

Busy, busy, busy: horse-riding in the Burren, surfing, cycling and Glee, which you can emulate in Kerry. Photographs: Nutan/TI, Christa Renee/Stone, Mike Harrington/Digital Vision, Channel 4 and Arthur Tilley/Taxi/Getty

Cracking good

Struggling to think of a place to go that will keep everyone busy during the holidays? **Sandra O'Connell** has a few suggestions for hotel breaks that take in everything from horse-riding and surfing to 'Glee'

1 Sea and cycling in Sneem
One of Ireland's true resort hotels, **Parknasilla** is synonymous with family holidays – and with good reason. Leaving aside the famously mild climate, spectacular scenery and the sense of space that comes from staying on 200 hectares of parkland, there's just so much for a family to do. Tennis, boules, golf, horse riding, archery and fishing: just think of the fun trying to get everyone to agree which to do first. Or bring them all on a sea safari in search of seals. The concierge can organise it and even rustle up a picnic for you. For landlubbers, the hotel has bikes and helmets, so you can cycle some or all of its seven mapped routes. If their little legs are up to it, pedal over to Caherdaniel, 14km away, to see Daniel O'Connell's estate at Derrynane and his former house, now a museum. ■ **Parknasilla** Hotel & Resort,

Sneem, Co Kerry, 064-8675600, parknasillahotel.ie. Two nights' B&B plus evening meal costs €239 per person in a standard room. Upgrade to a suite for €60

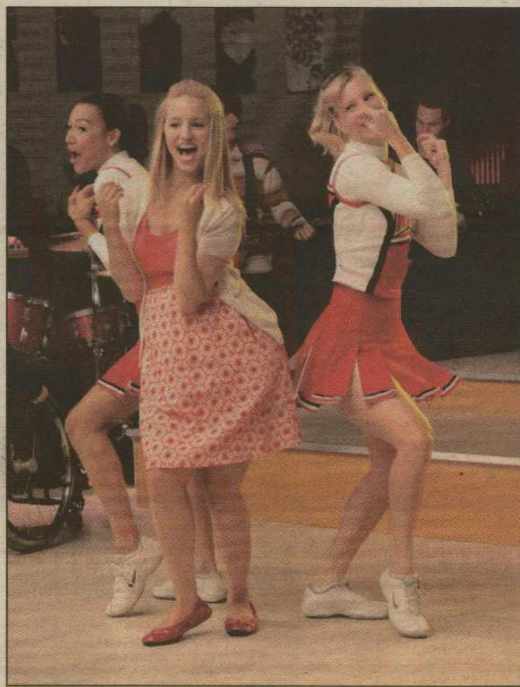
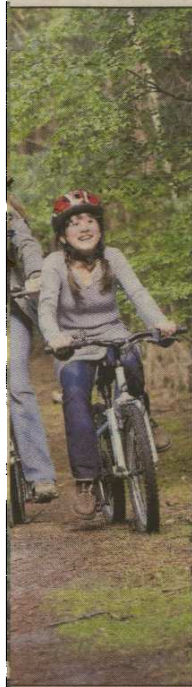
2 Kinder-friendly Kinsale
The Co Cork town has loads for families, even if it's not having one of its festival weekends. (Jazz, trad, point to point, gourmet, vintage car – you name it, they celebrate it.) The Easter hols are positively quiet by comparison, but still there's Charles Fort to explore, history tours by day and spooky ghost tours by night. A stone's throw away are adventure centres, riding stables and windsurfing schools, or just take a boat trip round the bay – the boat has toys and crayons for tots unimpressed by the scenery and maybe even older kids who want to capture it. The Trident Hotel is smack in the middle of all of this, with a waterfront location. ■ **Trident Hotel**, World's End, Kinsale, Co Cork, 021-4779300, tridenthotel.com. Two nights' B&B plus one evening meal, mid-week, costs from €110 per person sharing. Under-tuos are free; under-12s cost €10 per night. The rate includes use of a nearby leisure centre with pool.

3 Watery fun in Waterville
Tire out older kids with a three-day adventure at the **Butler Arms Hotel** in Co Kerry. On the Saturday and Sunday you also get two days' adventure

at **Mor Active Outdoor Pursuits Centre**, offering kayaking, canoeing, climbing or hiking. ■ **Butler Arms Hotel**, Waterville, Co Kerry, 066-9474144, butlerarms.com. Arrive Friday and get three nights' B&B plus two evening meals – one in the restaurant, one in the bar – for €310 per person sharing

4 Kids camps in Athlone
Hodson Bay Hotel has put a lot of thought into its kids' camps, dividing them up the way we're used to for overseas holidays. For under-12s (but over-fours) a range of supervised games is on offer, including quizzes, dancing, arts and crafts and soccer, as well as chill-out time with a movie. Camps run from 9.30am to 1pm and 5.30pm to 11pm each evening. Children have to be signed in and out, so it's secure. Teenagers have their own den, with games suited to their age. ■ **Hodson Bay Hotel**, Athlone, Co Westmeath, 090-6442000, hodsonbayhotel.com. Two nights' B&B for two adults and two children, with one dinner, costs €375

