



NEXT WEEK

May - a month for Marian devotion.

within Ireland. If you live in the suburbs of Dublin, you might not think of your home as a holiday destination, but to a family from Kerry a week in Dublin might seem very exciting.

Camping

A week under canvas can be great adventure for children. Tents can be bought cheaply, rented or borrowed. Best of all, if you fancy a change of scenery, you can just pack up and move on. There are campsites with great washing and cooking facilities all across Ireland. Many are adjacent to beaches, parks and mountains.

Holidays overseas

There are also a number of economical ways of holidaying abroad.

Flying

The price of flights has been creeping ever upwards in recent years. However, by booking in advance and searching websites such as Skyscanner (www.skyscanner.net) and Momondo (www.momondo.com), bargains can be found. Package holiday operators often have 'flights only' deals on their charter aircraft. You can research for destinations through sites like tripadvisor.com or check out offers on lastminute.co.uk

Ferry

There is a romance to sea travel. Certainly, for children, the experience of travelling on a ship can be unforgettable. The ferries that operate out of Ireland are some of the largest in Europe, and boast a range of on-board facilities including cinemas, swimming pools, restaurants and play areas.

A new budget operator, Celtic Link Ferries, now plies between Rosslare and France. You can bring all the accoutrements children need in your car, and you have your own transport on arrival. In early autumn, a return ferry trip to France for a car and a family of four costs from €450, including basic cabin accommodation. Prices rise considerably in the peak season, but still represent good value for families when compared to the cost of flights and car rental.

House exchange

House exchanges are taking off. A number of websites let you put pictures and details about your home online, and help you get in contact with people around the world who want to exchange houses for a couple of weeks. You can even exchange cars too and exchange insurance on each-

others' cars. This means the only cost you incur is the flight and - for free - you have your own accommodation and transport. Another bonus is that you are introduced into a local community, and you get to see how a real family lives, instead of just staying in the tourist bubble. The properties available for exchange range from apartments in Paris, to villas in Italy to boats on the Mediterranean.

Train travel

Continental train services are excellent and cheap. If you can travel light, a train journey can be a shared adventure for the family.

Children aged under six usually travel free and family 'saver passes' can be bought. Last year, my wife and I flew in to Nice with our two toddlers, and travelled by train around the South of France and Northern Italy. We had the one of the best holidays imaginable and met lots of locals. For more see www.eurail.com or www.raileurope.com

Self-catering

Campsites generally offer the best value abroad. Continental campsites often have swimming pools, playgrounds, water slides and restaurants. If you have a tent, you can rent a pitch, or alternatively you can rent a pre-prepared tent or mobile home. Simply turn up, or book in advance through agencies such as keycamp.ie or www.eurocamp.com

Package holidays

Package holidays save you a lot of organisational woes. Simply pay the fee, turn up at the airport, and flights, transport and accommodation will all be organised for you. What's on offer with a package holiday is straightforward 'fun in the Sun'. You will be able to speak English in the local Irish pub, and most of the people you meet will be Irish or British. There might be excursions outside the resort area to see some of the sights, or you can rent a car for a couple of days. Week-long holidays for two adults and two children can be had from €1,500. For the budget-conscious, self-catering accommodation is far better than a hotel where you will have to pay for all meals and snacks.

Whether you stay in Ireland or travel abroad, a week or two away from the ordinary grind can really bring a family together. Arguably, the bonding experience will be all the better if you spend your holiday camping in Dingle rather than in a five-star hotel in Dubai.

CHILDREN'S CORNER

ERIN FOX



May Day flowers for Our Lady

May is around the corner and traditionally we crown Our Lady with a garland of fresh flowers on May 1 to recognise her as Queen of Heaven and Mother of God. There are lots of traditions celebrating May that we no longer practice; such as leaving a Merry May Cone filled with flowers on a neighbour's door handle. Try making a May Cone this year to give to a family member or neighbour. You can also leave one at a grotto of Our Lady.

For the May cone you will need: coloured card, scissors, glue and a paper doilie.

Cut a semi-circle shape out of bright coloured paper card. Make the point flat. Roll the triangle into a cone shape and tape the two sides together.

Trim off any extra paper around the top of the cone to make it even. Dab a small doilie with glue and wrap around the cone. To make a frill at opening of the cone, curl a doile and place inside the cone, securing with glue.

Cut a strip of paper card that is approximately 12 inches long by two inches wide. Tape this strip onto the top of your cone to make a handle. Decorate as you wish.

Fill the cone with fresh flowers such as blossoms and bluebells, and hang on the door of a relative or a neighbour. Alternatively you can place flowers bulbs or a packet of seeds inside the cone.

For a floral head band you will need: satin ribbon, fresh flowers and greenery in water or fabric flowers, hair band, glue and tape.

Squeeze a small amount



of glue to the bottom of the hair band. Take the end of the satin ribbon and place it over the glue on the hair band. Wrap the ribbon tightly around the hair band, slightly overlapping it as you go.

Wrap the ribbon all the way around the hair band, pulling it tightly and adding more glue as you go along. Cut any excess ribbon at the end

of the hair band. Allow to dry completely for a few hours or overnight.

Using floral tape, attach the fresh flowers and greenery all around the hair band. If using fabric flowers, mark on the hair band with glue where you want to attach them. Place the flowers over the glue and use a clothes peg to keep it in place until it is dry.

Couples offered spiritual retreat for whole family

Mags Gargan

The second ever Irish 'Cana week' for families is being held in the Esker Retreat Centre in Athenry, Co. Galway from July 21-27.

Cana is a six-day programme for couples to strengthen their marriage and deepen their spiritual life. It includes talks, prayer, time together as a couple, relaxation and times of celebration.

Couples can bring their children along on retreat and they take part in their own Cana programme where they are looked after by a team of volunteers who organise activities, games and recreation.

Relationship

"It's like a summer camp for the children, while the couples have time to concentrate on their marriage and their relationship for the week," says Eugene Smith, who is co-ordinating the week with his wife Maruska.

"There will be a number of workshops, time away for the couples to relax, to pray together and to work on issues like communication, forgiveness and intimacy in their re-

lationship."

The programme was developed by the Chemin Neuf Community, an international Catholic community with a strong ecumenical commitment which is inspired by the spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola and the Charismatic Renewal. The programme has been running since 1975 and is in 45 countries worldwide.

Six couples took part in the inaugural Irish Cana week last year, and 12 are already signed up for it this year. The couples then have the opportunity to join a fraternity where couples meet in their homes once a month for reflections, to continue to strengthen their relationship. There are three fraternities in Ireland at the moment in Dublin, Tipperary and Carlow.

The Cana week is a non-profit undertaking and is made possible through the efforts of volunteers, so costs are kept as low as possible to make it available to as many people as possible.

For more information contact: Eugene and Maruska Smith at eugenemithireland@gmail.com or on 085-7330191.



Eugene and Maruska Smith, Cana Ireland national coordinators