

Co. Down



### Ballymote House

Killough Road, Downpatrick, Co. Down

Rare seabirds can occasionally be spotted over Ballymote where it stands in an undisturbed pocket of historic monuments, deserted beaches and rolling countryside, an area left to its own devices as it only goes to the sea. Thousands of years ago, that sea brought some of the earliest settlers to Ireland: a short drive or bike ride leads to stone circles, dolmens, castles, healing wells and 10th-century churches. One of the first unfortified houses built in the area, Ballymote has wonderful charm, its graceful 1730s Georgian looks framed by a fine park laid by the 19th-century plantsman George Carter. The sight of mature ash and sycamore lifts any morning. Nicola runs the place with gusto and seemingly boundless energy, poaching nectarines for breakfast one moment, conversing with great erudition the next, then out to feed the horses, dogs in tow. Amazing. The house has great style, bedrooms are immensely comfortable, there's an odd Landseer glass sculpture of two polar bears and you could try rook's breast for dinner. Killough village is near, walks in the Mourne Mountains are stupendous.

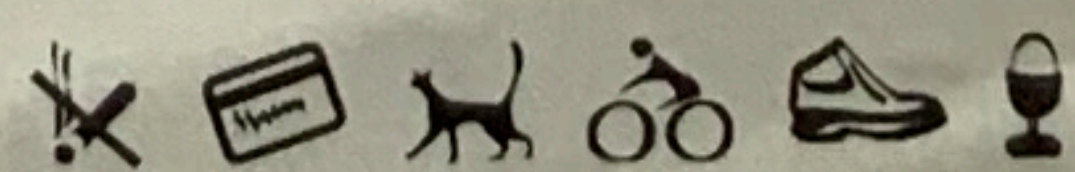


rooms 3: 1 double, 1 single; 1 double with separate bath.  
price From £60. Singles £30.  
meals Meals by arrangement. Wide choice of pubs & restaurants 2 miles.  
closed 23rd-30th December.  
directions From Downpatrick B176 for Killough; house 1 mile on left after town.

tel James & Nicola Manningham-Buller  
+44 (0)28 4461 5500  
fax +44 (0)28 4461 2111  
email [bandb@ballymotehouse.com](mailto:bandb@ballymotehouse.com)  
web [www.ballymotehouse.com](http://www.ballymotehouse.com)

B&B

Map 2 Entry 19



## NORTHERN IRELAND - COMBER

### ANNA'S HOUSE

Anna Johnson  
Tullynagee, 35 Lisbarnett Rd  
Comber, County Down  
☎ 028-9754 1566  
☎ 028-9754 1566  
🌐 [www.annashouse.com](http://www.annashouse.com)



Anna and Ken's house is one of the ultimate cult addresses, with fans from all over the world.



Anna and Ken Johnson's house is the ultimate cult destination in Northern Ireland. A gorgeous house, a gorgeous garden, gorgeous cooking. Anna's is the sort of house that manages to evoke the most elemental feelings about hospitality, food and our place in the world. Anna's is 14 miles from Belfast, but feels a zillion miles from the real world. Step in here and you step into a dream, or at least into some imagined world from your childhood, a space where you are woken by the smells of morning baking, a space where you can lose yourself in an afternoon in the garden, where you can chat away to people you have just met and yet feel you have known them all your life. Does that sound like hyperbole? Well check this script from a pair of German visitors: "This is the ideal B&B... great cooking, comfy rooms and superb hospitality. Anna and Ken you're great.. it felt like coming home." Feels like coming home.

- **OPEN:** All year, except Christmas
- **ROOMS:** Three rooms
- **PRICE:** £40-£45 per single room, £70 double room

● **NOTES:** Dinner by request. Secure car parking. No ♿ access. Babies welcome, not suitable for children. 📧 On-line bookings.

● **DIRECTIONS:**

In Lisbane pass the petrol station, turn right into Lisbarnett Road. After 1km & after a right-hand bend follow a private concrete lane leading up the hill.

## DOWNPATRICK - NORTHERN IRELAND

### BALLYMOTE HOUSE

Nicola & James Manningham-Buller  
Killough Road  
Downpatrick  
County Down  
☎ 028-4461 5500  
🌐 [www.ballymotehouse.com](http://www.ballymotehouse.com)



Resplendent, elegantly faded charm and great cooking from Nicola are the Ballymote signatures.



