

Magnificent adventure at wonderful Westport House

Overnight stay in a bell tent with incessant rain? Just perfect!

Brian Gillespie

LET'S face it, you can't guarantee fine weather in this country. The best laid plans can and often are interrupted by the vagaries of our climate.

You may think that incessant rain on a camping trip would represent a nightmare scenario, but that certainly isn't so when the campsite is located at Westport House. There's just so much to see and do at this great family attraction.

Rain isn't an issue when the house itself is a constant source of fascination, and when the rainclouds clear away there's a whole world of outdoor adventure awaiting.

Then there's the accommodation. Bell tents are new to the Westport House campsite and save you the hassle of setting up tent yourself. They're spacious enough to accommodate up to six people on two double and two single mattresses, and they're dry. On the weekend of our stay, we had enough rain to fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool, but nothing came through the walls of the tent.

For your convenience there's a kitchen box/table with six settings (plates, bowls, mugs, knives, forks and spoons), a bin and an interior



ABOVE: Majestic Westport House is as popular as ever for family getaways. **INSET:** The bell tents at Westport House's campsite are surprisingly commodious.



light, while the site itself comes with all you need (hot showers, toilets, recycling, a sand pit, outdoor playground, picnic and washing up areas, recreation room, etc) at the 18th century cut stone stables that also house Gracy's Gastro Bar, where the food is to savour.

We sampled pizza from the wood-fired oven and it was delicious, but there's much more to the menu than great pizza, including a great selection for children, and there's a comprehensive drinks list too, with a number of craft beers to choose from.

When the rain clears, as it surely must, there are plenty of fun activities to partake of nearby, include

zorbing and zipping (see below) not to mention laser combat games, tree climbing, archery tag, archery and the sky challenge high ropes course.

For younger children there's the Pirate Adventure Park, with fabulous rides such as the Cannonball Run slide, the Pirates' Swinging Ship and the Pirates' Plunge log flume ride, or you can go-kart, bounce on an inflatable castle, take the Westport House Express, have a game of table tennis, or get out on the lake in one of the swan pedalo boats.

And fear not if the weather comes against you, for the house itself is well worth a visit. As someone who had never before been inside West-

port House, I found it fascinating from the moment I stepped into the majestic front hall.

The younger of the children really wanted some outdoor adventure but he soon got lost - metaphorically, not literally - inside the house, marveling at the architecture and enjoying most effusively the crazy mirrors, the dungeons, and the Kitchen Café.

Surprisingly, both children - aged under 12 - found one of the six exhibitions currently on display most fascinating, that being the wax works exhibition of 10 notable contributors to Irish literature, music and the arts.

All told, you can easily while away a few hours in the house, even with young people in tow. So no matter if it rains, as there's just so much to keep you occupied in wonderful Westport House.

THE LOWDOWN

BELL tents cost €110 per tent per night and sleep up to six people each. There is a two-night minimum stay and three-night minimum for bank holiday weekends. Full payment is due at reservation to secure your booking. Call Westport House on (098) 27766 to book; online booking is not yet available. Groups booking three or more bell tents will get 10% off their booking.

Meanwhile, Westport House is open daily and the season is off to a fantastic start. All signs point to this being a bigger year than last, which means another €50 million injection into the local economy as a result of the house being open. At the time of going to print there is no update on the sale of the property but it's business as usual and your support would be welcome.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR WISH TO KNOW MORE ABOUT ALL THAT WESTPORT HOUSE HAS TO OFFER, TELEPHONE (098) 27766 OR EMAIL INFO@WESTPORTHOUSE.IE. I.E. SEE ALSO WWW.WESTPORTHOUSE.IE.



Wet or hydro zorbing is just one of many activities available for adventure enthusiasts at Westport House.

You can roll down a hill...

Brian Gillespie

THE last lines from a favourite song kept coming at me. "You can roll down a hill, but if you can't / Then I pity you."

How many of us roll down a hill just for fun anymore? Precious few. But there's a way to do it that's fun and safe, even if it's not quite free.

Zorbing is just one of many outdoor activities you can enjoy at Westport House. Young and old alike can partake, and you have the choice of a dry (harness) or wet (hydro) roll. Wet doesn't mean you're strapped to the outside of the big inflatable ball and splashed through a stream; rather you sit inside the zorbing ball and splash around in warm water sprayed in on top of you before you set off down the hill. Don't worry about getting

all your gear wet either; there are spare clothes for you to change into and you can leave your valuables in a locker at the booking centre located at the bottom of the hill.

Dry zorbing is the other option. As it says on the tin, you'll stay dry for this one and unlike the wet option, you're strapped in this time.

It truly is great fun. I opted for the dry run, for which I was joined by my son. He claims he never heard me laugh so loudly from once the orb left its launching pad at the top of the hill. It's a short run, but what a thrill. I defy anyone not to guffaw while rolling to the bottom.

The girls in my life chose the wet zorbing and were equally impressed. Soaked through, of course, but beaming too with the fun of it all.

Just as good is the adjacent zip wire line. Stepping off is fairly daunt-

ing but once you've set sail on the zip line it's big fun and while 270 metres strikes you as quite a distance before you take off, you wish it could go on for longer when you reach the end point.

Zorbing and zipping are just two of the many activities you can enjoy at Westport House, where you really can reawaken the inner child. That song again: "If your heart is a flame burning brightly / You'll have light and you'll never be cold / And soon you will know that you just grow / You're not growing old." Keep the flame of adventure burning with a visit to Westport House. You're never too old for some real fun.

(There are some rider restrictions in terms of age, weight, height and health for zip wire, zorbing and other adventure activities - see www.westporthouse.ie for full details.)