

Weekend away

East Clare Yoga Centre, Co Clare

First impressions

The calm of the surrounding trees strikes you as you drive into Boru Oak Lodge, a yoga centre that sits at the edge of Raheen Wood in east Clare. Already, the urban thrum feels light years away.

After Killaloe, the remaining 10 miles of the trip take in magnificent views of Lough Derg on one side and unspoiled hills and forest on the other.

When you turn into Boru Oak Lodge, you'll fall under the gaze of a wise Buddha as you crunch down the gravel path to the yoga centre.

A little marmalade cat comes out to greet you, nudging your leg for attention.

Why go now?

When you read the quotation by yoga master, BKS Iyengar — "Free the mind of stress and become filled with calm and tranquillity" — you might feel like beating a path to this zen retreat run by Susanne and Paul Sturton.

You need to book ahead though; there are eight weekend courses a year. The next runs on the June bank holiday with senior yoga instructor Judith Richards.

The rooms

Think cosy, cottage charm. Bedrooms are simple, spotless and homely but not en suite, so they might not suit everyone.

The food

Paul's organic vegetarian stews, soups and salads are excellent. A dinner of Thai curry followed by baked pear drizzled in honey, then dates and nuts, was healthy and delicious.

His sweet potato, peanut butter and spinach stew and exquisite homemade hummus were other favourites.

If you feel peckish during the day there's plenty of fruit, and a cup of tea or coffee is always on the boil.

The yoga

Senior yoga teacher Marion Kilburn has a rare gift. Gentle and encouraging, she'll manoeuvre you into poses you didn't think possible.

All the teachers are qualified in Iyengar yoga, a practice that uses props — belts, blocks, even chairs — to emphasise detail, precision and alignment in the postures.

There are eight hours of tuition over the weekend, but it doesn't feel too much. Everything is at the student's own pace and you'll feel deeply relaxed and restored afterwards.

Prepare for some incredible stretching, though. One of my favourites was called 'legs up the wall' pose — or Viparita Karani in sanskrit — you do exactly as the name suggests:



From top: Rooms are simple but cosy; the centre's tranquil sitting room; Susanne Sturton (left) doing a yoga pose; the delicious organic food



lie on your back and rest your legs up a wall with two or three folded blankets under your hips. It's sometimes called the 'fountain of youth' pose because of its profound restorative and rejuvenating effects. This is definitely one to try at home.

A good workout will leave you feeling as if you've grown several inches.

The attraction is simple. Apart from the pleasure of getting away, yoga has a staggering list of benefits: it tones muscles, bones and organs, boosts metabolism, corrects posture, increases energy and improves breathing.

The crowd

Overwhelmingly female. You don't need to be rubber-limbed to take part, and beginners are welcome, although it does help if you have some previous experience.

Anything to do beyond yoga?

Take a trek through the woods to the 1,000-year-old Boru oak tree, named after local hero, the ancient High King of Ireland Brian Boru.

It's only about 10 minutes away, but take the map provided by Susanne and listen to the instructions. I got a little lost, which turned out to be no bad thing because there are lots of beautiful trails in Raheen Wood.

It's also worth driving into nearby Killaloe to check out the historic arched bridge, the shops and the beauty of Lough Derg.

The pamper factor

There's no spa, but this is pampering of a different kind. Yes, you have to work for it, but the sense of calm that comes is deep and lasting.

The downside

Communal-style living is not for everyone. You may not want to share your bathroom, or the dining experience, but it really is worth trying it — at least once.

I found myself lingering for hours over the dinner table with a group of strangers.

The damage

A weekend workshop costs from €335 per person sharing (€395 for the bank holiday weekend). This includes eight hours of yoga tuition, accommodation, meals, snacks and transfers from and to the airport or train station.

The details

East Clare Yoga Centre, Boru Oak Lodge, Raheen Road, Tuamgraney, Co Clare. Tel: 061 640923; eastclareyoga.com. ☐

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