If you're a food-lover looking for somewhere to stay in St Patrick's country, then there's nowhere nicer than Ballymote, a pretty Georgian B&B and well worn family home, stuffed full of fine hand-me-down antiques, faded silk curtains and pure-bred dogs. Blissful beds, huge bathtubs, log and hand-cut-turf fires await you, and Nicola, an enthusiastic, well practiced cook, gives ingredients - from local butchers, the family estate, and the boats at Ardglass - a sophisticated cordon bleu treatment. You need to allow plenty of advance warning if there's a large party, or if you'd like to experience the aristocratic charm of the dining room. However, even at short notice, Nicola will churn out delicious suppers - such as the legendary stone of langoustines and bottle of Chablis - while chattering away about horsey pursuits and all the activities you can pursue in this beautiful holy well and stone circle-blessed countryside.

- **OPEN:** All year, except Christmas
- **ROOMS:** Three rooms
- **PRICE:** B&B £35 per person.

● **NOTES:** 📧 Visa, Mastercard. 📧 Email bookings. Pets facilitated, but not in the house. Horses can be stabled by arrangement. Preferably no children under 5 yrs. Secure parking. No ♿ access. Internet access available to guests.

● **DIRECTIONS:**

In Downpatrick, take the B176 to Killough and they are 1.5km on the left-hand side.

## Where to stay and go in Northern Ireland

### What to see and do

- Explore the breathtaking countryside of the Duke of Abercorn Estate, Baronscourt, Newtown Stewart, pulled by a team of highly trained Siberian Huskies; [www.bessybellhuskytrekkers.co.uk](http://www.bessybellhuskytrekkers.co.uk)

- Belfast's iconic City Hall has undergone an £11million restoration and free tours of the building are available daily except Sundays.

- Step in the footsteps of CS Lewis along the Lagan Towpath, passing through wetlands, riverside meadows and mixed woodland.
- Visit one of Ireland's spectacular castles that have stood through centuries of war, siege and change.

### Where to stay

- Conveniently located close to Belfast, Maryville House, formerly a Victorian gentleman's residence, is a boutique B&B



Belfast City Hall

THINKSTOCK

located in its own private grounds with an in-house tearoom. Single room £45, Double room £90. Tel: 028 9068 1510; [www.maryvillehouse.co.uk](http://www.maryvillehouse.co.uk)

- Built around 1730, Ballymote House in Strangford Loch is a country house situated in peaceful rolling countryside, close to Blue Flag beaches and the spectacular Mourne Mountains. B&B from £42.50 per person per night. Tel: 028 4461 5500; [www.ballymotehouse.com](http://www.ballymotehouse.com)



Ballymote House

## Stefan's choice specialist nursery

### Dickson Nurseries

I found Dickson Nurseries when I was last visiting the great houses in the Newtownards area and anyone who knows anything about roses will recognise the name! Dicksons claim to be the world's oldest rose breeding company and the name is synonymous with the great Irish tradition of rose growing. Go at the height of the summer season and you will be bowled over, as I was. But if you can't, then take advantage of their mail order.

- Dickson Nurseries, Milecross Road, Newtownards BT23 4SS, tel: 028 9181 2206; [www.dickson-roses.co.uk](http://www.dickson-roses.co.uk)



'Irish Eyes'



'Mind Games'

PHOTOS: DICKSON NURSERIES



## DIARY DATES

### Happy New Year!

#### Tuesday January 1

Outdoor walks and nature activities for the whole family at Pensthorpe Wildlife and Gardens in North Norfolk. The 250-acre reserve is perfect for wintertime exploring and for those with a love of nature and wildlife. Walks take in popular features such as the Millennium Garden, the Wildflower Meadow and the Conservation Centre. Spot red squirrels, cranes, other birds and wildlife. Open 10am-4pm. Admission: £9.75 for adults, £8 for seniors and £6.25 for children (aged four to 16). Information: 01328 851465 or visit [www.pensthorpe.com](http://www.pensthorpe.com)

