

TravelScotland

Safari, so good



The Atholl Palace Hotel

SAFARI – a word usually associated with hot, dusty treks across the Kenyan Masai Mara or Tanzanian Serengeti; with jungle adventurers in camouflage clothing watching a herd of elephants march across the African plains or a pride of lions stalk a helpless zebra. These are the scenes that traditionally come to mind at the prospect of a safari – a term borrowed from the east African language Swahili, meaning journey. But what would a Highland safari in the heart of Perthshire entail?

No hungry cheetahs chased their prey across the plains and the temperature was well below sub-Saharan levels. Thermal underwear replaced the khaki slacks, and the lush greens and savannah yellows of the African palate made way for rugged browns, rocky greys and snowy white. Nonetheless, our journey to heights of nearly 3,000ft in a sturdy Land Rover with a kilted ranger for a guide was most definitely worthy of the title.

The expedition culminated in spellbinding 360-degree vistas of one of Europe's last wildernesses, including the magnificent snowy peak of 3,948ft Schiehallion, followed by a hot cup of tea and a sneaky shortbread in a mountain bothy.

The concept is the brainchild of Donald and Julie Riddell of Highland Safaris in Aberfeldy. From modest beginnings 20 years ago, the couple have created a unique range of experiences to help tourists access and enjoy their beautiful central-Scotland home.

Above the entrance to the cafe at the Highland Lodge there's a quote from 19th-century Scottish-born naturalist John Muir, which reads: "The mountains are calling and I must go."

This captures perfectly the Riddells' passion for sharing the majestic landscape and abundant wildlife that surrounds them with others – be it by bike, on foot or in a 4x4.

The mountains – and lochs – really are one of Highland Perthshire's most impressive assets and, with walks aplenty for families, as well as the most experienced of climbers, must be explored.

If the mountains fail to "call you", however, then maybe the whiff of the water of life from one of the area's many distilleries will.

The Glenturret Distillery –



Lindsay Watling fails to spot a big cat but does tick off heart-stopping views, mirror-like lochs and some of the world's best whisky during a Highland safari

world-renowned for its Famous Grouse blend and smooth malts – is situated about 15 miles west of Perth at Crieff.

Alternatively, there is the Blair Athol distillery – celebrated for its contribution to the Bell's blend – or the privately-owned Edradour, both found in Pitlochry, a picturesque town located at the start of the Highland Fault.

The settlement at Baile Chloichridh, to use Pitlochry's Gaelic name, dates back to the 12th century.

The Port-Na-Craig quarter and historic Moulin Kirk are testimony to this medieval heritage, but most of the modern town, which was honoured with a visit from Queen Victoria in 1842, was constructed in the 19th century.

The stone-built Victorian buildings and period cast iron canopy which adorns one side of the main street, set against the dramatic backdrop of the 2,759ft Ben Vrackie, make for an enchanting setting.

Wandering past these attractive facades and popping in and out of the stylish boutiques and cosy coffee shops, followed by a stroll along the River Tummel up to the 1,000ft salmon ladder, it is easy to while away a day or two. Or even a night or two at the town's festival theatre, which is famous for its high turnover of plays and variety of productions.

Whether you visit Pitlochry in summer or winter, whether your passion is hill walking or sightseeing, whatever your age, the luxurious Atholl Palace Hotel is the ideal base.

Formerly the Athole Hydropathic, which opened in 1878 as a centre for healing and restoration, the modern hotel continues to promote a healthy living philosophy.

The Lavender Spa, which boasts both an indoor and outdoor pool, a Jacuzzi and a sauna, is located in the basement in the very rooms



See the sights with Highland Safaris of Aberfeldy

TRAVEL FACTS

■ Atholl Palace Hotel – visit the website www.athollpalace.com for special offers or phone 01796 472400.

■ Highland Safaris Aberfeldy – open 9am-5pm, seven days a week from March to mid-November; six days from mid-November to March. Safaris depart at various times throughout the day depending on the season. Visit the website www.highlandsafaris.net

■ Famous Grouse Experience at Glenturret Distillery – phone 01764 656565 or visit www.thefamousgrouse.com/visit-us

■ Blair Athol Distillery – phone 01796 482003 or visit www.discovering-distilleries.com/blairathol

■ Pitlochry Festival Theatre – contact the box office on 01796 484626 or visit www.pitlochry.org.uk

■ Beatrix Potter Garden at the Birnam Institute, near Dunkeld – the garden is open throughout the year from dawn until dusk. Call 01350 727674 or visit www.birnaminstitute.com



Marrying the past



PHOTOS of the very first wedding and reception to be held at the Atholl Palace have been donated to the hotel's museum. The pictures and other mementoes chronicle the marriage of Lilian Jane Duff, who was brought up in the estate's gate house, to Donald MacAlpine on July 7, 1951.

Many couples have tied the knot at the hotel over the years, but it is understood that Miss Duff, who was the step-daughter of the estate's gardener Richard Paton, was the original blushing bride. She set a trend that continues to this day. When Lilian passed away last July, aged 86, her godson Alastair McConnachie was asked to go through her personal effects.

A bit of a hoarder, she had thrown nothing away and he uncovered photographs of the estate from her childhood, as well as images of the big day. "The full wedding album is there, as well as numerous other photographs and documents such as wedding telegrams," said Mr McConnachie, whose mother – the youngest in the family – can be seen in some of the pictures, aged 13.

General manager Dougal Spaven said the hotel was "absolutely delighted" to receive such a "fascinating donation".

"We want the museum to be a living and growing reflection of the Atholl Palace's long and varied history – as a hydropathic establishment, a convalescent home for soldiers, a school and finally a hotel," he said. "The gate house where Lilian grew up is now used by honeymooners and couples as a luxury holiday home, and we like to think that she would be very pleased about that."

He urged anyone who remembers Lilian or her father to get in touch.

■ The museum is open daily from 10am to 5pm to the general public, as well as hotel guests. For more information visit www.athollpalace/museum

"excellent service and prompt attention..."

FOCUS CRAFT GROUP

Hi Sam,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and the art team at the Press and Journal for all your help over the past few years. The Focus Craft group have used your paper for many years to advertise our craft fairs and have always had the highest satisfaction with the response and the amount of customers who have seen our adverts and this year the art team were involved and gave us a very colourful version instead of our usual black and white advertisement.

Thank you once again for your excellent service and prompt attention to any requests we've had. We will be continuing to use your services hopefully for many years to come.

Norma Adams

Focus Craft Group

• telephone:
Aberdeen
01224 691827
Highland & Moray
01463 232317

• email:
leisure@ajl.co.uk

www.pressandjournal.co.uk

The Press and Journal



"The Lavender Spa is located in the very rooms where the Victorian guests enjoyed – or indeed, endured – therapies such as internal lavage, the 19th-century equivalent of colonic irrigation"

