



The view from Strule Arts Centre

REVIEW

Ciara Hedgcock explores Omagh and The Sperrins

Breath of fresh air

A winter morning walk in the Gortin Glens Forest Park is a peaceful experience; the wide-open space is unspoilt and naturally beautiful. Gortin Glen is six miles north of the historic town of Omagh at the western gateway to the Sperrin Mountains. A range of waymarked trails gives visitors the chance to enjoy the park's natural flora and fauna at its best. As well as rambling, visitors can enjoy mountain biking and, with a permit, horse riding.

A children's play sculpture composed of larch, red cedar and oak was inspired by the natural surroundings. The sculpture centrepiece, a family of red deer, was chosen specifically to reflect the importance of the forest park's relationship with its much admired inhabitants.

Home from home

Vincent and Briege Meenagh, proprietors of Drumaneir Cottage and Drom-Na-Gainne B&B, are the perfect hosts. They are down to earth and welcoming, and with over 20 years' experience in the business, they are hospitality experts.

Their charming home and B&B Drom-Na-Gainne, in the idyllic, serene foothills of the Sperrin Mountains is cosy and modern. Breege takes great pride in her delicious home-cooked breakfasts.

Drumaneir Cottage is a delightful self-catering accommodation, that features a BBQ house and secure children's play area. Vincent grew up a stone's throw away and is constantly thinking of ideas to enhance this

wonderful getaway.

Both properties are in Carrickmore, just off the main road between Omagh and Cookstown and have been awarded a four-star rating from Tourism Northern Ireland. Unsurprisingly, Vincent and Briege have a loyal following of regular guests who return year after year.

Food heaven

Grants of Omagh is a popular family-owned bar and restaurant. It is filled with curious antiques, ornaments and artwork. With the wood panelling, high shelving and ornate windows it feels church like.

The low lighting, alcoves, natural fires and décor create a comfortable and warm ambience. There are lots of nooks for intimate dining and large tables for sociable family-friendly gatherings.

During my visit co-owner Myles McCann,

Gortin Glens Forest Park



Grants of Omagh

was very personable and carefully explained the interesting menu. Our choice of starter; the goat's cheese, beetroot, candied walnuts with pear, and the Spanish fish cakes with rocket, pepper and paprika mayonnaise got our taste buds off to a great start.

For my main meal, I opted for a vegetarian spicy Moroccan curry. I really enjoyed the authentic flavours with the couscous and naan bread accompaniment. My friend decided on the Grants signature Boston beef fillet steak with all the trimmings, which she described as "melt in the mouth delicious".

Saturday night live

We were lucky to catch The Knotty Pine String Band and The Drunken Lullabies at Strule Arts Centre. Both were hugely talented and entertaining.

This award-winning contemporary

arts venue and conference centre is home to theatre performances, comedy, music, dance, workshops and exhibitions. Gorgeous views can be admired from the cafe. It is located conveniently in the heart of Omagh, close to transport links and town centre parking.

Open-air history lesson

The Ulster American Folk Park is an open-air museum, five miles north of Omagh. Step back in time to an era when brave emigrants risked their lives crossing the Atlantic to travel to America, hundreds of years ago. With more than 30 exhibit buildings to explore, the museum tells the story of three centuries of Irish emigration.

I enjoyed discovering the thatched cottages of Ulster and American Frontier log cabins and meeting costumed characters, including a blacksmith who demonstrated traditional crafts and told stories of years gone by. I also embarked on a full-scale model of an emigrant ship to experience the living conditions faced by so many as they set sail for a new life in America.

Culture and play

An Creagan is a versatile community, family and tourism focused heritage environment site located between Omagh and Cookstown. Families, couples, individuals and groups can get involved with an impressive range of workshops or choose one of the many walks or cycle trails. You can unwind in the community garden and children can enjoy the freedom of the natural wildwoods play area.

Visitors can stay in one of the traditional cottages that have been refurbished with a contemporary twist. For those summer days and bright evenings, guests can make use of the spacious BBQ area. The restaurant, which produces hearty dishes using seasonal and local produce, overlooks the natural bogland and pond.

This intriguing building, designed to reflect the archaeology sites in the area is



The Ulster American Folk Park

nestled in a quaint and calm setting. Visit the interpretative exhibition and learn about this unique landscape and its culture and heritage. It is the ideal central base to explore the wider Sperrins region and many other well-known sights. **NW**

For further information regarding attractions mentioned in this feature visit: www.exploremaghsperrins.com or call: 028 8224 7831.

An Creagan

