

Preserving a World-Class Resort

An Interview with Colm Hannon,
Chief Executive Officer, Adare Manor, Ireland



The Tack Room bar (left);
the exterior of Adare Manor, Ireland (above)



EDITORS' NOTE Colm Hannon has held his current post since August 2005. Prior to this, he was General Manager for Sandy Lane Resort Barbados and Resident Manager for Cambridge Beaches Bermuda. Hannon is a graduate of Shannon College of Hotel Management in Ireland. He received his General Managers Programme, Management degree from Cornell University – S.C. Johnson Graduate School of Management.



Colm Hannon

PROPERTY BRIEF The five-star Adare Manor, Ireland (adaremanor.com) is situated in the heart of Adare Village in County Limerick, Ireland. Adare Manor is steeped in history and surrounded by medieval ruins. The 840-acre riverside demesne is home to a championship golf course designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr. and superb trout fishing on the River Maigue. This hallmark experience offers the best of contemporary food and an impeccable approach to hospitality that brings guests back, time and time again.

What excited you about the opportunity to lead Adare Manor and made you feel it would be the right fit?

In many ways, I was quite fortunate in that I have a history and relationship with the owners of the property. I've been working with them since 1997 when I first joined Sandy Lane and continued through the opening and transformation there. When I relocated back to Ireland, I stayed with them.

When this opportunity came up, it was an exciting project. We knew the property well and this was a natural progression when it became available.

When you have a property with such heritage, while you want to make it current, how important is it to maintain some of the tradition?

We took over the property in January of 2015, and we wanted to see the operation run for just over 12 months to determine what worked well, what didn't, and what we had to change. It also gave us an opportunity to really understand the building itself. It's the most beautiful structure in terms of the finishes and detailing, and the architectural style that originally went into it.

We started creating a master plan to preserve and enhance and, in some cases, dramatically restore some of the old buildings around the estate. This property dates back originally to 1720. We have a lot of history here, and as we started to uncover some of the beautiful features that in some cases had been covered, we got to see what a real gem it was.

We went out around the world to find the best people in terms of specialists in their fields to bring this back to life and protect the building for the next 100 years.

Will you highlight the new wing and 42-bedroom expansion?

The Manor was really busy in the summers but not in the winters because it didn't have some of the facilities that one would expect in a modern-day luxury resort.

We did extensive analysis to work out the optimum size to make it viable for the future. Adding the 42 rooms was a must. Once we knew that, we hired a Grade-A architect from London to help us maintain the exterior look and feel of the old building.

What we have now is a new wing that seamlessly fits onto the old building and doesn't in any way detract from it.

In regard to social events, will the new ballroom open up more opportunity for the property?

It will because Adare is such a beautiful geographical town in Ireland, and the area itself is naturally a beautiful location. It is a dream special-event destination in terms of high-profile dinner dances or anniversaries, and meetings and weddings.

The beautiful new Grand Ballroom along the riverside adds a whole new dimension of what business will offer for the future, and makes us complete as a true resort offering.

Is your primary market Europe or the U.S.?

Our main market is North America from April through October. The North American market really loves what Adare Manor has to offer and its location on the west coast of Ireland.

In terms of the added facilities, such as conference, meetings, and events space, we are seeing the U.K., Europe, and local market vacation numbers increase significantly.

What do you have planned for the food and beverage offerings?

We want to offer our guests choice, and we don't want anybody to feel that what we're doing is limiting them.

We have two main restaurants in the resort – one is the Oakroom, which was the original restaurant in the Manor. That offers a more elegant dining experience. We'll have a gastronomic team of chefs there delivering at the highest level with a very strong focus on Irish local produce.

In addition, at the Carriage House, we're putting in a modern steakhouse concept. It's more casual and aimed at providing an alternative to what we're doing in the hotel and we'll have a specialty of meat, seafood, salads, and a range of offerings in a very different setting.

We will also operate 24/7 room service, and the gallery and the drawing room will provide two more casual dining venues. We're specializing in a sophisticated afternoon tea every day and light lunch running through the day and into the early evening.

In the evening, we will have another venue called the Tack Room, where we will offer traditional style tapas, craft beers, and whiskey selection.

Do you enjoy opening and running properties equally?

From a creative viewpoint, being onboard at this stage in a project is so rewarding and exciting, and gives me the opportunity to be involved with every aspect of creating what will ultimately be a fantastic, world-class resort.

It's not only exciting being part of the creation but also a part of the operation, the management, and the running of a resort such as this for the future. I doubt anyone will get the opportunity to do this again in Ireland. This is a unique project, and the scale and level at which it has been done will not be something that will be repeated for a long time, if ever here.

In leading this effort, how critical is it to have owners that are so invested in the business?

The McManus family is fully invested in this property and the next generation of the family is keenly involved in everything that is being created here. In this case, this is a generational investment for the family. It's also very close to home for them. The owner and his family are from Limerick. This is their home turf and it's a project that's very personal and special to them. ●