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Gateway to the stars

Gaze at the night sky from a sunken bath in this remote Co Kerry cottage. By Eithne Dunne

Eithne Dunne

August 13 2017, 12:01am, The Sunday Times



Lost Cottage is set in 85 acres of Co Kerry countryside

MARK WATTS



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Hidden at the end of a 1km driveway, Lost Cottage, in Treangarriv, Co Kerry, lives up to its name. Finding the holiday home, which is perched above Caragh Lake, between Glenbeigh and Killorglin, requires a detailed set of directions. The driveway wends through the densely wooded hillside and the cottage fully reveals itself only as you round the last steep turn.

Lost Cottage, which is set in 85 acres, is an amalgam of traditional cottage and modern extension. What sets the place apart are the panoramic views across the lake towards Carrauntoohill and Macgillycuddy's Reeks.

Our six- and four-year-old daughters were in heaven because of the sheer freedom the place offered. Wandering through the woods one afternoon, we spotted a frog and a hare in quick succession, and with rough-hewn steps and piles of stones

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The views can be enjoyed from the picture window in the master bedroom
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Inside, a particular favourite was the remote-controlled floor-to-ceiling blind in the master bedroom. A touch of slick modernity in an otherwise traditional setting, it was the perfect and most dramatic way to reveal the astonishing views.

There is no television at Lost Cottage — instead there's an 18in tablet with a Netflix subscription, which came in handy once or twice for cartoons. This place doesn't need a screen, however. We spent each evening ensconced on the sofa at the end of the bed gazing out the window, completely entertained by the slow-moving clouds and weakening sun over the mountains, not to mention the friendly neighbourhood bat manically darting about.

And who needs TV when you're in one of the top three places on the planet from which to spot stars? Lost Cottage is in the Kerry International Dark-Sky Reserve, a 700 sq km area where it's possible to get clear and unpolluted views of the night sky.

It is among the few areas on the planet to have achieved "gold-tier" status. It means that on a clear night stargazers will get the kind of eyeful here that they can't get elsewhere, with phenomena such as aurora, the Milky Way and meteors easily visible.

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Some of the furniture in the cosy cottage is made from local Douglas fir
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Although we were not lucky enough to see stars during our visit, if your stay coincides with cloudless skies, you can even stargaze while luxuriating in the cottage's sunken bath, as there's a window in the ceiling directly above it.

When you can drag yourself away from the views — and the bath — nearby Dooks beach is a beautiful, deserted spot; a bit like the Lost Cottage, it's not easy to find, but that makes it all the more rewarding when you do.

We spent a blissful few hours here while the girls played with what must be the friendliest beachfront-dwelling dog in the country. Another day was spent at Rossbeigh beach, where there is a large playground and extensive parking along the front.

Although the beach trips were great, and this is a great base from which to explore the wilds of Kerry, if it hadn't been for the young ones we would have been more than happy to while away our days at the cottage. There were two inviting chairs perched outside the cottage that we didn't get to spend half enough time in.

Lost Cottage is the result of the endeavours of a Dubliner who spent most of his childhood summers with relatives in this part of Kerry, and bought a home in the area in 2000.

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Lost Cottage is an amalgam of traditional cottage and modern extension
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Wowed by the beauty and seclusion of the cottage when he came across it, he took on the challenge of its renovation, and now divides his time between Kerry and France.

Believed to predate 1800, the cottage shows up on the earliest Ordnance Survey maps of the area. It was abandoned in 1960, when its occupant Jack “The Badger” O’Shea and his family moved to Killarney.

For the next 40 years it was a winter refuge for a herd of mountain goats, who still roam the mountain behind the cottage. It wasn’t until 2003 that the painstaking restoration began. “We started by carefully peeling off the rotting roof and removing the last few remnants of render, bringing it back to its bare stone walls,” says the owner.

The larch roof timbers were harvested from the forest behind the cottage, the mud floor was stripped back and lime rendered and slowly the building came back to life. All with the help, says the owner, of “conservation experts, many kilos of lime render and a lot of love”.

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Enjoy panoramic views across the lake
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The windows and doors were hand-crafted to match precisely the design of what was there before, and once the old cottage was restored, the owner turned to the question of the extension. To ensure that it would meld with the existing cottage and the landscape, a wood-grain concrete was used.

“I bought three Douglas fir trees and had them rough sawn and sandblasted. These were used for the outer form-work for the walls and roof of the extension, giving the wood-grain effect. Finally, we oxidised the concrete, giving it its rusted colour to match the mountain,” he said.

There would have been many quicker and easier ways to finish an extension, but the extra forethought and effort paid off and the result speaks for itself. Some of the furnishings are also made from local Douglas fir, and the cottage is kept at a constant temperature by the underfloor heating which is based on an air-to-water system.

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For walkers, Lost Cottage is on the Kerry Way. At more than 200km, this is Ireland's longest walking route, which loops around the spectacular Iveragh Peninsula.

For a more relaxed jaunt, you can take a pony ride along Rossbeigh beach or hire a bike in nearby Killarney and take a spin along the Muckross trail. If you don't even want to venture that far, amble down the hill and strike out around the lake.

Killorglin is the nearest town. Get to Jack's Bakery in the mornings for delicious buns, hot from the oven. I miss these almost as much as I miss the views.

THE LOWDOWN

What it is: A two-bedroom extended and renovated 19th-century cottage that is available for let by holidaymakers

Where it is: Glenbeigh, Co Kerry

Rooms: There's an open-plan kitchen/dining room, two bedrooms, an en suite bathroom in the master bedroom and a family bathroom with sunken bath.

When can you go: The house is available to let for short stays and by the week. Prices range from £950 (€1,049) for a three-night off peak stay, to £2,750 for a week in peak season.

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