

Travel

# Enjoy a little taste of Scottish life as it used to be

The little Borders town of Peebles is the perfect place for a relaxing break, a world away from the nearby cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, reports **RICHARD ELIAS**

SCOURING the travel sections of our favourite newspapers is one way of drifting away from the rigours and stresses of our everyday lives. Perusing the specialist TV channels dedicated to pointing out the very latest must-see places is another. But there is a much simpler – and cheaper way to relax and you don't need your passport to get there. The Tontine Hotel, pictured right, is located in the heart of Peebles' town centre and is an oasis of calm where the hassles of the week vanish the moment you step through the impressive front doors. The magnificent surroundings remain true to the original building and the obviously expensive overhaul has created a luxurious but yet welcoming air. Peebles is a beautiful market town whose location in the Borders

countryside mean it has a distinct and very different feel to the nearby big cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh. Yet, despite the contrast the journey time from either conurbation is, at the most, just over an hour's drive. The Tontine prides itself on soothing even the most-troubled brow and in order to do this, its "Lazy Days" programme can be tailored to any need. Whether it be arranging a brisk and invigorating stroll through the verdant Tweed Valley countryside, which is virtually at your doorstep, when you set foot outside the hotel or working out a route for a relaxing cycle ride, the staff have the answers. Maybe a round of golf is more your idea of chilling out or what about a spot of fly fishing?



However, even if sitting in and sipping a rare single malt whilst reading the paper is more of your scene, then that too can be catered for. The small yet cosy bar located just off the main entrance hall is a favourite of both guests and locals alike. But while in Peebles, a wander down the High Street is highly recommended, even if it is just to remind you that today, in this age of huge homogenised supermarkets, it's not always so. Individually-owned shops abound in the town centre – each offering their own perspective on their specialist choice of wares. Stroll down the street on a Saturday morning and you will undoubtedly see a huge queue outside the butcher's and neighbouring bakers. People come from miles around to buy the wonderful pasties, pies, black pudding, haggis – more of which later – and cakes. The smells emanating from both stores are simply magical and present an image of a long-gone age when quality mattered and personal service was the norm. Pop into one of the many tea-rooms for a cuppa and a bit-to-eat and you will invariably

meet and probably end up chatting to the locals who are both warm and welcoming. Heading back to The Tontine, the newly-refurbished rooms offer large, well-furnished bedrooms with beautiful en-suite facilities. Take your time to relax here before getting ready for dinner which is an event to be savoured. The hotel chef prides himself on using as many locally produced goods as he can and the final results are testament to this determination. Each course seemed to exceed the previous one for taste, imagination and individuality. The wonderful haggis and black pudding – yes, you guessed it, sourced from that lovely little butcher's less than 500 yards away – was simply stunning. Saying that, everything we had at Tontine was excellent and beautifully presented. And to top it off, the staff throughout the hotel are exceptionally friendly and professional and make your stay an exceptional experience.

**THE KNOWLEDGE** The Tontine Hotel, High Street, Peebles, EH45 8AJ, 01721 720 892, or www.tontinehotel.com

++ The locals are welcoming ++



COSY: The Tontine is a great place to relax in

## arrivals

**POLE POSITION** Hotel standards just went up a gear with the opening of The Yas Hotel in Abu Dhabi. Hovering only metres above the Yas Marina Circuit, the modern hotel is in prime position for the inaugural Formula 1 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix this weekend. Impossible to miss, The Yas Hotel is made of a colour-changing gridshell of 5,016 panes of glass and offers eight restaurants, serving everything from Indian to Italian, a lounge bar with views of the race track and a spa with traditional hammam. With bespoke furnishings from MOMA and artwork festooning the 500 bedrooms and suites, not to mention the all-glass bathrooms, The Yas Hotel has the wow factor. Premier Holidays (0844 4937 542/www.premierholidays.co.uk) offers four nights' B&B from £849pp (two sharing), including return Etihad flights from Heathrow and transfers.



WINNING FORMULA: Abu Dhabi's new Yas Hotel is designed to impress

make the most of the best Christmas markets Europe has to offer? Jet2holidays.com is offering a trip to Prague's Old Town Square Christmas Market (November 28 to January 1). Fly direct from Edinburgh and find a gigantic Christmas tree brought in from the Sumava Mountains, as well as stands selling mulled wine, local sausages, Czech specialities and traditional souvenirs. This package includes three nights at the three-star Hotel St George, Prague City, a short distance from Venceslao Square and within a magnificent 18th century building that has been carefully restored. Price is £294.61 based on two sharing a double room with breakfast. Flights depart Edinburgh on December 3, returning December 6. Details: www.jet2holidays.com



PRAGUE: A winter wonderland for visitors

**AWAY DAYS IN BELFAST** Stena Line is offering away day sightseeing in Belfast from Scots travellers. The Belfast City Sightseeing Tour allows you the opportunity to get a taste of Northern Ireland's capital city by taking either a one-hour city tour, or the hop-on/hop-off tour which provides a choice of five stops throughout the day. Tour prices are from just £25 per adult and £18 per child (and includes a pick up from the ferry terminal). Or get a new perspective on Belfast from a capsule on Belfast's very own big wheel. From just £20 per adult or £15 per child, families can take a trip to the Big Wheel in the grounds of City Hall and experience spectacular views of the whole city 40metres from the ground. You can take your trip at any time of day, leaving plenty of time to shop fill you drop at Victoria Square. These fares are available until December 18 and includes travel as a foot passenger on the Stranraer to Belfast service. Details: www.stenacruise.co.uk/daytrips or visit your local travel agent.

**SCOTLAND TO BORDEAUX** Ryanair is to open a new route from Edinburgh to Bordeaux starting on March 31 next year. The service will run four times a week – Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday – leaving at 12.50, and arriving at 16.05. To mark the launch, Ryanair is releasing a million £15 fares for travel across its European network in November and December which are available for booking on www.ryanair.com

**CHRISTMAS MARKETS** As preparations begin for the festive season, why not break away from the stresses of shopping for the in-laws and

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EXPRESS

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