#### Tuesday January 1

Enjoy a refreshing two mile guided stroll around the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffordshire DE13 7AR with an experienced guide. The tour is suitable for the whole family. £7.50 per person (includes a bowl of home made soup). Information: 01283 792333 or visit [www.thenma.org.uk](http://www.thenma.org.uk)



NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM

## Fairs and Exhibitions

#### Saturday January 12 and Sunday January 13

Head to the National Botanic Garden of Wales Llanarthne, Camarthenshire SA32 8HG and join the Derwen Fairs for high quality antiques stalls with china, jewellery and furniture. Set in the stunning surrounds of Lord Foster's Great Glasshouse. 10am-4.30pm both days. Tickets: adult: £2 and under 16s go free. Information: 01558 668 768 or visit [www.gardenofwales.org.uk](http://www.gardenofwales.org.uk)



RHS

#### Saturday January 12 until Sunday February 24

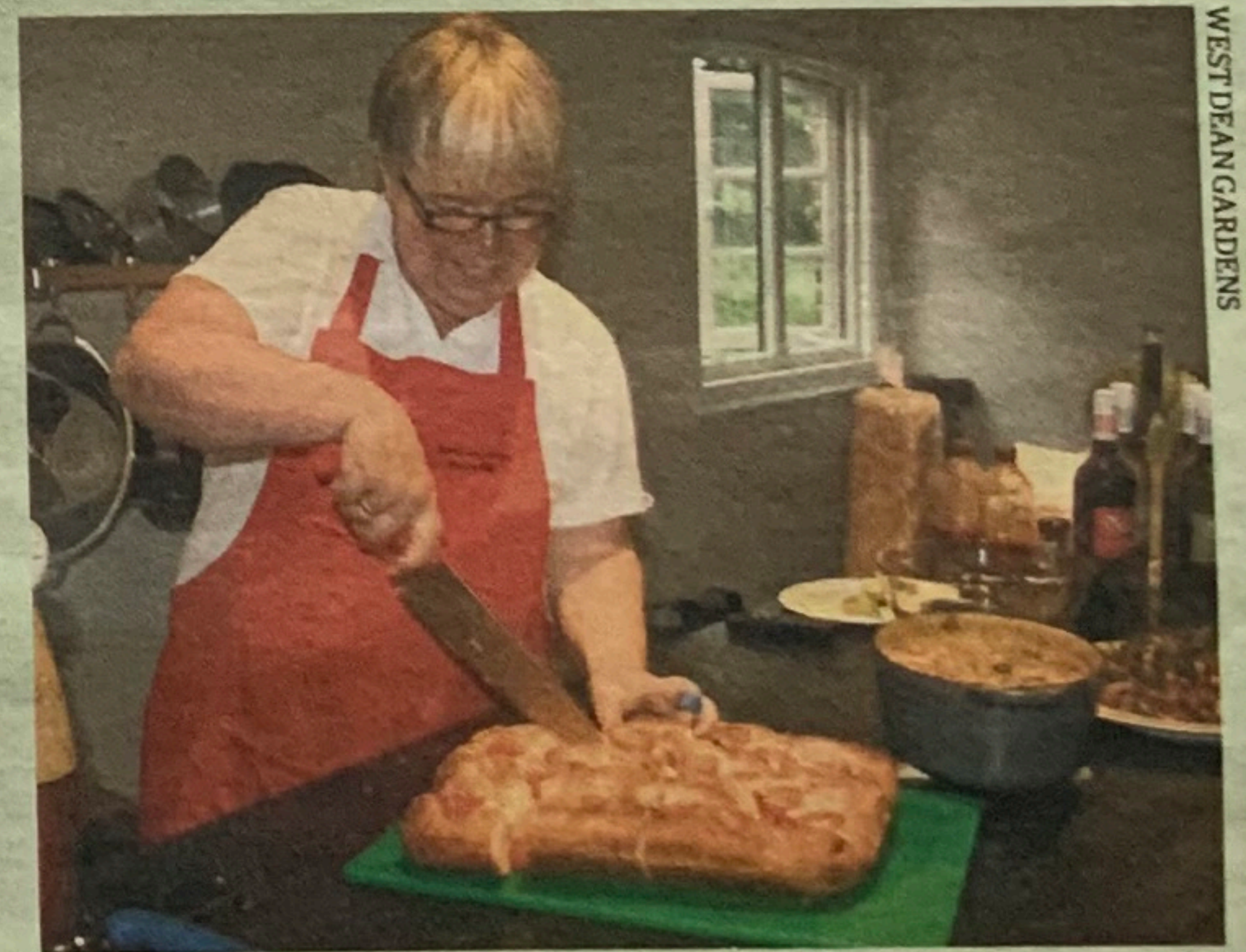
Set hearts a-flutter with a visit to the RHS Garden Glasshouse, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB. Enjoy the sight of exotic butterflies and wander among a world class tropical plant collection. Suitable for all the family. Glasshouse open daily from 10am-4pm. Admission for adults is £9.50 and £3 for children aged between six and 16 years. RHS members and children under six go free. Information: 0845 260 9000 or visit [www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk)

