



IRISH GAZETTE



VOLUME 22 • NUMBER 5 • MAY 2008

CELEBRATING 21 YEARS OF SERVING THE IRISH COMMUNITY 1987 - 2008

Exploring Northern Ireland

Seaweed bath, anyone?

By Kathy McGorray Dougherty

From now on, visits to Northern Ireland won't be complete until I sink into a tub of hot, steaming saltwater filled with bright, fresh seaweed. Thanks to SOAK Seaweed Baths in Newcastle, Co. Down, I've experienced the wonders of seaweed baths and I'm a true convert.

SOAK opened in 2006 and is located along the Promenade in Newcastle, near the historic Slieve Donard Hotel and the world-famous Royal County Down Golf Club. Housed in a renovated 1896 building, it looks down at the Irish Sea. The atmosphere is warm and welcoming, with an open-hearth fire to greet you and comfy chairs to relax you.



There are a small number of private rooms, each featuring an old-fashioned steam cabinet or steam shower, a large Victorian roll-top bathtub and a freshwater shower. The owners and staff will happily answer any questions for you. You can even bring your own music CD to enjoy as you relax in the tub.

For years people in rural, seaside communities have understood the natural benefits of seaweed and saltwater. Due to its extremely high mineral content, it relieves pain due to rheumatism and arthritis and helps alleviate skin conditions. The hot saltwater allows the seaweed to release its nutrient-rich oils, which are then absorbed into your skin. Soaking in this all-natural mix can improve circulation, help detoxify your body and reduce tension and stress.





After spending 10 minutes in the steam cabinet, I tentatively stepped into the tub, where the seaweed had been soaking in hot saltwater, releasing its healthy oils. The water felt thick and soft, not oily or goopy. There's just a faint whiff of ocean, but it's not strong; remember — this is fresh seaweed, not the stuff that's been lying on the beach for weeks. The seaweed oils are great for your hair and scalp, so seaweed wigs are highly recommended.

After 40 minutes or so in the tub (which goes by much too quickly), it's time for the cool, freshwater shower rinse. Afterward, my skin was amazingly soft, and I felt relaxed and energized at the same time. I wasn't the only one who benefited from this treatment. After the seaweed is used once, it is given to local farmers who utilize it for bedding for their cattle. Both the farmers and local veterinarians claim the cattle are much more content. I know I was.

SOAK is expanding their space to include a small coffee shop and wonderful self-catering apartments, featuring views of the Irish Sea and the Mourne Mountains. SOAK's motto is "Once you've had a SOAK with us you'll never look back." And, I would add, you can't wait to get back and have another!

Kathy McGorray Dougherty is owner of Northern Ireland Travels, which specializes in creating personalized, self-guided trips to Northern Ireland. For more information, visit their website at www.nirelandtravels.com.