

### Of Castles And Things: Don't Miss These Grande Dame Stays Around The World

By Becca Hensley | July 3, 2014 | Destinations, The Jet-setter | No comments



Photo courtesy of the Castlemartyr Resort

In a scene conjured from a modern fable, a forgotten teddy bear arrives by pony cart—just in the nick of time. Amid the craggy ruins of a 12th century castle, just adjacent to the 16th century manor house and only the distance of a crossbow-slung arrow from a swan lake and the walls of an ancient garden, a little princess dries her eyes. She watches the incoming cart bounce over the hillocks and lows of a traditional links course in mute anticipation. When the Kerry Bog ponies halt with a clatter at the door of her nearly departing automobile, the child jumps for joy and her parents exchange long looks of relief. On cue, a tuxedo clad redeemer leaps like a lord from the cart, the rescued stuffed toy aloft. With a flourish, he delivers his charge into the child's anxiously outstretched hands, takes a bow, then remounts the carriage and disappears across the lawn at a clip to perform more beneficent deeds. He's no prince charming, but a concierge; and she's not real royalty, but a hotel guest. It's just a typical (fairytale) day at Castlemartyr Resort in Ireland's County Cork.



Advertisement:



*Photo courtesy of Castlemartyr Resort*

By any definition, Castlemartyr, a complex that includes a castle where Sir Walter Raleigh once roamed, qualifies as a grand resort. It's the sort of place you might choose to check into and never leave—at least until its time to go back to work. Like most imposing hotel complexes, Castlemartyr is steeped in history. In addition, it's five starred for luxury and service, set in an idyllic locale and has a high ratio of ritually returning guests. A perfect example of the destination-in-itself mode of hotel, Castlemartyr presides over 220 acres of rolling land that's patched with a hundred shades of green, punctuated by woodlands and dotted by lakes. Ensnared in coastal County Cork—the artisan food capital of Ireland—Castlemartyr's environs offer plenty of intrigue. And, just down the drive, a quaint village and its traditional pub beckon. But what most guests will remember long after they're home again is how they couldn't manage to leave the estate. Here, a bi-level, contemporary spa woos the weary. Guests can have Negronis or Ireland's own Murphy's beer in the bar. They can choose to stay in the more streamlined suites in the modern wing; or tuck into the original manor house—where the halls just might be haunted. When not snuggled into sofas with a good book or teeing off on the links, guests can do any number of activities here: fly fish, shoot skeet, cycle, walk the resident Irish Setters (Duchess and Earl) or learn to drive the pony cart with hotel horse trainer and amateur historian, Rory—whose forefathers worked for the estate.



*Photo courtesy of Castlemartyr Resort*

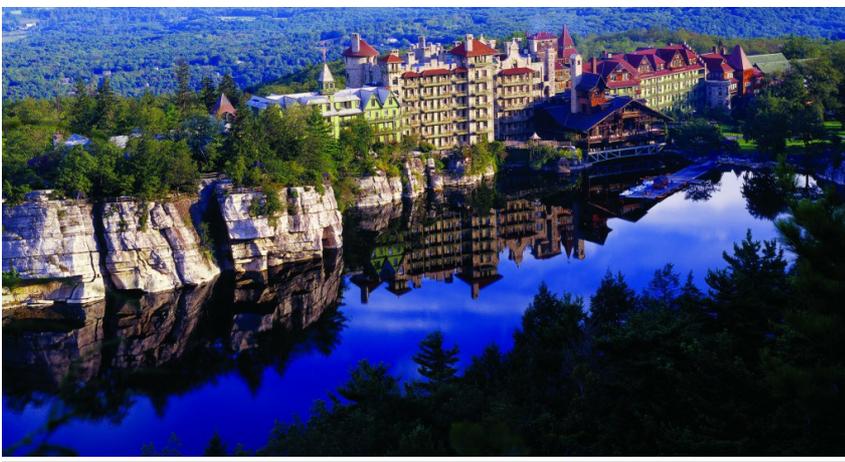
But it's the soulfulness that Castlemartyr has in spades that truly elevates it to the rank of top shelf resort—and ultimately warmth and gravitas remains the true test. "We're a very friendly, very Irish hotel," says General Manager Andrew Phelan, who doesn't leave Castlemartyr at day's end until every single newly arriving guest has checked in. "I like to welcome them personally," he says. He also insists on waving good-bye when they depart, urging them to return. "Call in if you are passing; the kettle is always on," he says to them. And, he means it. Thanks Andrew—I'll be back for some tea.

[castlemartyrresort.ie](http://castlemartyrresort.ie)

#### **A Few More Grand Resorts**

Just as iconic, a slew of other classic resorts await you. These are refuges and havens with a mission to transport you to an altered reality. They are fairy tale makers. Your wish is their command. All you have to do check in.





