



## SOLÍS LOUGH ESKE CASTLE

**WHY** This five-star hotel, set in a magnificent 17th century castle on the shores of Lough Eske in Donegal Town, and with the glorious backdrop of the Bluestack Mountains, is the perfect spot to get away from the stresses of the holiday season, and yet offers that old-fashioned cosy Christmas setting you're likely to look for this time of year. At every turn you'll find homely sitting rooms where you can curl up by the fire with an *apéritif* and a good book or enjoy family time over a game of chess

**FESTIVE TREATS** The three-night Christmas package includes mulled wine and canapés followed by a three-course dinner on Christmas Eve, while on Christmas day guests are treated to a sumptuous lunch, kicked off with a welcome glass of bubbly. That night, recharge your batteries post-snooze with a buffet supper before you retire. Outdoor activities on Stephen's Day will help you work up an appetite for another three-course dinner, before you begin any New Year's resolutions. Children will enjoy pre- and post-dinner fun on Christmas Eve, a visit from Father Christmas the next day and an after-dinner movie on Stephen's Day

**PLUS** Guests wishing to arrive early will be treated to a complimentary night's accommodation on December 23 **NEARBY** Be sure to pull yourself away from the beautiful grounds of the castle to explore the scenic Donegal coastline, where cliff walks and sandy beaches await. And when the crisp December air gets too bitter, a hot cocoa is likely waiting for you in one of the quaint craft shops and cafés along the drive, though perhaps a brandy by the fire back at the castle might just be the perfect antidote

**COST** From €635pp for three nights (or four if you arrive on December 23); children from €150pp when sharing with parents

**CONTACT** 074 972 5100;  
[www.solislougheskecastle.ie](http://www.solislougheskecastle.ie)

# AWAY *for* CHRISTMAS

Escape the weather, the cooking, the family, or just the whole darn thing. The IMAGE team has found the places to go for the best Christmas cheer.



## ST MICHAEL'S HOTEL AND SPA, Cornwall

**WHY** It's the great escape! Situated near Gyllyngvase Beach in Falmouth on the Cornish coast, with stunning sea views and bracing breezes, this is the perfect mix of healthy pursuits and laid-back luxury. A modern hotel, designed in a modern, New England style, St Michael's is warm, welcoming and very much a home-from-home. The hotel's Christmas plans are equally all-embracing and encompassing **FESTIVE TREATS** St Michael's has thought of everything. Celebrations on Christmas Eve include an evening reception with mulled wine and a local brass band leading the carol singing. On Christmas day, the proceedings will unfold in a traditional style - Buck's Fizz with breakfast, a visit from Father Christmas, full Christmas lunch, a screening of the Queen's speech, afternoon tea with Christmas cake, the big St Michael's Christmas family quiz in the afternoon and, for those with room, a sumptuous dinner. On St Stephen's Day, guests will be able to enjoy a treasure hunt, dinner and a casino night. In between activities, treatments can be booked at St Michael's renowned spa **PLUS** For a small supplement, guests can attend the special Boxing Day pantomime at the hotel. Great fun for all ages **NEARBY** Beyond the blustery beach walks beside the hotel, there are plenty of local attractions to explore. St Mawes and Pendennis Castles are nearby, there's a choice of Truro or Falmouth golf clubs and miles of pretty Cornish coastline to discover **COST** Packages ranging from three to 20 nights are available. Prices from £595pps for the three-night option **CONTACT** 0044 132 631 2707; www.stmichaelshotel.co.uk

## DAR LES CIGOGNES, Marrakech



**WHY** Sprinkle some exotic spice over your Christmas with a trip to Morocco. Hot Marrakech is home to a wave of cool hunters, artists and designers **FESTIVE TREATS** Dar Les Cigognes, a stunning eleven-room riad, with spa and hammam, has put together a Christmas and shopping package that helps you track down bargain finds, out-of-the-way treasures and have a mellow Yule. You'll get a Christmas like you've never experienced before - a traditional Christmas mass at the Catholic church of Gueliz, Saint Martyrs, with the Choir of Marrakech singing Christmas carols with an African rhythm. Afterwards, guests take a horse and carriage along the festively lit streets before champagne and canapés by the fire at the hotel, then dinner to the haunting sounds of Andalucian and Gnawa music, and storytelling. They have also culled the best of the souk's offerings for your bargain hunting, then you can relax with a massage in the hammam (treat yourself to a henna tattoo) **PLUS** The hotel's restaurant serves local speciality dishes that change according to what's

available at the market and are so delicious they've just published their own cookbook; the rooftop café has breathtaking views of the Atlas Mountains; staff are fantastically knowledgeable about all the best boutiques, cafés and sights **NEARBY** You're well placed to make shopping forays into the humming Medina, since Dar Les Cigognes is within walking distance from Djemaa el Fna and the warren-like souk. Gourmets can sample snails, brains, sheep's heads and other local delicacies there. Marrakech is at the foothills of the Atlas Mountains and a day's trek is well worth the trip, or drive through the dramatic mountain pass to the desert beyond - if you fancy skiing that's possible too **COST** Audley Travel offers five nights B&B in a superior room from £985pp, including return flights, private air transfers and a full day private guided tour of Marrakech **CONTACT** Audley, 0044 199 383 8400; www.audleytravel.com; Dar Les Cigognes, 00212 524 382 740; www.lescigognes.com

## THE MERRION HOTEL

**WHY** If the best bits of a traditional Dickensian Christmas could be recreated in modern Ireland, the time machine would most likely drop us at the steps of Dublin's Merrion Hotel. With its five-star standards and elegant Georgian setting, The Merrion is certainly the real deal when it comes to smart, cosy Christmases and its 2010 offer leaves plenty of flexibility to enjoy the festive season at leisure, whilst offering all the traditional pleasures that make the holidays so special **FESTIVE**

**TREATS** The Merrion has great, family-pleasing Christmas packages for one, two or three nights. All include seasonal treats on arrival, Christmas day lunch or dinner (depending on your traditions), plus mulled wine in their Number 23 bar. Stay on Christmas Eve and Santa Claus visits the little ones, with presents for all, while grown-ups celebrate with a glass of champagne. Those choosing the three-night package get a choice of enclosure tickets to Leopardstown Festival or reviving Tethra Spa treatments. All stays include full Irish breakfast each morning **PLUS** If you're in Dublin on December 5, 12 or 19, and fancy a nostalgic hit of festive cheer, book afternoon tea beside roaring turf fires in The Merrion's Drawing Rooms with traditional carol singers

**NEARBY** The Merrion is positioned in the most picturesque part of Dublin, between Merrion and Fitzwilliam Squares, and a stone's throw from the city centre. Last-minute shopping and dining can be rounded off with a horse and carriage ride back to the hotel. Or stay put and feast in Restaurant Patrick Guilbaud before toasting the season in The Merrion's atmospheric Cellar Bar **COST** One night from €290pps, two nights from €410pps and three nights from €595pps **CONTACT** 01 603 0600; www.merrionhotel.com

