



THERE'S THE RUB

Invincible is usually a word reserved for superheroes, but following several blissful treatments at the **Westport Plaza Hotel's Sula Spa**, **Ciara Dwyer** was certainly feeling champion

'You can see the Reek from here," said the therapist, Aoife, pointing out the window of **Spa Sula** in the **Westport Plaza**

Hotel. I looked at Croagh Patrick and smiled. It may have been Reek Sunday, but for me this was the perfect way to see the mountain: from a distance, as I ambled along in a dressing gown and towelling slippers, on my way to get a massage.

Once inside the Lemongrass Suite, Aoife soaked my feet in a basin of salts. This ritual was incredibly relaxing. Part of the Ayurvedic belief is that we hold stress in our feet, so it has to be washed away first.

Before the oil massage, she asked if I would like it to be hard or soft. Because she asked me, I didn't end up feeling perverted, as I often do during massages when I plead with the therapist to go harder. I told her to pummel away — I had been for a run that morning and my calf muscles were like rocks. Then the magic began.

Nigella Lawson once said that she couldn't enjoy a massage unless it was given by her lover. What nonsense. A massage from your man is one thing, but if you want deep relaxation which will eventually energise you, you should leave it to the professionals. It is a skill to be valued. You have to be silent for a massage. Silence helps you to switch off and really appreciate what the therapist is doing. It's hard enough trying to quieten down your internal monologue without gabbling away too.

Sometimes when I get a massage — I am a firm believer in them — I find that the therapist can be a bit stingy with the oil. There was none of that here. In fact, part of the process was the warm oil being poured slowly on to my body, and then massaged in. There is something very nurturing about having oil massaged into your stomach. And

when Aoife wasn't massaging, she would touch on pressure points, such as in between my big toe and the index toe. I didn't always enjoy the pressure, but when she released her touch, there was a wonderful feeling of well-being and deep calmness.

Then I drifted off to the thermal-suite area where I sat and bathed my feet again, lay in the rock sauna, and then got into the outdoor rock pool. One was as heavenly as the next. I lounged about until it was time for my facial.

Gone are the days when a therapist would squeeze every blackhead out of you. Instead, this was an Omega 3 Supplifying Facial, where the same talented girl worked Sundari potions into my skin. While they were taking effect, she massaged my shoulders and gave me a head massage, too. I don't think I have ever been so relaxed. I was on the brink of sleep. Then, she touched a pressure point on my forehead — no doubt where the crevice of my frown is — and afterwards I felt invincible. All this was in the **Westport Plaza Hotel** in **Mayo**. It took a painless three and a half hours to get there — a very pleasant train journey — and the hotel is less than five minutes from the train station. On arrival, I had seafood chowder, and the next night, in the hotel's Restaurant Merlot, the food was superb.

In this incredibly comfortable hotel, the splendour made me feel like royalty. It's the little things; civilised ways such as not having to break your neck getting down for your grub in the mornings — breakfast is served until 11am.

Each morning, I got up and went for a run. I tottered over the bridge spanning the Carrowbeg, puffed up High Street and then found a delightful route — the old railway line — where I listened to the twittering birds and admired the trees.

I had never been to **Westport** before, and found it to be a delightfully buzzy town. There are loads of little shops. I got

a lovely homemade marmalade in Market 57, and a beautiful dress for my sister in Carraig Donn. And, if you're into traditional Irish music, you can nip into Matt Molloy's to listen to a session.

I arrived feeling clapped out, as if I had climbed the Reek. Two days later, I left the hotel a calm, serene woman with glowing skin and a relaxed body. Next year I might even climb the Reek and then get massaged. The Reek is a might — the massage is a definite. **L**



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