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By David Gordon

IN the busy world we live in, like me, you maybe find it difficult to switch off and relax.

I've often been told of the benefits of spa breaks and how they actually do allow you to reset your inner self, a bit like switching a computer off and on again, I suppose!

It may surprise you to discover that Northern Ireland is home to award-winning spa resorts, including the counties of Down, Antrim and Londonderry.

Coupled with their proximity to stunning country and coastal walks, the spas provide the ideal detox on a short break.

The scenic and tranquil Roe Valley Country Park near Limavady, renowned for its spectacular riverside views, woodland walks and opportunities for salmon and trout fishing and canoeing, is an ideal location for the Roe Park Resort.

Based on a historic country estate, the resort boasts an 18-hole golf course, four-star hotel with two restaurants and an award-winning spa and leisure complex.

The opulent, comfortable suite we stayed in was one of four in the more historic part of the building.

A large bay window offered stunning views across the golf course to the town of Limavady, with Binevenagh Mountain in the background.

The resort caters for many interests, from children through to the older generation, with plenty of activities on offer. The spa offers an aqua meditation chamber, sauna and steam suite, heated pool and gymnasium, along with treatments from facials to body wraps.

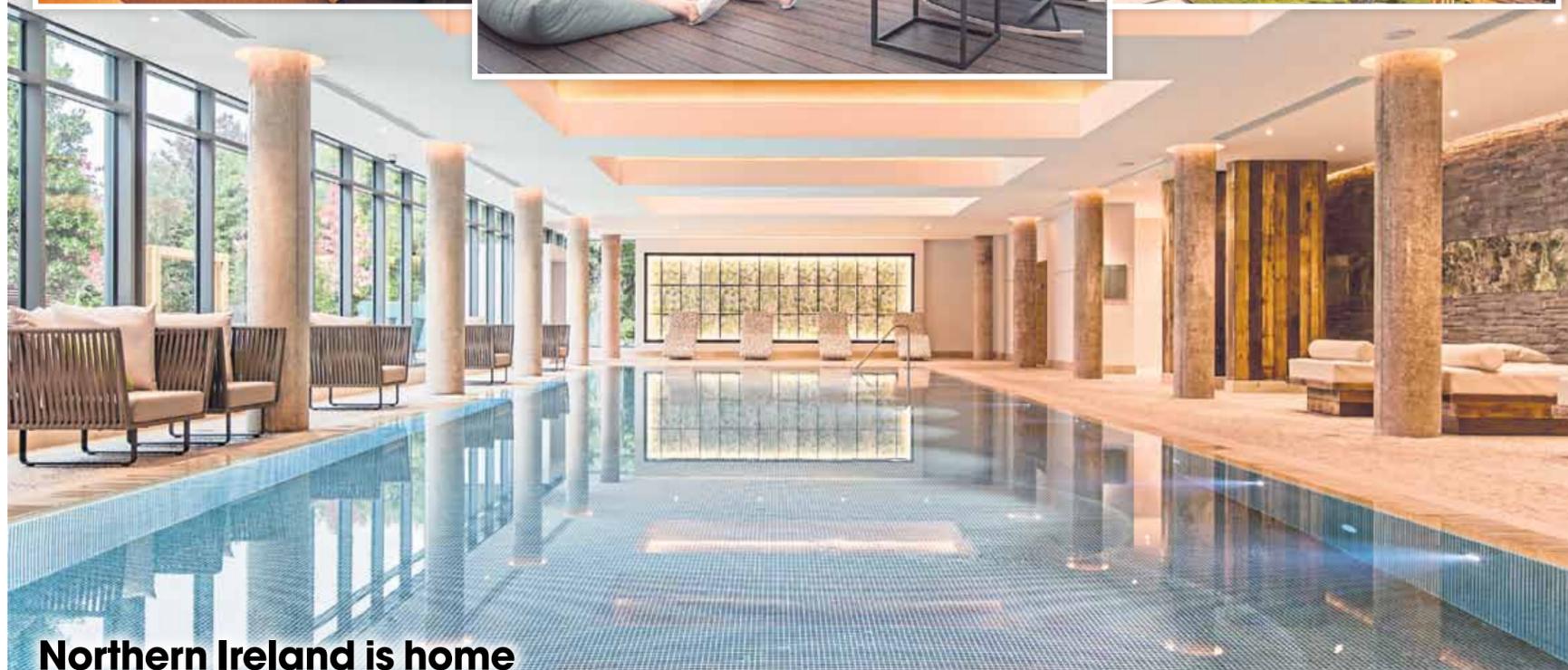
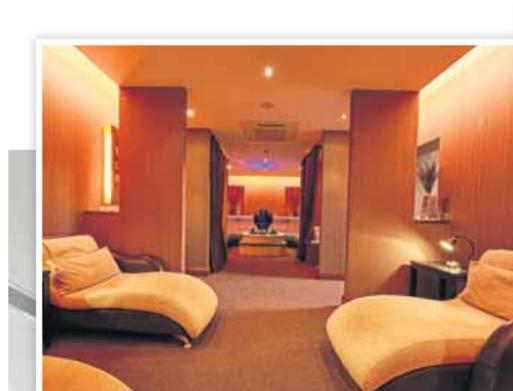
Of the two restaurants on site, we enjoyed the casual atmosphere of the Coach House Brasserie, which overlooks the greens of the golf club.

