

▼ There is a host of activities in Northern Ireland for adventurers of all ages – and nerves!

By David Gordon

If you are a parent of teenagers, you've probably thought long and hard about how to prise them away from their games console or TV over the summer.

Long gone are the days when kids would get hours of enjoyment out of a bucket and spade on a beach or on a trip to an amusement park.

Today's teens are more street savvy and social media-aware than my generation ever was.

But what about adventure holidays that would get them out of the house and still let them update their social media followers on their exploits?

The south-west corner of Northern Ireland is a hotbed of adventure activity above ground, below ground and on the water.

I arranged a short break for three teenagers in my family which included as many activities as we could muster, from zip-lining to mountain biking and cave exploring to cruising on Lough Erne. Our



Take your teens on an adventure they will never forget

# Get active... get a great holiday

first port of call was Todds Leap Activity Centre in Co. Tyrone.

The centre offers 20 action-packed activities. On our visit, we attempted Ireland's longest zip-line and a white-knuckle ride in a Land Rover.

The nearby Blessingbourne estate, which has 550 acres of ground, including 13km of mountain bike trails that were next on our to-do list.

Found in the woodlands surrounding the very grand house and self-catering apartments, the trails take in the private lakes and nature reserve and offer challenges, for novices to experts.

While the teens were in the

woodland practising their skills on the table-tops, jumps and drops, I was quite content trying out the pump track and skills area.

Getting around without making a fool of myself, or breaking anything, was quite a personal accomplishment.

Our next adventure took us to the natural underworld of rivers, waterfalls, passages and chambers of the Marble Arch Caves, part of a UNESCO geopark.

The guided visit includes an underground boat journey and a 1.5km stroll through the cave system.

The highlight of our trip was still ahead of us though. As we pulled into the marina car

park at Ballanaleck, on the shore of Lough Erne, we were met by the sight of dozens of cruisers of all shapes and sizes.

Our Waterford craft, an eight-berth vessel, was remarkably roomy. The three double bedrooms were all en suite, so the teens had a room each while I took up residence in the main lounge area.

After some tuition by the Carrickcraft staff, we took some time to get acquainted with the finer points of rope tying, navigation and nautical terminology.

There are 154 islands and numerous coves and inlets on Lough Erne and many have public moorings so you can

dock alongside, visit the island and even stay overnight.

As my only experience of controlling anything on the water was a pedalo in Spain, I decided a short introductory voyage was best so we travelled towards Enniskillen, about an hour away from our base marina. Enniskillen is a busy historic

market town and the journey towards it from the water is spectacular as you cruise past the castle and the waterfront area.

As luck would have it, we docked next to the town centre and had a number of restaurants to choose from.

The next morning, after being woken up around 7am by a seagull padding noisily along the

upper deck, we set off on our day's cruising and navigated our way towards Devenish Island, a former monastic settlement with a tall round tower.

The cruiser was not a speedboat by any stretch, but there was something quite relaxing about our gentle journey up the lough. Nearing dusk, we docked alongside the Killyhevlin Hotel. The Lakeside Grill was a welcome sight after a day on the water.

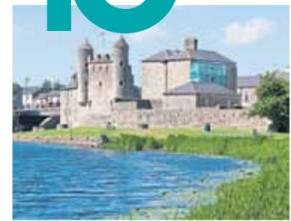
Our adventure break was at an end but I had managed to keep everyone entertained and there hadn't been a mention of wi-fi or consoles for days!

## FACT BOX

Carrickcraft operate a range of cruiser types (2-14 berth) from Bellanaleck marina. For prices and availability, go to [cruise-ireland.com](http://cruise-ireland.com)

For further info visit [discovernorthernireland.com](http://discovernorthernireland.com)

## 10 Irish highlights



**ENNISKILLEN CASTLE**  
Displays incorporate the history of the town and region as well as a military museum.



**NATIONAL TRUST**  
The historic houses and estates of FlorenceCourt, Crom and Castle Coole are all within a few miles of each other.



**DEVENISH ISLAND**  
Ninety-minute tours of the island are available. The Round Tower and monastery are surrounded by wildlife.



**SHARE DISCOVERY VILLAGE**  
An outdoor activity centre for disabled and non-disabled people to enjoy.



**BELLEEK POTTERY**  
Original collectables are made using traditional methods. The process can be seen firsthand on a regular tour.



**ULSTER-AMERICAN FOLK PARK**  
Travel from a thatched cottage and board a full-scale emigrant sailing ship bound for the US.



**BLESSINGBOURNE ESTATE**  
Meet the farm animals. Bike, fish, walk in the woodlands or view the carriage and costume museum.



**HILL OF O'NEILL**  
The O'Neill dynasty ruled Ireland for more than 300 years. Exhibitions narrate the site's importance in Irish history.



**PEATLANDS PARK**  
Explore peatland and woodland habitats and the many forms of wildlife that call this nature reserve home.



**GRANT ANCESTRAL HOME**  
Early US President Ulysses S Grant's ancestral family home, a traditional thatched cottage, can be visited near Ballygawley.