



GREAT ESCAPES

Lake of Menteith Hotel: Scottish waterside retreat

WHY IT'S GREAT This sprawling hotel is right on the shore of a reedy lake that's alive with birdsong from dawn to dusk, and being here made me feel like I'd stepped into the pages of Sir Walter Scott. The hotel is the former manse of the next-door priory (the ancient churchyard, with its moss-encrusted gravestones, is worth a wander). It's set in lush Perthshire countryside, on the eastern edges of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park, which means it's easy to get to from Glasgow, Edinburgh and Stirling – worth the journey if you're travelling from further afield.

Interesting fact for history buffs: the largest island in the lake is home to Inchmahome Priory, where Mary Queen of Scots was brought as a child to be kept safe after a pitched battle between English and Scottish armies in 1547. Although it's so patently Scottish, the hotel has the feel of a New England waterside inn: the owner,

Glasgow restaurateur Ian Fleming, has two other properties on the east coast of the USA.

THE FOOD BIT Views across the lake from the conservatory dining room are stunning but the food's worth concentrating on too. A main course of west coast scallops with Stornoway black pudding, celeriac and fennel was perfectly judged, as was a generous serving of gnocchi with chestnuts, mushrooms and sage. There's also plenty of game when it's in season. For afters, apple crumble with cinnamon and pecans hit the comfort-food high notes.

For whisky fans, the 'vault' (it's actually above ground but vault has a better ring) holds special bottlings of the local amber nectar, including some venerable – and very pricey – rarities and cask-strength single malts. The Port Bar is the place to enjoy a dram by the fire – and the hotel is hosting its annual Burns Night supper on 26 January, complete with Highland piper

and readings of poetry from Scotland's national bard.

ROOMS There are just 16, and it's worth paying extra for a Lake Superior room on the first floor – they have the best views over the water to the hills beyond. There are coffee and tea makers – and you know you're in Scotland when you have unbidden in-room access to Tunnock's tea cakes.

WHAT'S NEARBY Nick Nairn's Cook School (nicknairncookschool.com) is just up the road and there's limitless hiking and biking to be done in the National Park. Stirling and Doune Castles aren't far, either.

WHAT'S NOT SO GREAT The wines by the glass in the restaurant are pretty dull; best to stick with the whisky.

COST Doubles from £138 B&B (Lake Superior rooms from £240). Dinner about £37pp for three courses.

Mention **delicious.** when you book by phone to get a 15 per cent discount on the B&B rate*. lake-hotel.com

A BIG MEAL AND A WEE DRAM
The Port Bar is the place for a wintry tot or two with views of the lake – choose something from the impressive whisky vault

WORDS: SUSAN LOW. PHOTOGRAPHS: JOAN RANSLEY. *APPLIES TO STAYS TAKEN BEFORE END OF MARCH 2018