

TRIBUNE
MEDIA SERVICES

Connecting
Content with
Audiences™

Products

18 JUNE 2006

DOMESTIC / INTERNATIONAL

TMS Features Home

Astrology

Business

Cars

Comics

Entertainment

Family

Food

Games & Puzzles

Health & Fitness

Humor

Lifestyle Commentary

Magazines

News & Commentary

News Services

Pets

Real Estate and Homes

Relationships

Religion

Seniors

Sports

Technology & Science

Travel

Weather

Women

Engaging Content

WORLD'S FARE-best-addresses

For release 06/01/06

(ATTENTION EDITORS: This column ends with the words "WF-ADDRESSES-SITTING." If the column you see below concludes any other way, you have received an incomplete version. Please contact TMS customer service at 800-346-8798 for a retransmission.)

TO THE MANOR BORN, AT IRELAND'S ASHFORD CASTLE

By Anne Z. Cooke

Tribune Media Services

CONG, Ireland - If your name is O'Connor - or Burke, Bingham, Oranmore or Browne - you've come to the right place here at Ashford Castle, a posh resort hotel and rambling stone pile on the north shore of Lough Corrib, in County Mayo.

Inspect the Castle from the seat of a horse-drawn jaunting cart, following a network of country lanes beneath ancient trees. Admire the rusticated gray stone, the late-medieval-style towers and the crenellated parapets. Stroll along the lakeshore, looking for fly fishermen. Stop by the stables, where a riding lesson is in progress. Walk through the formal gardens amongst

Ireland's finest. If you feel like the lord of the manor, you might be bred in the bone.

If you fancy the courtly arts, there's archery in the morning and falconry in the afternoon. Or you could play tennis before lunch, and shoot clay pigeons in the afternoon. You will surely dine on the Emerald Isle's finest cuisine, served by white-gloved waiters, and listen to Ireland's old sweet songs in the Dungeon Pub.

But back to the O'Connors; now there's a tale. It wasn't that long ago, so they say - 1,100 years, or so - that this battle-hardened tribe, rulers of west Ireland, built a medieval fortress where Ashford Castle now stands. The site, in a grassy meadow where the River Cong flows into the lake, was easy to defend and the lake, full of brown trout and salmon, was bountiful. The views, if you had a taste for that sort of thing - green mountains and misty mornings - were spectacular.

Unfortunately, the O'Connors' world was teetering. Sometime around 1228, an Anglo-Norman family, the de Burgos - also called the de Burghs, or the Burkes - defeated the O'Connors in battle and built their own castle on the ruins. Three hundred and sixty-one years later, they lost it in a similar skirmish to one Lord Bingham, an Englishman and the governor of Connaught.

By now, the castle, oft repaired and enlarged, was spreading. Soon it would grow again. In 1715, the Oranmore and Browne family bought it, adding a French chateau. In 1852, the next owner, Sir Benjamin Guinness, the beer baron, added two large Victorian wings. When Guinness' son, Lord Ardilaun, inherited the 26,000-acre estate, he rebuilt the entire west wing and restored the woodlands, laying out many of the gardens you see today.

But the era of the great landowners was over. In 1939, Noel Huggard bought the castle and opened it to the public, advertising it as a "First Class Hotel." John Mulcahy succeeded him in 1970 and he restored the entire hotel and built a nine-hole executive golf course. In 1985, a group of Irish-American investors took the plunge.

Ashford's Victorian interior is quite fantastic, though thankfully not gloomy or fey. The polished wood paneling, exquisitely detailed, rich and warm draws the eye toward monumental fireplaces and coats-of arms. Austrian crystal and Venetian glass chandeliers glitter, illuminating gold-framed mirrors, oil portraits, and voluminous silk draperies. Antique chests, ornamental artwork and plush sofas are what you'd expect from the lord of the manor.

The guest rooms and suites, in various weeks, are individually decorated; conveniences include 24-hour room service, hairdryer, television, electronic safe, bathrobes and data port connections for broadband Internet service. Golf and tennis are free to guests. The concierge books other on-site, concession-owned activities, such as shooting, archery, fishing, riding and lake cruises.

INCIDENTAL INTELLIGENCE:

Rooms for two in high season start at 417 euros. Golf, fishing, honeymoon and other packages are offered. Call (800) 346-7007, 353-94-954-6003 or visit www.ashford.ie.



Image 1



Image 2



Image 3



Image 4

Ashford Castle is in the village of Cong, County Mayo, 40 minutes from Galway City. Shannon Airport is 90 minutes by car; Knock Airport is 45 minutes by car. Fishing in Lough Corrib, Ireland's second largest lake, is rated second best in Europe. Ghillies (fishing guides), boats and tackle are available for rent. Orvis, the renowned 150-year-old fishing outfitter, offers fly-fishing courses at Ashford in April, June and July.

ART: With four numbered color images with captions.

CAPTIONS:

IMAGE 1. Dawn at Ashford Castle with a pale pink sky over Lough Corrib in rear. Photo by Steve Haggerty/ColorWorld. Slug: WF-ADDRESSES-ASHFORD

IMAGE 2. The fountain and lawns of the Terraced Gardens at Ashford Castle. Photo by Steve Haggerty/ColorWorld. Slug: WF-ADDRESSES-GARDENS

IMAGE 3. Two knights guard the front entrance to Ashford Castle. Photo by Steve Haggerty/ColorWorld. Slug: WF-ADDRESSES-KNIGHTS

IMAGE 4. The sitting room in a small suite at Ashford Castle. Photo by Steve Haggerty/ColorWorld. Slug: WF-ADDRESSES-SITTING

Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty explore the world from Venice, Calif. They can be reached at TravelsWithAnne@cs.com.

© 2006, Anne Z. Cooke

Distributed by Tribune Media Services, INC.

© 2005 Tribune Media Services, Inc. All rights reserved.