

Travel Callander and Crieff hotels offer a tempting weekend break

Good reason to stay home this summer

CHRIS MARSHALL

SO illustrious a past does the Roman Camp Hotel have that the building counts former prime ministers and Peter Pan author JM Barrie among its one-time residents.

Originally built as hunting lodge in 1625, it was purchased by Viscount Esher in the late 19th century and only became a hotel after the Esher family sold the property in 1939.

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Today, visitors to this secluded hotel are greeted by an imperious looking peacock who struts across the car park. Reached via a tree-lined drive off Callander's high street, the hotel sits on the banks of the River Teith.

We arrived at the hotel on a glorious June evening and promptly checked into its impressive restaurant, which prides itself on using some of the finest local produce Perthshire has to offer.

Pre-dinner drinks are served in the drawing room which boasts a magnificent view of the river and the leaping salmon on which no doubt often end up on guests' dinner plates.

For a traditional Scottish hotel housed in a grand seventeenth century building, the restaurant's menu has a contemporary feel.

We dined from the four course set dinner menu pre-



MAINS ATTRACTION: The dining room at Knock Castle Hotel and Spa, Crieff, Perthshire

pared by chef Ian McNaught, the centrepiece of which was saddle of roe deer presented on a bed on polenta and beetroot.

A starter of gazpacho with parmesan foam was a treat, but the highlight of the meal was the dessert - a delicious coconut creme brulee and soft cheese sorbet.

After a post-dinner constitutional along the banks of the river, it was time for bed and we were lucky enough to

be staying in one of the hotel's grandest suites - the Lady Esher room.

"Biggest selling point was the restaurant's fantastic views - one of the best in Scotland"

After a restful night we were on the road again and heading

in the direction of Crieff. Formerly operated as a health spa under a different name, Knock Castle is now rather more luxurious and boasts a stunning rooftop restaurant with panoramic views of the surrounding countryside.

Once the 19th century baronial home of shipping magnate Lady MacBrayne, the hotel has recently undergone an expensive refit.

Guests know they are in for a restful time when they drive

TRAVEL FACTS

The Roman Camp Hotel, off Main Street, Callander. Tel 01877-330 003

Knock Castle Hotel and Spa, Drummond Terrace, Crieff. Tel 01764-650 088

past a sign at the hotel's entrance announcing a ban on under 18s. We were treated to the Lady Mary suite, which sits atop the hotel's central staircase and boasts commanding treetop views of Crieff and Perthshire beyond.

After a relaxing massage and some time spent in the hotel pool and steam room it was time for dinner.

Locally sourced produce included a starter of salmon and capers followed by a satisfying main course of lamb, asparagus and creamy mash.

But the biggest selling point was the restaurant's fantastic views of the surrounding hills, perhaps one of the best vistas enjoyed by any eatery in Scotland.

The night we stayed, Scotland was enjoying a mini heatwave with soaring temperatures and clear skies which allowed for enjoying the sunset.

All in all, a weekend of rest and tranquility amid some of the country's most beautiful scenery.

And with our batteries fully re-charged it was back to work on Monday morning.

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