot:** Experience one night at The Talbot Hotel, in a Deluxe room with all comforts you will need after playing a round of golf and enjoy one gourmet dinner in the Barony Restaurant and freshly cooked breakfast in the morning for only €114 per person sharing. For more information log onto [www.thetalbothotel.ie](http://www.thetalbothotel.ie).



**TAKETHE PLUNGE:** Hiring a cruiser on the Shannon River is great fun for all the family

# SHIP HIP HOORAY

Our intrepid adventurers set sail on a

By Brenda Woods

**I** THOUGHT I was going to do a Goldie Hawn in Overboard - bejewelled and bedecked on the portside in a shimmering cocktail ball gown.

Reality was - sitting around the table in the cabin, hiding from the rain, two children and myself, thumping our fists onto the formica in the darkness over a couple of glasses of apple juice, singing Don't Stop Believing before the thud sound hit us and we were jostled into alarm. Me like a badly panicked Richard Dreyfuss in Jaws pushing my glasses up onto my nose again as the children kept asking: "what's happening!"

Sink or swim - that's what was happening.

Hubby up deck at the helm told us not to panic, just another craft had jostled into us, looking for a birth for the night.

We'd decided to stay in Ireland and try an alternative holiday to sun, sea and sand. This was going to be a holiday at a very leisurely pace, with plenty of mishaps and adventure on the high seas of the Shannon river.

We booked a week with Carrickcraft, one of the largest and most experienced cruiser hire companies in Ireland. It operates some 300 majestic miles of silvery waterway and has promised idyllic cruising holidays over 35 years.

If you want a lazy paced holiday, and the chance to really get away from it all, from the motorways, cars, hubbub of shopping

centres and streets, then this is the place for you.

Driving down to Banagher in County Offaly, we parked our car safely at the marina while the children took time out to play in the extremely child friendly playground, before checking in at the reception.

No licence is required to cruise the rivers of Ireland, and anyone over the age of 21 can take command of any of the seven holiday cruisers on offer. And for the first time, this year, you can book any length of holiday from three days to two weeks.

The boat was simple to operate, based on just turning a key into the ignition and steering off, keeping the craft within red and black markers posted along the river.

They take their safety seriously at Carrickcraft with life-jackets issued for us all and warnings to wear them up deck and around the marina. This was followed by a 20 minute video on the perils and pitfalls of a life afloat. It was interesting and fun and we all felt a bit more relaxed about what was needed.

The best thing about life onboard our Carlow Cruiser, was the freedom to do and go where we wanted, whenever. There was no agenda, no schedule and it took us a while to unwind to the fact we didn't have to be anywhere at a specific time. Just moor the craft at any marina along the way - disembark and enjoy the craic.

Our first port of call was Clonmacnoise. The historic

**Always find the sunny spot.**



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