## Food glorious food!

#### Friday January 18

Head to 'Marvellous Marmalade' Day at West Dean Gardens, near Chichester, West Sussex PO18 0QZ, famous for its fruit orchards, exquisitely restored walled kitchen garden and Victorian glasshouses. Join cookery expert Rosemary Moon for tips and demonstrations on how to be creative with Seville oranges, the first truly seasonal fruit of the year, as well as other dishes using marmalade. There will also be group experiments with a variety of different methods and you'll even receive a full recipe sheet to try at home! Cost £122.

More information or to book a place, visit [www.westdean.org.uk/college](http://www.westdean.org.uk/college) or call: 0844 499 4408.



WEST DEAN GARDENS

#### Saturday January 19

'Taste your way to sensations' with Rosemary Moon's flavour trails at West Dean Gardens, near Chichester, West Sussex PO18 0QZ. The cookery expert will reveal how chefs and cookery writers come up with new recipes. An essential course for anyone wanting to be a creative cook. Cost £45.

More information or to book a place, visit [www.westdean.org.uk/college](http://www.westdean.org.uk/college) or call: 0844 499 4408.

#### Every day in January

Escape the chills with a visit to The Lost Gardens of Heligan, St Austell, Cornwall PL26 6EN. Their award-winning tearoom has dedicated the month of January as 'Heligan soup month'. With seasonal produce arriving daily from the gardens, the catering team are creating at least three different home made soups every day, noon-2.30pm. The Heligan shop, plant sales, tearoom, car park and facilities are open daily and free from any admission charge.

Information: 01726 845100 or visit [www.heligan.com](http://www.heligan.com)

## ROMANTIC HIDEAWAYS

Ten hideaways for St Valentine's weekend

### BALLYVOLANE HOUSE

Fermoy, Co Cork (025 36349,  
[www.ballyvolanehouse.ie](http://www.ballyvolanehouse.ie))

Ballyvolane House is one of the country's finest historic homes. Start the evening off with rhubarb martinis in front of a crackling fire and prepare for some seriously good cooking. Over the season of St Valentine's, maps of secret woodland trails will be left in bedrooms for guests to explore. Wellies provided. A two-night stay with four-course dinner and breakfast costs €295 pps.

### FREWIN HOUSE

Ramelton, Co Donegal (074 915 1246,  
[www.frewinhouse.com](http://www.frewinhouse.com))

A former rectory with big bathrooms and lovely woodland views, Frewin House is a dreamy romantic retreat. Dinner is eaten with old crockery and silver beneath the glimmer of a candle chandelier. For real privacy, there's a cottage tucked away on the grounds. Three nights B&B plus one dinner costs €240 per person. The same package costs €250 staying in the cottage.

### CASTLECOOTE HOUSE

Castlecoote, Co Roscommon (0906 663 794,  
[www.castlecootehouse.com](http://www.castlecootehouse.com))

Spend St Valentine's exploring the rambling grounds of this Georgian mansion. Underfloor heating, super bathrooms and lovely bedrooms are some of the pleasures inside. A two night B&B Valentine special with one dinner costs €225, including champagne and chocolates on arrival.

### NUREMORE HOTEL

Carrickmacross, Co Monaghan (042 966 1438,  
[www.nuremore.com](http://www.nuremore.com))

Set in a parkland estate, the spacious Nuremore is a haven of peace and quiet. Perfect for pampering, there's a good spa and well-equipped leisure centre with an 18-metre pool. The award-winning restaurant is lovely for romantic dinners. A two night B&B package with one dinner, massage, champagne and chocolate costs €225 pps.

