



BORDERLINE: The Tontine Hotel in Peebles offers a wide range of activities, including a Garden Lovers' Trail which takes in Kailzie Gardens (below)

dayout

DARKEST MUNCASTER
Muncaster Castle

MUNCASTER Castle in the Lake District will be bringing a riot of unusual autumn colours to the darker nights in the form of its annual Darkest Muncaster light shows.

The historic castle will be transformed by lights, music, sound and special effects into an enchanting feast for the senses.

From October 25 the award-winning attraction in the Western Lake District will be running a number of Darkest Muncaster special themed evenings when its gates will remain open until 9pm.

Muncaster's Peter Frost Pennington says: "Most visitors don't get to see the castle and grounds after dark so they don't realise how atmospheric it can be, especially with the addition of lighting and special effects."



SHOW: Muncaster Castle

"It is a really special and magical experience and a very different feel from Muncaster during the daylight hours."

Hundreds of coloured lights transform the trees and shrubs into a mystical garden and projected shows will play across the front of the Grade I listed building.

Day or night, Muncaster is a special attraction for the all the family.

Visitors to Darkest Muncaster are advised to wrap up warm and bring a torch to explore the gardens fully. Visitors can also warm up in the café which will remain open until 8pm each evening.

The price for the evening spectacle is included in the day ticket fee.

www.muncaster.co.uk

On the trail of a lazy break

PETER RICHARDSON heads north...

YOU'D have to be borderline insane not to yearn for a few days in the Scottish Borders.

The region has it all... yet so many people speed on by in their quest for the grandeur of Edinburgh or Glasgow.

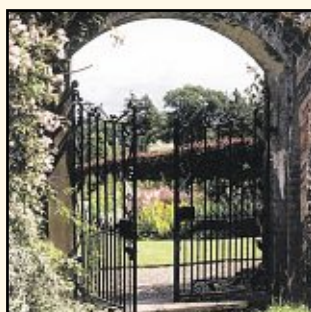
The trick is surely to opt for a berth in the borders – on the banks of the glorious Tweed amid rolling hills for preference – and if you must have a fix of the city bright lights, then take an easy drive in and use the park and ride systems.

In which case, try Peebles.

Specifically, try the Tontine Hotel, a recently refurbished 36-room high street coaching inn whose owners have made it their business to retain the graceful, old world character of a place where genteel folk from the Georgian era met to dine and dance.

checklist

For further details on Lazy Days trails – the range covers golf, mountain biking, cycling, walking, fishing, food, culture, gardens and books – call the hotel on 01721 720892, email info@tontinehotel.com or visit www.tontinehotel.com



Peebles, which counts the Chambers family of dictionary fame among its better known former citizens, became a royal burgh way back in 1367 and built its wealth on textiles until tourism came into its own.

French prisoners from the Napoleonic wars helped build the Tontine which owes its name to the manner in which it was financed. The "tontine" principle ensured that investors lost their share on death, leaving the hotel entirely in

the ownership of the last man standing.

Gordon and Kate Innes bought the place in more conventional fashion in 2001. Their refurbishment is entirely in keeping with the cobblestone courtyard which leads directly on to a shopping street of enormous character - a description which applies equally to the hotel's main restaurant whose minstrels' gallery is but one feature of a truly splendid Georgian assembly room.

The Innes have launched "Lazy Days" in partnership with the area's major attractions.

Peebles has long played host to its fair share of golfers, bikers and walkers - for obvious reasons - and the Tontine is geared up to welcome them, to the extent of having an in-house golf planner and secure storage and washing facilities for mountain bikers.

But for those of us who prefer to interpret "lazy days" rather more literally, there are more gentle pursuits on offer.

The Lazy Days Foodie Trail, for example, takes in the area's finest suppliers of food and drink. With stops along the way at Caldwell's Ice Cream in Innerleithen, the brewery at Traquair House which produces Jacobite Ale; and Cocoa Black, where you can have a go at making your own chocolates, we were sorely tempted.

But after feasting on the Tontine's rack of lamb and oven-baked seabass the previous night,

as well as a full haggis-and-all Scottish breakfast that morning, we decided in the interests of self-preservation to sample the Garden Lovers' Trail instead.

An inspired move, as we were blessed with late summer sun while walking the peaceful walled gardens of Kailzie on the Tweed just outside Peebles, followed by the botanic splendour of Dawyck a few miles away at Stobo.

We also sampled a little of the Lazy Days Book Lovers' Trail with a visit to the museum at Broughton which is dedicated to Thirty Nine Steps author John Buchan.

Back at the Tontine we had another great meal and, over a nightcap, reflected on the pleasures of an all-too-brief visit to a region which is less than three hours from Central Lancashire, and wondered why we'd left it so long since our last trip.

We won't be making that mistake again.



STYLE: A balloon back chair

Georgian influence on elegant seating sets

THESE distinctive dining chairs have been elegantly made from walnut. Known as "balloon back" chairs because of the shaped back-rest which resembles a hot air balloon, they were a common feature in Victorian houses. The seats have been recently re-upholstered with calico. The cabriole legs are both graceful and sturdy.

This set of six chairs is on sale for £995. The set is unlikely to be complete. Large Victorian families meant lots of chairs – sets of a dozen or more were not unusual.

collectables

ALLAN BLACKBURN
of GB Antiques Centre, Lancaster Leisure Park



The original set has probably been divided between inheriting children over generations. Still, it is good to see a collection of six rather than a lonely pair!

The design of balloon-backed chairs is largely attributed to George Hepplewhite, a Georgian cabinet maker and author of *The Cabinet-Maker and Upholsterer's Guide*. The wonderful guide has since given us a detailed insight in period furniture design. He had seen a similar French design and brought it to England.

Made from a variety of different woods, the finest balloon back chairs (housed in only the wealthiest homes) were made from solid rosewood. Other solid woods in-

cluded mahogany and walnut. Less expensive versions were made from beech or birch, which were stained (sometimes quite convincingly) to imitate rosewood or walnut.

By 1850 these chairs were to be found in every well dressed home with variations made for different rooms. Drawing room and bedroom chairs were usually light and decorative, whilst chairs intended for the dining room were tough and made for the long hours spent at the Victorian table.

Usually stuffed with horse hair, there is much debate about the comfort of these chairs, and with the Victorian's love of frequent and extravagant dining, meals were a lengthy affair. I certainly would not want to spend too many hours over my Victorian dinner!

Next week: Davenport Desk
Allan Blackburn is owner of GB Antiques & Furniture Centre at Lancaster Leisure Park. An antiques enthusiast for more than 20 years, he has built up an indoor centre with more than 140 dealers.