

BY DAVID GORDON

IF you are a parent of teenagers, you have probably thought long and hard about how to prise them away from their games console or TV over the summer months. Long gone, of course, are the days when they could get hours of enjoyment out of a bucket and spade on a beach or taking them to an amusement park.

Today's teenagers are more street savvy and social media aware than my generation ever was, so as I pondered this predicament, I had a sudden thought about adventure holidays. Such a break would get them out of the house and also lend itself to updating their social media following on their exploits.

The south-west corner of Northern Ireland is a hot-bed of adventurous activity above ground, below ground and on the water. I managed to arrange a short break for three of the teenagers in my family which encompassed as many activities as we could muster from zip-lining to mountain-biking and cave exploring to cruising on Lough Erne.

Our first port of call was Todds Leap Activity Centre in Co Tyrone. The centre offers 20 action packed thrillseeker activities for all agegroups.

On our visit, we attempted Ireland's longest zipline. When I say 'we', obviously I don't include myself in that as I voted myself in as official photographer.

However the looks on the boys' faces as they soared over the treetops confirmed I had made the right decision.

My smugness at remaining on ground level soon left me as we took our seats on a real-life white knuckle ride in a Landrover which took off across the off-road track at a much higher speed than I would have considered feasible.

After being drenched and rattled about, I was very glad to make it in one piece to the on-site Twisted Axle restaurant for lunch and to get my breath back!

THE nearby Blessingbourne estate, which has around 550 acres of ground, has developed 13km of mountain bike trails and they 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 various challenges, from novices to experts. Whilst the teens were in the depths of the woodland practising their skills on the table-tops, jumps and drops, I was quite content to enjoy afternoon tea in the historic house.

Whilst our over ground adventures were complete, our next 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. It is



Serene: Enniskillen



TRAVELFACTS

WHERE TO STAY

Carrickcraft operate from their marina at Bellanaleck, Co Fermanagh. They offer a range of cruiser types, from 2 - 14 berth. Prices are seasonal and the most up to date prices and availability can be found at www.cruise-ireland.com.

IMPORTANT WEBSITES

For further information on Northern Ireland go to www.discovernorthernireland.com or Callsave 1850 230 230

easy to take yourself back to 1895 when the caves were first discovered by a French explorer. The nearby "stairway to heaven" at Cuilcagh mountain is becoming a major attraction, or if that is too strenuous, more sedate walks can be enjoyed at FlorenceCourt House, which is managed by the National Trust.

The highlight of our trip was still ahead of us and as we pulled into the marina car park at Bellanaleck, on the shore of Lough Erne, we were met by the sight of dozens of cruisers of all shapes and sizes. Our 'Waterford' craft was an eight-berth vessel, and at 36ft long, much bigger than I had imagined. However, the boys and I soon made ourselves at home and after some mandatory (but very welcome) 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 onboard. As my only experience of controlling anything on the water was pedalo in Spain, I decided that a short introductory voyage would be best and we decided to travel towards Enniskillen, which was about an hour away from our base marina.

Enniskillen is a busy historic market town and the journey towards it from the water is actually spectacular.

Cruising past the castle and the waterfront area is quite an eyeopener.

With the sudden realisation that I now had to park the boat it was a case of all hands on deck as the boys took up their positions at port and starboard to ensure I steered us to the right spot and their scouting skills

took over to get the knots right so that once docked, we couldn't float away.

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

Franco's, an institution in the town, was just a few minutes' walk from our mooring and offered a great selection of meals. After a walk to the castle, we made our way back on board our cruiser.

The vessel was remarkably roomy. The three double bedrooms were all en-suite, so the teens got a room each while I took up residence in the main lounge area.

I was mildly surprised to hear movement around 7am, but there were definitely footsteps on the upper deck (yes, we even had

one of those) of the boat.

When I peeked out the window, I found family of ducks staring back at me. Their early morning wanderings on our roof also woke the other three passengers, who being teenagers don't usually see mornings during the summer holidays.

On the plus side, we were able to set off relatively quickly, though before we navigated our way towards Devenish Island, a former monastic settlement with a tall round tower, we moored the boat outside the local shopping centre to stock up on groceries.

The cruiser was not a speed boat by any stretch of the imagination, but there was something quite relaxing about our gentle journey up the lough.

You become accustomed to waving at fellow cruisers on the water and when docking there's always someone else around to lend a hand.

Some of the rural moorings are close to bars and restaurants. Nearing dusk, we docked alongside the Killyhevlin Hotel.

The Lakeside Grill was a welcome sight after a day on the water. As the hotel has a public mooring, we were able to stay alongside the hotel that night too. The cruiser was a great option for the teen agegroup. Each took turns at navigating, map reading, steering and rope tying.

All too soon our Northern Ireland adventure break was at an end. I had managed to keep everyone entertained and there hadn't been a mention of wifi or consoles for days!