



**MARCH**  
Resorts  
March 8: Mexico  
March 15: Florida  
March 22: Caribbean

RESORTS

# A modern fairy tale

Ireland's Ballyfin combines old-world charm with luxurious style



Terrace dining offers sweeping views of the grounds.

By SHANNON MELNYK  
Special Contributor

**B**ALLYFIN, Ireland — When you're in a horse-drawn carriage galloping toward a medieval stone tower, you know you're not in Texas anymore. Billie the Irish cob, mane blowing in the wind, makes his way around the bend, passing ancient grottoes and gardens, delivering you to the grandest estate in all of Ireland.

You're not only traveled overseas, you've managed to travel back in time. This is Ballyfin, a nearly 200-year-old regency guest mansion at the foot of Ireland's emerald Slieve Bloom Mountains. The scene is as dramatic as the story behind its restoration.

Once upon a time, Baronet Sir Charles Coothe and his young bride set about making their home the most opulent in the land. The year was 1820, and the newweds spared no expense in creating a home to rival the finest country estates and palaces of



Ballyfin

Europe.

The Cootes traveled the world collecting rare antiquities. They lavished attention on every detail of Ballyfin, from the acoustically eerie whispering room to the obsessively symmetrical gardens.

Ancient Roman floors, Chippendale mirrors, monstrous French chandeliers. A chimney pot for every week of the year. Even the servants' quarters were designed with sail-vaulted ceilings.

But 100 years later, by the Irish War of Independence, Ballyfin had dwindled into a state of disrepair. An opulent estate no more, it somehow ended up at boarding school for boys.

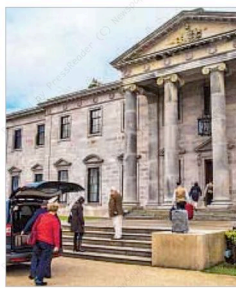
Luckily for today's traveler, fairy tales have happy endings. Enter the

21st century and a new couple to restore the Cootes' labor of love. Chicago-based electronics magnate Fred Krehbiel and his Irish wife had a vision to return the property to its original glory, while offering guests a five-star, all-inclusive experience.

After almost a decade of collaboration with historians, landscape architects and interior designers, Ballyfin is Europe's newest neoclassical resort. It is once again among Ireland's most lavish estates, with a multitude of original treasures.

At Ballyfin, you don't have to be an aristocrat to feel like one. If you book a stay at this 20-suite manor an hour outside of Dublin, you'll find yourself

See **BALLYFIN** Page 3K



The sprawling Ballyfin estate sits at the base of the Slieve Bloom Mountains in the center of Ireland, an hour outside of Dublin.

The resort reflects almost a decade of collaboration with historians, landscape architects and interior designers.

WEST TEXAS | CHINATI HOT SPRINGS

## Find serenity at a desert oasis

Escape the rat race in Big Bend country

By PAM LEBLANC  
Austin American-Statesman

Here at Chinati Hot Springs, with my toes splayed out at the end of the longest, deepest private bathtub I've ever eased into, the buzz of the city feels a million miles away. The warm water filling the homemade, cement-walled basin makes me feel so mellow,

in fact, that even the mustard-colored walls of the El Presidente suite where I'm soaking don't bother me. It's bliss.

Fair warning: Don't make the trek to West Texas expecting to find the Four Seasons. The 640-acre resort is situated along a twisty creek in the bottom of a rocky canyon. Big cottonwood trees along the banks shade a little oasis held hostage by the prickly, lizard- and tarantula-populated Chihuahuan desert.

It's beautiful, though, and these soothing waters lured

humans to this hard-to-get-to corner of the Big Bend region for thousands of years before it opened as a resort. It's easy to see why. It's quiet in the desert, and no one just happens upon this place. You have to be purposefully headed here.

Even that takes some effort. By car, you have two options — the gorgeous but mostly unpaved and rugged Pinto Canyon Road from Marfa, or the mostly paved road from Presidio. (We chose the rugged, two-hour route from Marfa and loved every moment. Just

be sure you have a high-clearance vehicle and take your time.)

Pulling into the gravel parking lot is like discovering a cool glass of iced tea waiting for you after you've hiked 20 miles in the heat. A few big trees spread a leafy umbrella over the grounds, and the rugged Chinati Mountains set a dramatic backdrop.

Dianna Burbach, who manages the property, showed us to our cabin and gave us the

See **CHINATI** Page 4K



Chris LeBlanc/Austin American-Statesman

Writer Pam LeBlanc soaks in the outdoor hot tub at Chinati Hot Springs, where a long journey is rewarded.