The Galgorm Resort near Ballymena is set in 163 acres of parkland and makes full use of the River Maine, which flows through the estate.

Guests enjoy the chance to be close to nature and experience the relaxation offered by Ireland's first "Thermal Village".

This wasn't our first visit to the Galgorm, but it was our first since a multi-million-pound investment in the facilities.

Luckily, our stay coincided with a period of great weather, so it wasn't difficult



Northern Ireland is home to award-winning spas

Switch off and take a break

to venture out to the riverside hot tubs, Celtic sauna and the snow cabin.

The Orangery and the River House offer amazing relaxation spaces. We particularly enjoyed the feeling of being in the open air with the river flowing alongside.

Of course, the village spa is only one part of the Galgorm experience.

Gillies Bar & Grill or Fratelli restaurants offer a casual dining experience and the more formal River Room restaurant and the Gin &

Cocktail bar in the conservatory allow guests to enjoy their stay as they see fit.

The resort is a favourite of many celebrities passing through or filming in the area. Denise van Outen, Liam Neeson, Jemma Kidd and Michael Fassbender have stayed, so you never know who you might bump into!

The Victorians were quick to realise the benefits of sea air and relaxation, so it is little wonder the coast at Newcastle, Co Down, was seen as an ideal destination.

The very grand Slieve

Donard Hotel is steeped in history, previous guests include stars such as Charlie Chaplin and, more recently, Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones.

The hotel sits on the beach at one end of Newcastle promenade near the Royal County Down golf course, at the other end, as the song says, the

mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea. The spa is spread over two floors. Upstairs, guests can try holistic therapies while downstairs, the swimming and vitality pools enjoy stunning views of the coastline.

Accommodation at the Slieve Donard is quite stylish.

There is a modern feel, yet you can sense the history of the place as you take in the sea air and landscaped grounds.

Dining is sophisticated,

too. The Oak Restaurant offers an array of dishes prepared using local produce while, not far from the hotel, the Percy French Inn has a log fire and relaxed atmosphere.

Each resort is attached to, or close to, a golf course and while Rory McIlroy won't be losing any sleep over my golfing prowess, I enjoy hitting a few balls at a driving range.

Spa resorts have won me over. My partner and I left refreshed, re-energised and planning our next spa break.

FACT BOX

Galgorm Resort – One night summer escape for two from £220. Lunch and thermal experience from £75pp. See galgorm.com
Roe Park Resort – Dine and stay from £75pp, Roe Park spa taster from £75pp. roeparkresort.com
Slieve Donard Resort – B&B from £65pp, spa and dine from £45pp. www.hastingshotels.com

10 Top spa treatments

GALGORM POULTICE BACK THERAPY

Focusing on the upper body, this powerful treatment begins with a singing bowl meditation to induce a deep state of relaxation before a muscle-melting hot quartz back and neck massage.

SLIEVE DONARD GOLFERS TONIC

After a hard day on the greens, this soothes aching muscles and targets the back, neck, legs and feet. Perfect for restoring energy.

ROE PARK COUPLES MASSAGE FOR TWO

Couples can enjoy a full body massage in the same room. Side by side in sweet harmony.

GALGORM ETERNAL GLOW FACIAL

This decadent bioeffect facial includes a nourishing cleanse and volcanic exfoliation along with a skin-calibrating massage.

SLIEVE DONARD CELTIC JOURNEY

An Irish tea ritual quiets the mood while a sea salt foot bath purifies and an ocean body wrap cleanses the system.

ROE PARK HOT MINERAL BODY BOOST

A powerful treatment which stimulates every cell in the body, helping alleviate muscular pain and remove toxins.

GALGORM WARM STONE ENERGY

Starting with a frankincense inhalation, this massage works on shiatsu meridians to rebalance the body's energy levels.

SLIEVE DONARD BAMBOO JOINT RELEASE

A fast-paced, energetic, full body treatment using heated bamboo sticks to soothe and reduce tension.

GALGORM SERENITY BATHING EXPERIENCE

Indulge the senses or detox body and soul among the olive trees and apple orchards of the Serenity Garden in a private hot tub before relaxing on heated beds in a wooden cabin.

ROE PARK BIOTEC SKIN RESURFACER

Revolutionary facial which addresses skin tone, blemishes and fine lines to transform the texture of the skin.