

# DO NOT DISTURB PINE TREES, PITLOCHRY

TRAVEL

**T**HE owners of the Pine Trees at Pitlochry, Robert and Valerie Kerr, have succeeded where many others have failed: in creating a quintessentially Scottish hotel without any tartan and piped pipes, but with an air of elegance and peace that suits perfectly its tranquil location, surrounded by acres of mature trees with views to the hills. And while we all know there's nothing better than sunshine alighting on those hills, I defy anyone to feel anything but content and indulged as they while away a few soggy hours on a sofa in the bar lounge playing one of board games provided, reading a book or newspaper, or just simply watching the rain fall while attentive staff look after your every need. ■

**Wining and dining?** While the menu at the Garden Restaurant, at first look, may seem a little tame, chef Cristian Cojocaru transforms traditional dishes into an art form, both on the plate and on the palate, and makes the most of the best produce available locally and further afield in Scotland. Try the haggis tartlet, or pinwheels of goats' cheese rolled in oatmeal and set on a small dressed salad with a sweet

pepper and ginger salsa for starters. Mains include an 8oz fillet of prime beef served on pomme puree with mushrooms and red wine jus (truly delicious) and pan-fried fillet of sea bass served on a mussel and saffron risotto with poached crevette. And if you've still room, I can recommend the sticky toffee pudding served with caramel sauce and creme chantilly, and poached pear served on home-made ginger cake with orange liqueur syrup. Breakfast can be as light, or as hearty, as your appetite – the porridge was lovely on a dreich morning – and the bar offers a comprehensive range of single malts, but maybe best to wait until a little later in the day to sample those.

**Room service?** Our 'superior double' bedroom may not have been overly large, but it was perfectly formed. The huge bed was set below a small window that had one of the deepest sills I have ever seen. And, beyond the French doors was a balcony. It was a warm evening and sitting looking across the hills with a glass of wine before dinner felt like we'd found a luxurious secret hideaway. There was even a flag pole.

**Worth getting out of bed for?** There's Pitlochry itself, where the carefully restored Victorian buildings of Atholl Road offer a wide range of restaurants and specialist gift shops, not to mention the Festival Theatre on the banks of



the River Tummel, and Pitlochry Dam and Fish Ladder, which enables salmon to climb from the river past the dam and into the man-made Loch Faskally. There are two whisky distilleries – Bell's Blair Atholl and the Edradour distilleries. Further afield there are the beautiful Cluny Gardens, like a man-made jungle, and Highland Adventure Safaris, at Dull, near Aberfeldy, where operations director Andy Reed took the helm of a 4X4 and drove a group of us up into the mountains in an expedition that culminated with a dram and shortbread in a mountain bothy.

**Budget or boutique?** Pine Trees is more boutique than budget, but with an informality thanks to the superb service. Next to the beautiful setting, it is the staff who really make a stay in this hotel such a memorable experience.

**Little extras?** Gorgeous toiletries in the bathroom by The Tub turned a relaxing bath into something special. There was a flat screen, digital TV in our room, complementary tea and coffee, hot chocolate and shortbread, plus the hotel's exclusive spring water in a specially designed bottle.

**Guestbook comments?** We could not fault a friendly and attentive staff, lovely food and drink and a superbly comfortable room. Oh, maybe one thing would have made it even better: a flag for our flag pole?

JANET WATSON

*Pine Trees Hotel, Strathview Terrace, Pitlochry (01796 472 121, www.pinetreeshotel.co.uk); Highland Safaris, Aberfeldy (01887 820 071)*

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## WALK OF THE WEEK CASHEL, LOCH LOMOND

**I**N 1996 the Royal Scottish Forestry Society bought Cashel Farm on the east shore of Loch Lomond and started to transform 3,000 acres of hillside into native woodland. Today, it is a beautiful spot covered in trees from birch to hazel, oak to juniper, but not so many as to restrict views across Loch Lomond and its islands which are with you all the way. Higher up you can gaze across moorland to the popular Conic Hill above Balmaha. There are usually fewer people at Cashel, allowing you to immerse yourself in bird song and the current sight of heather bursting into purple bloom.

The high point of this walk has been named Queen's View after the Queen of the Netherlands who was brought to the spot by her ambassador after she had inspected the farm's pedigree Galloway cattle. The cattle are still around, in fields near

the car park, but the rest of the farm has been transformed into a real country idyll. It is worth popping into the forest centre at the start of the walk to pick up a very good leaflet describing this (the longest) and other walks in the woodland. ■

**DISTANCE** 4½ miles.

**HEIGHT CLIMBED** 1,000ft.

**TIME** 2 to 3 hours.

**MAP** OS Landranger 56.

**PARK** The Native Forest Centre at Cashel is two and a half miles beyond Balmaha on the B837 and has a car park (£2 charge).

**IN SUMMARY** Head past the forest centre and go straight on, up a path which joins a track and enters woodland. The track makes wide zig-zags as it heads up - ignore paths going off to both sides. Further up you can cut the walk short by following a path off to the right, indicated by a red arrow on the other side of the way. The route described, however, continues uphill, following green arrows.

Higher up a sign indicates the way down, right, along a

path but it is worth continuing to Queen's View - go up the track for about 100 yards and take a path on the left.

The path down is slightly overgrown with grasses but obvious. Look for a viewpoint over Loch Lomond on the right then, lower down, a reconstructed shieling. These structures were home to women and children during the summer when they looked after cattle on higher ground. A few yards past this go left on a clearer path. It is quite hard to go wrong from here - follow the path down to the back of the centre, ignoring a path to the right near the bottom.

**NOTE** This walk can be done in either direction but the way up is easier.

**REFRESH** The Oak Tree Inn at Balmaha is hard to beat, especially when the weather is good and you can sit outside.

**WHILE YOU ARE IN THE AREA** Views are everything in this part of Scotland so head to the bonnie banks and paddle in Loch Lomond. Boat trips are also a good idea and run from Balmaha and Balloch.

NICK DRAINEY