

# Walking in a Waterford wonderland

*With many overseas markets cancelled, we take to Ireland's oldest city in search of festive cheer*



**W**ITH Christmas markets being cancelled globally, I decided to look closer to home for festive cheer at Waterford's ninth annual Winterval Festival, which takes place until December 23.

Founded by Vikings in 914 AD, the south-eastern region, nestled on the edge of the River Suir, has become a hotspot for festivity-seekers. At this time of year, the city's five quarters each feature a different Christmas theme, from the continental market to the 'Elf-stival' and cultural quarters. With food stalls galore, the sweet scent of mulled wine and mince pies travels through the air.

Winterval only opens at weekends but we're delighted to see the city bursting with life right throughout the week, with live music, fairground rides and twinkling lights lining every street.

The pinnacle of Winterval, however, has to be the Waterford Eye, a 32m high ferris wheel that offers 360-degree views of the city, which are best experienced at night.

Of course, no trip to the Deise is complete without a visit to the famous Waterford Crystal factory. Although tours are currently only running from Monday to Friday, it's worth visiting the store at weekends to view some landmark crystal productions.

For night owls, a visit to the famous Reg bar is a must. With six floors of entertainment and live music, it's refreshing to experience a semblance of normality.

Thankfully we don't have to travel far to get back to our hotel, the centrally-located and family-run Dooley's Hotel. In operation for over 70 years, it oozes history and charm. With 113 rooms, a bar and restaurant, its focal point on the quays and famous breakfast blaas, we're well looked after.

A recommendation from a local leads us to the Stable Yard food-hall for lunch. With an artisan Italian bakery, restaurant, Mediterranean deli, ice-cream parlour and more, we aren't stuck for choice. There we happily indulge in some halloumi burgers, later purchas-

by **REBECCA LEE**

ing some fine Italian and Spanish cheeses and meats to take home.

We purchase the Freedom of Waterford pass, which includes entry to four exhibitions: the Medieval Museum, Bishop's Palace, the Museum of Time and the Irish Silver Museum. A newly-opened attraction, the Museum of Time is Ireland's only horological facility, featuring over 5,000 years of timekeeping history.

From there, we head to the King of the Vikings experience. This virtual reality adventure takes place in a handcrafted replica Viking house, where you walk through history with a real-life warrior.

The graphics are truly exceptional and we thoroughly enjoy talking and taking photos with our hair-raising guide, Bart Gozdr, who is a bit of a celebrity himself, appearing in the last four seasons of the Vikings TV show.

Slightly further out but still within reach, are The Enchanted Gardens in Tramore. Taking place in the Lafcadio Japanese Gardens, this event is lesser known among tourists, with over 100,000 light displays and 1.5 acres to explore.

Another Christmassy activity worth trying would be The Santa Express on the Suir Valley Railway. A short magical train journey leads guests to the Magic Wood to meet Santa and Mrs Claus.

If you're looking for a festive trip, then Waterford is where it's at for mistletoe and mulled wine galore.

## TRAVEL FACTS

**Where to stay:** Prices at Dooley's Hotel start at €19 per room B&B. See [dooleys-hotel.ie](http://dooleys-hotel.ie).

**What to do:** The Freedom of Waterford pass costs €15 per adult, see [waterford-treasures.com](http://waterford-treasures.com). The King of the Vikings experience costs €10 per adult and €5 per child under 12, see [kingofthe-vikings.com](http://kingofthe-vikings.com). The Enchanted Gardens cost €6 per adult, children €3, see [lafcadiohearngardens.com](http://lafcadiohearngardens.com). The Santa Express on the Suir Valley Railway costs €10 per adult and €19 per child, visit [wsvrailway.ie](http://wsvrailway.ie)



BY ISABEL CONWAY

**I**CAN almost hear the clatter of Lady Danbury's carriage pounding the cobblestones, pulling up outside her grand mansion, the powerful noblewoman in her stately top hat setting out for a 'talk of the town' ball or debutante soiree to see and be seen.

Amid the Georgian splendour of Bath, seeing the locations used as a backdrop to the first series of *Bridgerton*, such fantasies easily spring to life. Up the hill at no 1 Royal Crescent, home to Lady Featherington, I can imagine Mama desperately plotting a course for her three daughters through the social season to find them suitable husbands.

The world may be divided into those who survived the depressing pandemic lockdown of last Christmas and beyond by gorging on *Bridgerton*'s Regency-era sex-fuelled high jinks — myself included — and critics who turned up their noses at its dubious dance with historical authenticity.

Taking in key *Bridgerton* sights such as the Holburne Museum, we meander through familiar territory to the Assembly Rooms (viewed with the admission ticket to visit Bath's outstanding fashion museum), one of the glittering chandelier-hung settings for those glamorous technicoloured costumed balls. Averting my gaze from tempting pastries and generously-filled ciabattas at the Abbey Deli on leafy Abbey Green, its shopfront once more transports us into a world of lust and lace. I have crossed the threshold of *Modiste*, the dress shop where romantic dreams took shape and scandalous gossip was scattered like confetti while made-to-measure ballgowns were fitted to hourglass figures armoured with corsets and stays.

**T**HE sultry, discreet epitome of French style, *Madame Modiste* — herself shielding many a secret of her own — is immortalised here with stacked bars of *Modiste* chocolate and various teas. Staff member Fran, who is busy filling brioches, says the boudoir-like interior converted to the sumptuous fashion salon lay empty, becoming a deli café after *Bridgerton* hit our screens.

'But it's done wonders for business, visitors recognise the original Georgian façade and wander inside,' she says.

Pointing to photos of the dress-maker and cast hung on the walls, she adds that the *Modeste* chocolate and souvenir teas displayed



**Christmas cheer: Santa Claus gives Scrooge a right kicking in Waterford**