### BARBERSTOWN CASTLE

Straffan, Co Kildare (01 628 8157,  
[www.barberstowncastle.ie](http://www.barberstowncastle.ie))

There's nothing like a 13th-century castle to get you in the mood for romance. Roaring log fires, antique furniture and four-poster beds make this the ideal place for a winter weekend away. Barberstown has a special Valentine's package of two nights in a premier room with dinner for two, champagne and chocolates for €265 pps.

### BALLYMOTE HOUSE

Downpatrick, Co Down (028 4461 5500,  
[www.ballymotehouse.com](http://www.ballymotehouse.com))

"Blissful beds, huge bathtubs and hand-cut-

turf fires" await you in Ballymote House, a pretty B&B and well-worn family home, according to the new *Bridgestone 100 Best Places To Stay Guide*. A short bike ride will bring you to stone circles, dolmens, healing wells and 10th-century churches. Horsey couples will love it here as four-leggeds can come too. One night's B&B costs from €50.

### MOUNT JULIET



Thomastown, Co Kilkenny (056 777 3064,  
[www.mountjuliet.ie](http://www.mountjuliet.ie))

Romance is alive and well in the rolling farmland of Mount Juliet. If you happen to go by the name of Romeo or a more common Juliet, then the hotel will treat you to a Valentine's weekend on the house. Passports or driving licence required for proof of identity. Those with less romantic monikers can enjoy two nights B&B with dinner for €285.

### BALLYKNOCKEN HOUSE

Ashford, Co Wicklow (0404 44627,  
[www.ballyknocken.com](http://www.ballyknocken.com))

Couples who share a love of food can start their weekend with a private cooking lesson in what is fast becoming one of the country's leading cookery schools. Set in a charming 19th-century home, the course focuses on the world's most romantic food - Italian. An overnight on Valentine's Day with four-course dinner and champagne breakfast costs €125pps.

### TRAG RETREAT

Skibbereen, Co Cork (086 822 6404,  
[www.tragretreat.com](http://www.tragretreat.com))

Set on the unspoilt peninsula of Gokane Point, Trag was originally built in 1782 and has been lovingly renovated into a self-catering farmhouse. If you're coming for Valentine's weekend, the owners will light a fire in the master bedroom prior to your arrival. A weekend break costs €280.

### BROWNE'S TOWNHOUSE

St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2.  
([www.brownesdublin.com](http://www.brownesdublin.com), 01 638 3939)

If you're celebrating St Valentine's in Dublin, skip the taxi queue and check into one of the city's coolest townhouses. The hotel has just undergone a major refurbishment. A night in a superior room costs €140 pps including candlelit dinner, champagne reception and breakfast. **W**

**Gemma O'Doherty**



► The seaside village of Carlingford is now thriving as an upmarket resort with a high concentration of seafood restaurants.