5 Stage-struck in Killarney
The five-star **Killarney Park Hotel** is offering youngsters a chance to emulate their *Glee* heroes, Kerry style. On hand throughout is **Fiona Crowley**, who runs the local stage school. Expect singing, dancing, improv workshops and all sorts of fun and games. And when the lure of the greasypaint fades, get them out in the fresh air of **Killarney National Park**. ■ **Killarney Park Hotel**, Kenmare Place, Killarney, Co Kerry, 064-6635555, killarneyparkhotel.ie. A two-night stay, including one evening meal, costs €290 per person sharing over Easter, with children's B&B free. You'll also get, subject to availability, a free upgrade to a junior suite



Easter deals

6 Surfing in Sligo The Clarion in Sligo is super child-friendly, which means super parent-friendly, too. It has a games room with pool table, air hockey, jukebox and arcade games; a kids'-club room with arts and crafts, treasure hunts, quizzes and story time; movie nights; kids' discos; and a crazy golf course – not to mention Nintendo Wii games and giant inflatables in the pool during dedicated children's swim time. And while all that is going on, there are relaxation classes, make-up lessons and cookery demonstrations for mum and dad. Or maybe just mum. For older kids, check out its surf packages, which start at €109pps midweek. For this you get two nights' B&B and a two-hour surfing lesson, including kit hire, throughout April. ■ Clarion Hotel, Clarion Road, Sligo Town, Co Sligo, 071-9119000, clarionhotelsligo.com. Easter family breaks from €139pps for two nights' B&B and one evening meal. Children share with parents free for B&B

7 Culture and castles Markree Castle, also in Co Sligo, has a cultural-heritage package that's much more child friendly than it sounds. For a start, it takes in Ceolaras Coleman, the terrific music centre in Gurteen, which stages regular performances by traditional musicians of all ages, including the youngest sean-nós dancers you'll ever see. It also includes entry to Arigna Mining Experience, where former miners take groups down into the bowels of the earth to see the conditions the miners and their predecessors worked under. It does the kids no harm to see the seams, some barely 50cm high, where workers chipped away for hours on end. And they get to press the dynamite box, Wile E Coyote-style.

■ Markree Castle, Collooney, Co Sligo, 071-9167800, markreecastle.ie. The two-night package costs €125 per adult sharing, plus €62 per child sharing, including breakfast

8 Cost conscious in Cavan For a bargain break you'll find it hard to beat Errigal Country House Hotel, in Cootehill. If you book a two-night midweek stay the kids sharing can go for free. There's more. Take the same deal and throw in an hour's horse riding (either a lesson or a leisurely hack) at nearby Redhills Equestrian Centre, and it will set you back €130 on the same basis. Kids can get a choice of lesson or hack for €25. ■ Errigal Country House Hotel, Cootehill, Co Cavan, 049-5556901, errigalhotel.com. Two nights' B&B and one dinner costs €105pps midweek, with kids sharing free of charge

9 Renvyle retreat Renvyle House, in Connemara, Georgina Campbell's family-friendly hotel of the year, has treasure hunts, entertainment

and supervised playtime by day, plus drama workshops and storytelling at night. For grown-ups there are yoga classes, fly-fishing introductions and morning guided walks, as well as classes in basic massage. The 80-hectare estate includes a beach, a lake to canoe, ducks to feed and woodlands to walk. Several family suites are available, and a children's meal is served at 5.30pm, with babysitters on hand so that parents can get a bite to eat in peace later.

■ Renvyle House Hotel, Renvyle, Co Galway, 095-43511, renvyle.com. This week and, subject to availability, a four-night B&B plus three-dinner package costs €365 per person, with family rates available

10 Well behaved in Sligo Finally, it is a fact well known to parents and hoteliers both that children and antiques do not mix. Indeed, nothing is likely to terrify parents more than finding themselves checking out – or worse, chucked out – with the price of a cracked Ming vase or two swelling the bill. That said, beautiful Coopershill House, set in 200 hectares of Sligo woodland, and with precious artefacts on the walls, is offering an Easter family package, including three nights' B&B, two dinners and two picnics. To show just how child friendly it is, children under 13 sharing are free, and there are handmade chocolate bunnies for all. Conscious of the havoc chocolatey fingers can make on four-poster canopies, I rang Simon O'Hara, the seventh generation of the family to reside here, to double-check. "Of course children are welcome," he said. "Well-behaved children." You have been warned. ■ Coopershill House, Rivers-town, Co Sligo, 071-9165108, coopershill.com. Packages start at €348 per person sharing

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