

# Bedding down in Kilfenora



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Owner of the new Kilfenora Hostel Orla Vaughan and her brother Mark check out the beds before opening to the public on Wednesday evening.

Photograph by Yvonne Vaughan (2024273)

## Bernie English

THERE are few business people who could watch 60,000 potential customers a year walk away without leaving hard cash behind and Orla Vaughan from Kilfenora is not one of them.

To net a slice of the spending power of the 60,000 who visit Kilfenora every year to see the Burren, Orla has risked half a million Euro to open the area's first hostel.

Until now, a couple of local bed and breakfast concerns were the only ones to offer accommodation to visitors and tempt them to make more than a day trip of their time in Kilfenora.

This week, Orla opened the doors of her new hostel and learning centre which can accommodate 46 guests at a time and will, she hopes, encourage people to spend more time in Kilfenora to the benefit of the whole area.

No stranger to business, Orla grew up in the pub trade as her parents, Kay and John, ran Vaughan's pub.

"It was my parents who first thought of opening a hostel back in 2000, but we were all travelling at the time," said Orla.

After a spell working in recruitment in Dublin, Orla decided to return home and move the hostel project on.

"There were a lot of difficulties in the process, sewerage being a big one," said Orla. Funding for the project was not straightforward either, with the bank Orla had expected to get a loan from turning her down.

But undaunted, she employed a fi-

nancial advisor and within a week of talking to him, had the go-ahead to spend €500,000.

"I had to do a very in-depth business plan to see where my market lay, as I applied to Leader for funding. I saw that there were a lot of students and school groups coming to the Burren and as you can't get money from Leader for accommodation alone, I put in a classroom to facilitate study groups."

Already the idea appears to be paying off, as Orla has bookings for a full week from a University in Leeds and for a long weekend, a Yoga group is taking over the hostel.

"There are so many visitors who come to see or study the Burren but they go away without spending any more than a day here and that's a shame. Now there is a facility for people to stay, I believe all businesses in the area will benefit," said Orla.

The Kilfenora Hostel is a far cry from some of the iron-bed, cold water only hostels we might remember from youthful back-packing days.

All the bedrooms are ensuite, there are facilities for couples to have private rooms and there is a fully equipped self-catering kitchen as well as classroom facilities.

Orla threw a bash this week to celebrate the opening with locals and friends "who did so much, even helping me to carry beds in. They were fantastic."

"A half a million is a lot of debt to be in at my age," said Orla "but as an astute business woman of my acquaintance said, the first big loan is a worry but after that you'll be asking yourself what can you spend a million on?"