# Ballyfin in Ireland restored to its grandeur

Continued from Page 1K

padding around like a royal house guest on a weekend retreat. Some of the staff are fourth-generation estate workers and even former boarding school students who take pride in the stunning grounds and their endearing Irish hospitality. Service is attentive, yet unobtrusive — and allows for snooping of the highest order.

It's delightful to enter the library, which is filled with 5,000 antique books, and discover one of the storied walls to be a secret door that leads to the glass conservatory. Here, lunch is served with views of the estate, including a waterfall that cascades down the slope beneath a Claudian temple.

Cuisine is local, organic and innovative. You may be surprised by the amuse-bouche of whipped foie gras deceptively crafted to look like a Ferrero Rocher chocolate.

No two guest rooms are alike, and all must be seen to be believed. From the little library suite to the Sir Charles Coote Stateroom, the rooms are a feast for the eyes. Look for a marble sarcophagus bath, 17th-century Flemish tapestries or maybe 500-year-old wall panels from China.

What is your whim? At the ready is an English saddle jaunt through the woods on a Connemara or an Irish Sport horse. Horse-drawn carriage tours, target shooting, archery and falconry are signature activities, as is fishing.

Guests can also laze about on the lake via rowboat with a picnic in tow, or linger in the spa and indoor pool. Engaging historical tours tell the tale of the Coote family legacy and the decadelong restoration. If the story gets you caught up in the spirit of the 1800s, you're welcome to choose from closets of period costumes and play dress-up.

It's like *Downton Abbey*, only better, because you're in it.

Shannon Melnyk is a freelance writer in Vancouver, B.C., Canada.



Ballyfin

The 20-suite manor includes the Lady Caroline Coote room, which was formerly Lady Coote's boudoir and is now a junior suite. No two guest rooms are alike. Historical tours recount the Coote family legacy and the decadelong restoration of the estate.

### When you go

- All-inclusive rates start at about \$700. This includes all meals and activities, with limited exceptions such as spa services. [ballyfin.com](http://ballyfin.com).
- Ballyfin is a one-hour drive from Dublin. Car and driver are provided by the estate for an additional cost.



Ballyfin

Guests at Ballyfin can dine in the private wine cellar. The cuisine is local, organic and innovative.



Steve Haggerty

The Thatch pub in Kinnitty is a good place for lunch on the way back from a country outing.



Steve Haggerty

A medieval stone tower on the grounds stands six stories high, providing long-distance views of the countryside.

**TRIP.IT**  
travel. stay. discover.

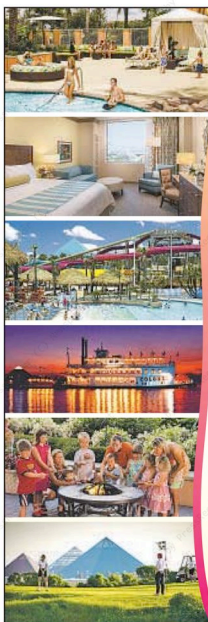
To Advertise, Call 214.877.7931

**Wine Tasting**  
**TRAFALGAR**  
see the world from the inside

WEDNESDAY, at Total Wine - N. Plano  
MARCH 4 • 6:30 pm (S.E. Corner Hwy. 121 & Preston Rd.)

**\$400 OFF per couple & 5% OFF Early Booking Discount**

CTC Travel CRUISE TOUR CENTER  
[CruiseTourCenter.com](http://CruiseTourCenter.com) RSVP RESERVATIONS  
214-206-4488



## Your Spring Break Adventure Starts Now!

- Stay in our brand new guest rooms
- Kids Eat Free\*
- Cool off in the Texas-size outdoor tropical pool with swim-up bar, adult lounge and cabanas
- Visit our new Ropes Course and Zip Line
- Kids Crew featuring: bounce house, face painting, balloon art, arts & crafts, Wii competitions, stores, treasure hunts, water fun and a free kids fun pack at check-in
- Play golf at the Moody Gardens Golf Course
- 15% off individual Spa services\*\*
- Moody Brews serving Starbucks beverages
- Dock at the Moody Gardens Marina
- Schlitterbahn Water Park is located next door

\*Some restrictions apply \*\* Excludes packages & Saturdays

**Make Your Reservations Today!**  
1-888-388-8494 or  
[www.moodygardenshotel.com](http://www.moodygardenshotel.com)

**MOODY GARDENS HOTEL**  
SPA & CONVENTION CENTER  
GALVESTON ISLAND  
Seven Hope Blvd.  
Galveston, TX 77554

Aquarium, Rainforest, Palm Beach, MG 3D & 4D theaters, Discovery Museum, Colored Paddlewheel Boat