



all been looking forward to. Spellbound by Magic Castle is an otherworldly fine dining experience, followed by magical entertainment. The menu includes the vanishing chilled jumbo shrimp, bamboozled butternut squash and apple soup; mains of prestidigitated beef tenderloin with lobster dumplings, or spellbinding roasted black cod, and bewitched bunny key lime pie to finish.

We are warned to take it easy on the drink as there will be a special mix of wizard cocktails served in the Victorian magical themed bar later. With names like Escape from Houdini's Chest, Open Sesame, and Smoke and Mirrors, a magical atmosphere is created, especially when the barman produces the Escape from Houdini cocktail from an ornate wooden box, oozing blue ice and a set of handcuffs at the bottom. After some amazing bar magic, we are treated to a performance from magician Pete Waddell, whose sleight of hand leaves us mesmerised.

In Gibraltar, we visit World War II tunnels built into the rock face, and see the Macaque monkeys at the top of the Rock.

From there it's another day at sea to Marseille, where we drive deep into Provence and explore an olive farm near Arles, which produces five delicious varieties of olive oil.

for me is when they flip a piece of food from a distance into our mouths one by one. Much of it misses, landing on our laps or the floor, and a big cheer goes up when a mouth is finally hit.

It's a two-hour experience and the prelude of edamame pods and miso soup is followed by starters of tonkatsu, panko-crusted pork, barbecue katsu sauce and shredded cabbage. The choice of mains includes grilled tofu, black tiger shrimp, miso salmon, seared scallops, teriyaki chicken, NY strip steak and filet mignon, with mochi ice cream for dessert. It's a truly wonderful experience.

Princess Cruises was put on the map during the 1970s thanks to The Love Boat, the hit ABC series which was filmed on Pacific Princess. It became synonymous with romance and adventure.

To pay tribute, the Love By Britto restaurant caters mainly for couples and it is certainly not shy when it comes to romance. The table is set beautifully and pink cocktails are served with red love hearts on the side.

The food includes oysters with lemongrass kaffir, and a salad of beets, heart-shaped of course, figs and goat's cheese. A granita of pink champagne and rose petals is served before the main, a duet of prime beef and wagyu. All Night Love, vanilla salted caramel ice-cream, concludes the scrumptious meal.

Our last night is one we've

TRAVEL FACTS

Sun Princess cruises cost from €619pp for an inside stateroom, and €1,394pp for a stateroom with balcony. Visit princess.com. Sunway has Sun Princess packages in the Mediterranean from €1,219pp for seven nights from August 30, or Caribbean from €1,349pp for eight nights from November 15, see sunway.ie.



Manchester is flying high

The northern city gives an alternative option for those embarking on a long-haul trip

WHILE many carriers fly direct to the US from Dublin and to most parts of Europe, when flying to the Caribbean and other long-haul destinations, there's no direct flight, so it's often suggested to go via London Heathrow.

However, Heathrow is the busiest airport in Europe, handling over 50 million passengers in 2024. So why not consider Manchester instead for an easier transition? It's still a busy place (30 million passengers in 2024), but much smaller and easier to get around.

Long-haul direct flights from Manchester include Barbados, Jamaica and Cancun. If you'd like to travel to Asia, there are flights to Singapore, Hong Kong, Delhi and Mumbai, while in Africa there's flights to Lagos and Johannesburg.

The flight from Dublin to Manchester takes about 50 minutes. If you get there before lunch with your flight early the next day, you could spend some of your time shopping and enjoying dinner in the city.

One of the biggest bonuses is the hotels are genuinely in the airport, not hotels with 'airport' in the name to fool you. So there's no need for shuttle buses unless you don't want to or can't walk.

There are seven altogether: Holiday Inn, Ibis Budget, Radisson Blu, Doubletree by Hilton, Clayton, Tribe and Crowne Plaza.

Price-wise, there is not much to choose from among the hotels. A couple of them are looking a bit tired, but Crowne Plaza, where I stayed, had a €9.5million makeover in 2022 and still feels fresh even though it has just celebrated its 60th birthday.

Another perk of staying at an airport hotel is that you can check in your bag the night before, avoiding the usual morning queue, so I had a little bit longer in bed – 4am felt early enough.

Breakfast is included and starts at 5am. If you have an earlier flight, let reception know the night before and they will make up a breakfast to-go bag for you.

I had a king premium



BY
OLIVIA GREENWAY

**Flying visit:
Manchester
Airport and,
inset, the
Crowne
Plaza hotel**

room (with lounge access) on the fourth floor. It's slightly bigger than a standard room and the higher rooms are quieter. There was some occasional plane noise but it didn't bother me.

The room spec gives access to the Club Lounge near reception. This is useful if the other public spaces are busy. From 6.30pm to 8.30pm, complimentary beers, spirits and a few snacks are served.

You can get the same room but without lounge access for a few euro less. A 24-hour room service is also available, with a €6.50 tray charge.

At the Asian dining restaurant, I had a vegetable tempura starter with pad Thai to follow. Portions were large, probably too large for me, but this is Manchester. The jasmine tea was very good.

At The Grill, as the name suggests, simple grilled dishes are served – steak, burgers, fish and chips – but there are other options too such as hot and cold sandwiches, pizza and

pasta. If you have time and want to get away from the airport altogether, there is a regular direct train into central Manchester.

Train tickets are not expensive, but booking in advance will get you a better deal. An express train service to Manchester Piccadilly takes 15 minutes.

From there, there are free buses around the city centre – no 1 and 2 – that run a circular route. For Exchange Square, take either bus to Market Street.

EXCHANGE Square is the main shopping area with Selfridges, Harvey Nichols, the Arndale Shopping Centre, Primark and many other known brands.

There are lots of places to eat too. For Indian, try Dishoom, for Chinese, try Rice Bowl or Little Yang Sing. Browns, in a beautiful old bank, is great for cocktails, snacks or a full meal. For a pub-like atmosphere, try Sam's Chop House.

The Arndale Centre has a good food court. There are also several food options in The Exchange and Printing Works. Manchester is not short of good places to eat and drink to suit all budgets.

There is plenty to do and see, depending on your interests. You might want to swing by the Gay Village or browse the indie shops in the Northern Quarter. The Manchester Art Gallery, People's History Museum and John Ryland's Library are all free and worth a visit.

I would highly recommend travelling via Manchester Airport for long-haul travel.

If you can fit in a city trip too, it would be the icing on the cake.

TRAVEL FACTS

Rooms at the Crowne Plaza Manchester Airport from €124 per night, for more see ihg.com.