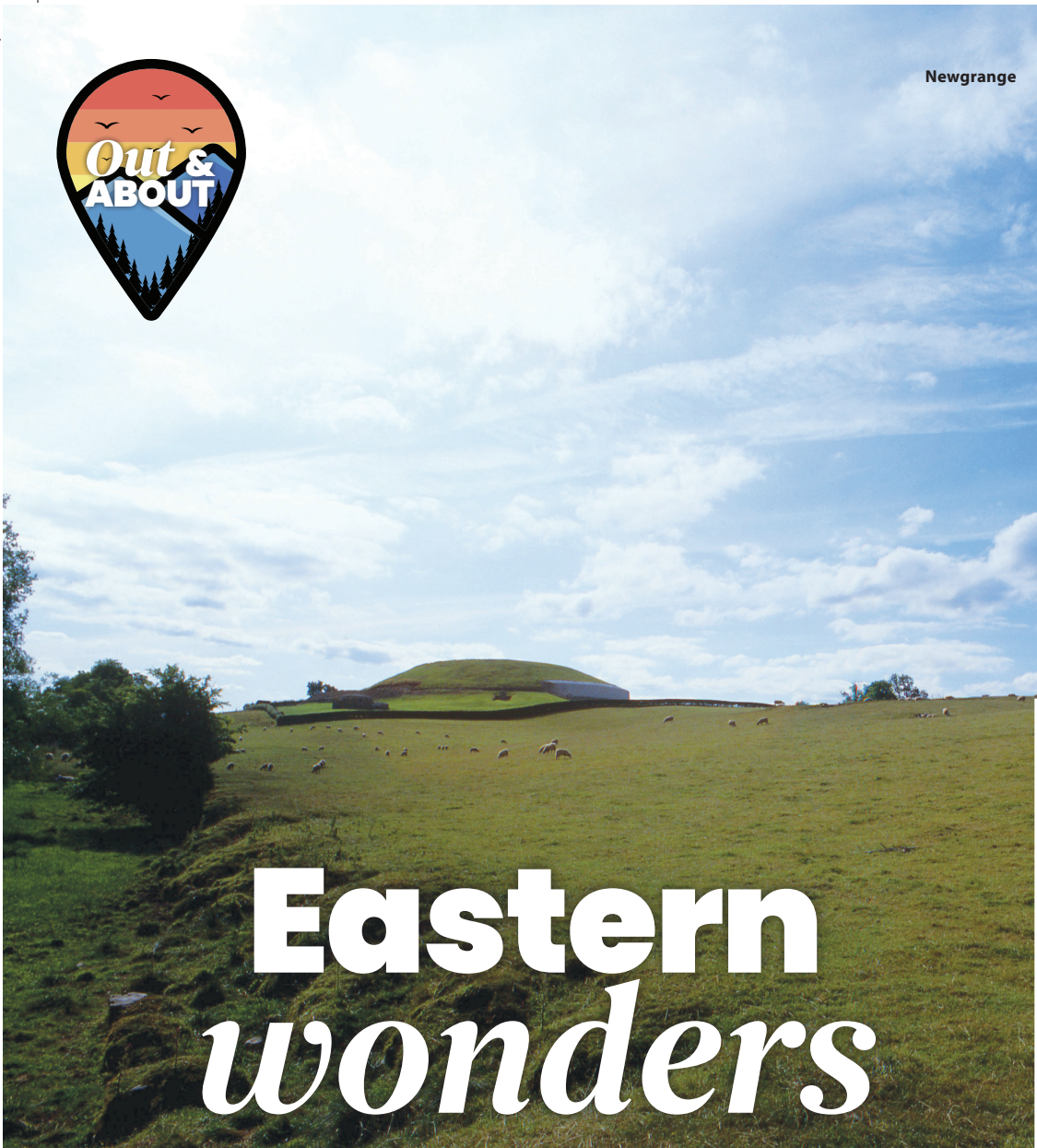




Newgrange



Eastern wonders



The kitchen at Decoy Cottage



Decoy Cottages



Animals at Decoy Cottages



Have some time alone in the sauna at Decoy

As the summer gears up and we plan our staycations, Janice Butler and her family discover some of the wonders of the historic Boyne Valley

Living in West Dublin, a trip to Meath and the Boyne Valley has always been a handy family day out. We've enjoyed the Hill of Tara, Trim Castle and the brilliant Emerald Park on many occasions. So, when we were invited on a family trip to the Boyne Valley, we jumped at the chance to explore the area further. In the summer, the Co Meath coast get a lot of attention, but the Boyne Valley has plenty of other attractions to be discovered. A central part of the tourism concept, Ireland's Ancient East, it's a place steeped in history. Combined with its lush green landscape and magnificent waterways, fantastic food, outdoor adventures and cultural gems, this wealth of heritage makes it a really special destination. Encompassing Co Meath and south Co Louth, the Boyne Valley is a unique place to go on holiday, with an abundance of things to do, especially for families. Discover tombs older than the pyramids at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne or find the birthplace of Samhain on the Hill of Ward (Tlachtga). You can brave a battleground at the famous Battle of the Boyne site or test your own courage on the legendary Cú Chulainn

rollercoaster at Emerald Park. You would need more than a weekend to really explore this region, but we packed plenty in over two days and here's a closer look at our adventure around the Boyne Valley.

Where we stayed: Decoy Country Cottages, Navan

This was exceptional. Decoy House and lands were once part of the Lismulin estate which was owned by the Dillon family. According to the family history, William III (King Billy), spent a night at Lismullin House immediately after his victory at The Battle of The Boyne on July 11, 1690. Before departing the following morning, he left some bits and pieces as a mark of appreciation for his hosts, and these items are on display at The National Museum of Ireland at Collin's Barracks.

Current owners Conor and Paula Irwin bought Decoy House and courtyard in 1999 after relocating back to Ireland from the UK. After extensive renovation work on the property and courtyard, they welcomed their first guests in 2004. The property has eight gorgeous, eco-friendly and family friendly self-catering cottages which range from one to four bedrooms, making them perfectly suited to family holidays

and group gatherings. We had a two-bedroom cottage which perfectly suited our family of five. One room had a large king bed and the second room, for the kids, had a king bed and a single. Both rooms were en suite. You can tell a lot of love has gone into these cottages and everything has been thought of, with a focus on eco living to the fore. Kitchens are equipped with an oven, fridge, washing and drying machines, which are essential when travelling with young kids. There's also a Sage coffee machine, which was a nice touch and Paula leaves plenty of information on the local area as well as a welcome basket with some lovely homemade produce.

The real highlight to these cottages are the extras on the property. There are farm animals, including an alpaca called Al Pacino, a pony and lots of free-range chickens – you can even go and collect your own eggs from the hen house in the morning. There's plenty to keep the kids entertained – a playground, sandpit, a magical tree house and campfire, a dedicated cottage with toys, pool table and gym and for the adults, there's a fabulous new sauna and plunge pool and you get an hour and a half session with each booking. The only problem with staying here is, you're not going to want to leave. See more at decoycountrycottages.ie

Photo: xxx