*Photo courtesy of Mohonk Mountain House, New Paltz, New York*

#### **Mohonk Mountain House, New Paltz, New York**

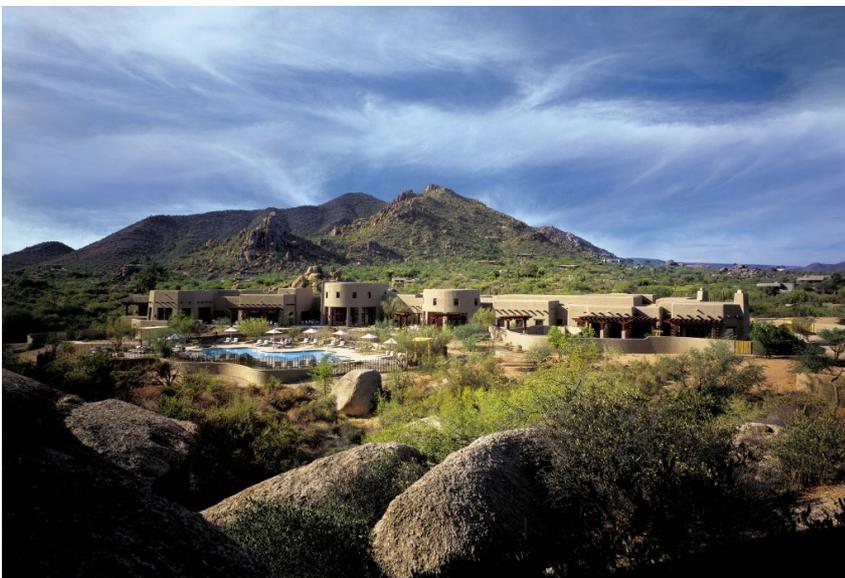
Evoking all that Early American, Hudson Valley romance, family-owned Mohonk Mountain House may well be the first great American resort. First opened in 1869, it occupies 2,200 acres along the banks of a glittering lake. Surrounded by all the flora and fauna from the pages of James Fenimore Cooper, its Victorian mansion main house proudly displays its designation as National Historic Landmark. Long the milieu of the rich and famous, the hotel has welcomed five presidents, among other famed guests, who have called it their getaway. Tendering countless activities, from skating in winter or boating in summer, it has garnered awards for its 30,000-square-foot spa—a manifestation of modernity. A refuge for the active, Mohonk's true gift stems from its air of eternal repose, symbolized by 600 rocking chairs lined up along its [balconies.mohonk.com](http://balconies.mohonk.com)

#### **JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country, San Antonio**

Texas-sized, the little more than year old JW Marriott Hill Country Resort and Spa takes the prize for the largest hotel in its brand—in fact, the most gargantuan Marriott in the world. Though it occupies 600 acres of undulating Hill Country just 25 minutes from downtown San Antonio, it manages an intimate, almost cozy feel—like your Uncle Bill's backcountry ranch house. This stems from a series of common spaces, not to mention two golf courses, a handful of restaurants and a water park that will drop your kid's jaws and burn all their energy. Oh, and a tequila bar that experiments with its own infusions—bacon tequila, anyone? Those with knotted muscles should two-step into the cathedral of a spa, themed around South Texas' folklore and traditions. [jwsantonia.com](http://jwsantonia.com)

#### **Boca Raton Beach Club, Boca Raton, Florida**

At the Boca Raton Beach Club sun dapples the pink stucco of the 1926, Mediterranean style mansion. A green lawn unfolds like a Persian carpet. Palm fronds sigh in the wind. You stand casually, a croquet mallet poised on your shoulder and a gin drink in your opposite hand. If it weren't for that I-Phone ringing in your pocket, you might think yourself a character from *The Great Gatsby*. And, that's the appeal of this Florida beach resort—it's both nostalgic and hedonistic. With clay tennis courts, a world renowned golf course, restaurants galore, and the nearby sea, find plenty to do. Be sure to book a treatment in Spa Palazzo: a water-themed oasis that screams Morocco on steroids.



*Photo courtesy of The Boulders, a Waldorf Astoria Spa, Carefree Arizona*

#### **The Boulders, a Waldorf Astoria Spa, Carefree Arizona**

Just ask the lizards—they barely noticed the change in their terrain when The Boulders was built near Scottsdale, in an otherworldly section of the Sonoran Desert. Subordinating architecture to nature, the triple-A, five-diamond resort melds like a mirage into the landscape. Set amid human-like Saguaro cacti and immense chunks of 12-million-year old granite, the resort is a sprawling assemblage of adobe casitas and common areas that mirrors its backdrop. Add in the 33,000 square foot Golden Door Spa, two par lover's golf courses, four swimming pools, seven tennis courts, myriad restaurants and oodles of shops, and guests rarely consider leaving the compound.



*The Boulders, a Waldorf Astoria Spa, Carefree Arizona*

[Theboulders.com](http://Theboulders.com)



*Photo courtesy of Four Seasons Las Colinas, Dallas*

#### **Four Seasons Las Colinas, Dallas**

Feel like a member of the best club in town when you go north to Dallas to stay at the Four Seasons Las Colinas. An oasis that's loaded with Southern hospitality, this larger-than-most-Four Seasons occupies 400 acres. With affable employees (some with tenures in the two decade range), the tony resort tends to casual elegance. A TPC golf course will keep the Izod set happy, while the tranquil spa will subdue and delight others. A triple A, Five- Diamond resort, Las Colina's hungry guests can choose from five restaurants and bars. [www.fourseasons.com](http://www.fourseasons.com)



## Becca Hensley

Austin-based Becca Hensley has never met a stranger. Award winning, this travel and lifestyle writer, poet and essayist can't resist the unexplored alley, that glass of champagne in an unknown bar or taking the train far beyond her planned destination. An ebullience addicted curiosity seeker, a peripatetic globe trotter, an expert in all things luxe, her work has appeared in hundreds of magazines and newspapers and on myriad websites. She dishes on hotels, food, drink, spas, art, design, people and nature. Read her monthly dispatches in Austin Monthly and San Antonio Magazine. Find her frequently in Washington Flyer, National Geographic Traveler, Toronto Star, Organic Spa, Bridal Guide, Travel Channel, Destinations, Weddings & Honeymoons, Austin American Statesman, Fodors and Virtuoso Traveler.

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