

ESCAPE

A country house stay, romantic breaks and where to absorb Berlin's cool atmosphere.

▼ BLAKES HOTEL, LONDON

If you're looking for a romantic break, the new Corfu Suite at Blakes Hotel should be on the shortlist. In French Provençal style, all pale shades of cream and white, with a king-sized four poster bed, wafty gossamer-thin drapes and mother-of-pearl inlaid furniture, it's a seductive spot (and there's plenty of Bang & Olufson techno gizmos to keep kidults happy). With 24-hour room service, there's really little need to step outside, but the adventurous are well-placed to hit the museums, art galleries and the big-name department stores such as Harrods and Harvey Nicks. Rates from £599.

33 Roland Gardens, SW7, 0044 207 370 6701; blakeshotels.com.

✈ AER LINGUS FLIES FROM DUBLIN, SHANNON, CORK AND BELFAST TO LONDON HEATHROW DAILY.



◀ BALLYFIN, LAOIS

If you're yearning after the *Downton Abbey* experience, book in here. You'll get the five-star treatment from the moment you arrive and it won't feel like a hotel stay, more like a country house weekend. This restored neo-classical house is a showpiece of the best of 19th century craftsmanship with marble and parquet floors and ornate fireplaces. The house, with just 15 bedrooms, manages to be relaxed and comfortable – and their new relaxation package offers lunch on arrival, Voya massage and seaweed bath, and five course dinner tasting menu in the grand State dining room. Packages from €1,210 per couple. Ballyfin, Co Laois, 057 875 5866; ballyfin.com.



▶ SOHO HOUSE, BERLIN

We suspect Berlin may be one of the coolest places on the planet right now, and Soho House might just be the epicentre. Like all its sister houses (London, Babington, New York and more), it's a private members' club but don't let that put you off, it's now open for bookings to all comers. Once it was the Communist party's Politisches Büro, now its industrial chic lobby has ping-pong tables and Damien Hirst on the walls. Rooms are large and retro/modern, with smaller, good value rooms under the eaves. It's got a cinema. And a rooftop pool. And a spa and a cocktail bar and a residents' club. Forget iPod docking stations, these rooms have vintage record players and a selection of vinyls. Leave the kids at home, and enjoy the party. Rooms from €130 per night. Torstraße, 0049 304 050 440; sohohouseberlin.com.

✈ AER LINGUS FLIES FROM DUBLIN TO BERLIN DAILY.



▲ RELAIS VILLA VITTORIA, LAKE COMO

Imagine lying by an infinity pool, glass of champagne in hand, surrounded by mountains, lakes and staff with canapé menus. Picture Jacuzzis, pampering and hot stone massages. If you're planning a weekend break, the Relais Villa Vittoria overlooking Lake Como is now open for 2012 bookings and offers all of the aforementioned. The Villa is equipped with a mooring where motorboats are available to rent. They'll even pack you a picnic basket upon request. If views of the lake still don't tickle your fancy, keep an eye out for George Clooney who famously holidays in the nearby village of Laglio. Via Vecchia Regina, Laglio, Italy, 0039 031 400 859; relaisvillavittoria.it

✈ AER LINGUS FLIES FROM DUBLIN TO MILAN MALPENSA MON, WED, FRI AND SUN.



LOVE IS IN THE WESTBURY – check out their Cupid's Corner Valentine's Day packages, which include rose petals, champagne, and strawberries in your room upon arrival. From €339. Grafton Street, Dublin 2; doylecollection.com.