### Troubles in Narnia

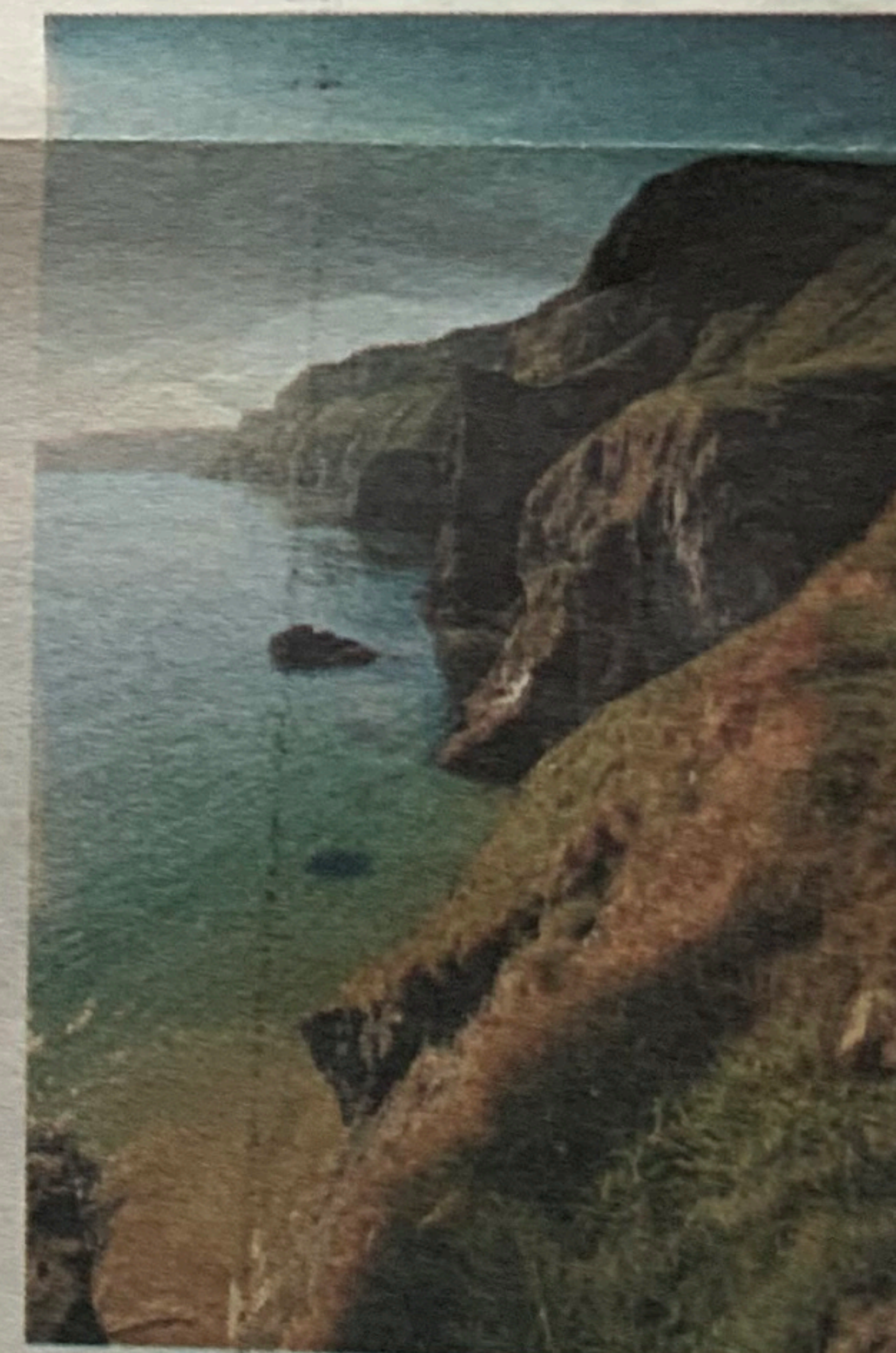
JUST NORTH of the border, another short detour from the main Belfast road takes you to Warrenpoint, infamous as the scene of the killing of 18 British troops by the IRA, and Rostrevor. It is on these gentle slopes that Lewis found his mountainous idyll. This, in the words of Lewis, was "Narnia of the heathery mountains and the thymy downs, Narnia of the many rivers, the plashing glens, the mossy caverns and the deep forests".

Hillwalkers are likely to be attracted to Slieve Donard, the highest mountain in Northern Ireland at 2,796 ft. For those seeking a more leisurely stroll, there are several accessible forest parks in the Mourne created out of the old country estates of the landed gentry.

Castlewellan Forest Park is one of Ireland's undiscovered gems. Bought by the British government from the Annesley family in the 1960s, the park with a castle set on a mile-long lake in the mountains is famous for its arboretum. Hundreds of exotic species grow on the sheltered southern slopes of the mountains.

The largest maze in the world, opened in 2001, can also be found in the park. Lewis spent many of his childhood holidays in these mountainous parts of County Down. He also returned frequently as an adult.

In Northern Ireland, it is not just the Mourne that are being promoted as a



destination for lovers of the *Chronicle Of Narnia*.

Belfast, his birthplace, has naturally taken him to its heart in recent months. The black taxis that were more used to take visitors to Belfast's violent trouble spots are now used by Narnia enthusiasts on a CS in the city. Some loyalists feature the creator of Narnia as a replacement for the sloe-strife.

### An Irish writer

LEWIS SPENT  
the Hollywood