

GORGEOUS GOLFING WITH BEAUTIFUL BEERS IN MONAGHAN

Life is par-fect on fairway to heaven



BEAUTY AND THE BEAST ... the lakes of Monaghan, left, and bottom, glorious golfing at Concra Wood, below, and the Brehon Brewhouse, above



GO: CO MONAGHAN THE Glencarn Hotel (theglencarnhotel.ie) in Castleblayney offers a 2-night B&B package including 1 evening meal from €119pp. Muckno Adventure (mucknoadventure.com) offers kayaking rental by the hour. Tours of the Brehon Brewhouse (brehonbrewhouse.ie) with beer tastings cost €10pp. Concra Wood (concrwood.ie) Weekday green fees from €45 for GU/ILGU visitors. €55 Sat-Sun Standard visitor. €60 Mon-Fri, €70 Sat-Sun. See monaghtourism.com



THERE are hundreds of golf courses in Ireland, but you'll do well to find a more picturesque or challenging one than Concra Wood in Co Monaghan. Situated on the banks of Lake Muckno, this hilly course provides the perfect test for golfers of all standards and was definitely my highlight of the Lake County. I consider myself an average handicap golfer yet I was well able to get around this stunning 18-hole beauty. I took my dear old dad with me to Castleblayney, an hour's drive up the M1 from Dublin. Our first stop was to visit the stunning Lake Muckno where we linked up with Janet Coogan and her team at Muckno Adventure. Their clubhouse overlooks the

lake and has wonderful views of it and the surrounding forest. The place is a natural play park which includes Black Island Forest, White Island and more than 300 hectares of lake. If it is an adrenaline rush you're after - they have activities that can cater for all interests and needs. The have everything from archery to kayaking. Dad took a fancy to the Canadian canoes and Jenny kindly agreed to accompany us on our maiden voyage into uncharted waters - but not before we had squeezed into the wet suits and tightly fastened our life jackets. We flew around the lake and for a while it felt like we were the O'Donovan brothers "pulling like dogs" at the Olympic Games - until we began to tire and decided it was best to return to shore.

From there, it was on to the Glencarn Hotel where we spent the next two nights. It offers a two-night B&B package including one evening meal from €119pp. This hotel has a rich tradition in attracting top country music talent and if you're lucky enough, you could get to dance the night away to the likes of Mike Denver or Michael English. We were up bright and early the next morning making the short drive to Concra Wood to take on what is one of Ireland's finest golf courses. Founded as a nine-hole course in 1905, opposite the entrance to Concra Wood, it closed in 1949. However, in 1985, it was reborn in the grounds of Hope Castle before moving to its current location in 2008, and expanding to 18 holes. The views are spectacular,

stretching across the Monaghan Drumlins to the Cooley and Mourne Mountains to the east with the Slieve Gullion and Mullyash Mountains to the north. And all the while you are surrounded by the lake and its scattering of islands. But be sure to hire a golf buggy because in order to really enjoy the round, you will need one. I've played golf all around Ireland and in Europe, but Concra Wood is definitely one of the most physically challenging courses I've faced. With a water feature on almost every hole - make sure you bring plenty of golf balls or you could be making a very embarrassing return to the clubhouse mid-round to ask for more. Once the round was over we enjoyed an excellent lunch at The

View restaurant and bar in the clubhouse. However, we still had one leg of our trip to complete. We travelled 20 minutes down the road safe in the knowledge that an ice-cold brewski was waiting for us. The Brehon Brewhouse is based on a dairy farm in Dunelty, Inniskeen and you won't get a more authentic brewery tour anywhere. Head brewer Jordan was on hand to take us through the brewing process from mashing to bottling and kegging. I even got to hand label my own beer. Of course, the tasting was the best part. Jordan poured us a tippie at the shabby chic bar in the converted cottage where he grew up. Brehon Blonde suited my palate the best but as a non-ale drinker I

was surprised when the Killanny Red Ale went down a treat. The business is up and running a mere two years but the brewery's thirst-quenching wares are already available nationwide in the best off-licences and pubs. Jordan also revealed that Brehon Brewhouse has just signed a deal with the SuperValu chain and they will be stocking their products in the coming weeks. The team are exporting worldwide and Jordan has begun experimenting with milk from the cows on his dairy farm in an attempt to make a milk stout. Jordan said: "It's a work in progress. Seamus is keen to do something milk-related because obviously this is how his business all began. "It's a challenge but it's one I'm really excited about and I think it

could make a very nice beer in the future." Monaghan might not be everyone's first choice when it comes to a stay-cation but you'd be surprised what this pretty county has to offer. It's a great spot for a round of golf, a sip of craft beer or a potter around a lake away from the madness of daily life. ALAN HARTNETT FAMILY ... with Dad



LATE DEALS

Table listing travel deals for various destinations including Amsterdam, Brussels, Nice, Dusseldorf, Munich, Barcelona, Malaga, Rome, Milan, Faro, Lisbon, Paris, and others, with prices and booking dates.

Lanzarote Long Stay Sale advertisement featuring a table of 28-day deals from €669, a photo of a person on a beach, and the BudgetTravel.ie logo.