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GO OVERNIGHT

AS WE HABITUALLY travel with our two little boys in tow we willingly put up with cramped accommodation as long as the enticements outside the revolving doors are up to scratch. Our trick is to set off early and stay out all day, treating our hotel room as no more than a place to sleep and store our kit.

Most hotels, particularly those keen to attract guests during challenging times, are happy to accommodate young families, but they tend to shoehorn everyone into a standard double room where any previously visible floor space is swallowed up by additional beds for our little ones.

We consequently spend our evenings clambering over each other to reach the bathroom and devising ways to dim the bedside light so the children can sleep while we read. Putting a lamp in a bedside locker often works.

It's hardly surprising, therefore, that the first thing that struck us when we inserted our key card and pushed open the door of the family room allocated to us by the friendly and efficient receptionist at Actons Hotel, in Kinsale, was the space. Acres of plush blue carpet stretched before us.

The king-size bed seemed dwarfed and the boys' sturdy bunk bed, tucked away in a far corner, was barely visible. So ample was the room that we also had the luxury of a comfortable sofa and coffee table. Even the rapid appearance of Lego-related detritus made little impact.

Actons, which is prominently located in the picturesque Co Cork harbour town, was partially refurbished last year. A refreshingly eclectic mix of design styles means that no two rooms are quite the same. All are well equipped, however, with a kettle for tea and coffee, an iron and ironing board, a hairdryer, a safe and complimentary Wi-Fi – a facility hotels often charge for.

Our two-night package included a dinner for two at the Captain's Table restaurant, a member of Kinsale Good Food Circle. We could bring the children for a small supplement. Though generally well behaved, our sons are prone to boredom when Mum and Dad linger unduly. Like all parents, we are habitually under pressure to gobble and go before

endearing high spirits become unnerving high jinks.

Fortunately, the presence of an exuberant and flamboyantly dressed hen party kept the boys entertained – and made for a festive atmosphere. Their vibrant presence livened up what could otherwise have been a dull, recessionary Saturday night.

As with most three-star hotels, what attracts guests to Actons are the treasures that lie beyond. The medieval town of Kinsale is a gem of west Cork. Its appeal for foodies has perhaps flagged somewhat from the heady days of the 1970s and 1980s, but the town is still justifiably celebrated for its gastronomy, and we dined exceptionally well at both the Blue Haven and the White House.

Bracing walks and an entertaining visit to the dramatic 17th-century Charles Fort blew any cobwebs away. The highlight for all of us, however, was playing darts in the charming Spaniard inn.

Back at the hotel, each morning's plentiful breakfast

buffet had a variety of continental and more substantial, rib-sticking options to choose from.

The dining room was thronged, the presence of the hung-over hens and ourselves supplemented by an assortment of guests who obviously made themselves scarce during the day.

After a suitable interval Derek took the boys swimming while I browsed in some truly independent bookshops.

The hotel bar is perfectly adequate but lacks character, and with much on offer elsewhere in the town guests are perhaps not inclined to linger in its lacklustre confines.

Otherwise, however, the hotel has a huge amount to recommend it. The recent much-needed upgrade, combined with special offers to boost business during the downturn, has brought Actons back within the reach of many and made it a convenient and comfortable base for visitors keen to sample the delights of Kinsale.

ELEANOR FITZSIMONS STAYS AT ACTONS HOTEL IN KINSALE

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■ **Where** Actons Hotel, Pier Road, Kinsale, Co Cork, 021-4779900, actonshotel kinsale.com.

■ **What** Three-star hotel in picturesque harbour town.

■ **Rooms** 73, including front-facing superior rooms with views of the harbour and marina.

■ **Best rates** Two nights' B&B and one dinner €130pps.

■ **Restaurants and bars** Captain's Table restaurant, Waterfront bar.

■ **Child-friendliness**

Children welcome; spacious family rooms; toddler pool.

■ **Access** Six bedrooms are somewhat accessible to more ambulant wheelchair users. Restaurant, bar and function room are fully accessible.

■ **Amenities** Health and fitness club with 1.5m pool, toddler pool, gym, steam room, sauna, whirlpool spa, outdoor hot tub. Three conference rooms. Function room. Parking. Gardens.



Comfortable: a suite and (below) the restaurant at Actons