

# ONE FOR THE BUCKET LIST

*LAUREN BALLINGER SAYS NO ONE SHOULD MISS OUT ON ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL VIEWS ON THE PLANET*

## TRAVEL REPORT SCOTLAND

**V**ISITING the Scottish Highlands is something everyone should put on their bucket list.

Don't go to your grave before you get the chance to feast your eyes on some of the most beautiful scenery on the planet.

Yes, it's usually raining, no matter the time of year - but without all that water there would be no tall pine trees; no mists gently rolling through the forests; no roaring rivers and cascading fountains - and no whisky.

It's quite a drive from West Yorkshire, so on our trip to Perthshire we spend a night in a hostel on the Scottish borders before getting back on the road to Pitlochry.

We're staying at the newly refurbished Dunalastair Hotel Suites in Kinloch Rannoch, a few miles from the town.

The further north you go, the more remote it becomes, as does the chance of a fuel - and comfort - break, so if you're heading up this way I'd take any chance you can to

refresh both yourself and your vehicle!

In fact when we arrive at the hotel, the reception staff tell us of someone who ran out of fuel while they were there - meaning they had to take a 40 mile round trip in a taxi to the nearest petrol station, to fill up a jerry can.

Despite its very old looking exterior, the hotel is very modern inside. The new refurbishment work looks smart and contemporary and the rooms are painted a calming shade of grey.

The suite has its own fridge and microwave, so if you're staying a few days you can make yourself your own food - but if you feel like letting someone else do all the cooking, there's an extensive menu which includes breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea and dinner.

It would be unthinkable to visit Pitlochry without taking a tour of the Edradour Distillery. According to its website it's the smallest traditional distillery in Scotland, where whisky has been made by hand since 1825.



It's still made that way today, and on the tour you can see, smell and even taste the process and its results.

The distillery produces just a fraction of the amount the big distilleries do - but whether you're a whisky fan or not you'll be able to appreciate the care and work that goes into making every drop.

One highlight is getting to look at the barrels as they're maturing. Whisky isn't whisky until it's been aged three years and a day, but Edradour's product has been waiting far longer than that to reach the glass - one barrel, which we didn't get to see, was filled up 50 years ago.

Pitlochry itself is a bustling town with B&B upon B&B for the many walkers who visit to enjoy the stunning scenery. There are plenty of little shops piled high with Scottish souvenirs, from fridge magnets to authentic traditional Scottish dress.

Also nearby - relatively speaking for a rural location - is the House of Bruar, a high end department store stuffed full of traditional Scottish produce. I've never seen so much tartan in one place. It's almost like visiting a museum of Scottishness. There's a huge food hall with every kind of edible Scots treat you can

think of, as well as a fish and chip shop where you can pick your own lobster.

Tired out from the exertions of drinking whisky and shopping, we spent the evening enjoying dinner in the hotel restaurant, Edina's Kitchen, which offers a choice of five starters, five mains and five desserts including vegetarian options. There's a good wine selection too, and a whisky menu, which we felt would have benefited from some more local offerings.

The village of Kinloch Rannoch, where the hotel is situated, is tiny - but it's in a perfect location for exploring the local area and taking on hikes, rambling and hill walking. If you fancy an adventure there's Loch Rannoch right next to the hotel; the ancient Black Wood of Rannoch where you might be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of a red squirrel; a trip on the West Highland Railway from the century-old Rannoch station, plus deer stalking, golf, historic castles; gardens and even discovering filming locations. The hotel's website has plenty of suggestions. (<http://www.dunalastairhotel.com>)

If you're travelling by car, take the road home via Fortingall church to see the Fortingall Yew, one of the oldest living things in Europe. The



Queen's View which is a short drive from the hotel at Pitlochry

magnificent tree is in a walled off part of the churchyard, and it's quite something to touch a 9,000 year old tree.

The drive to the churchyard and beyond back into England is breathtakingly beautiful and makes up for the hours on the motorway home!

Anyone choosing to fly would need to hire a car to get around - but make sure you take the trip to Fortingall. You won't regret it.



The hotel overlooking Loch Rannoch



The Dunalastair Hotel



One of the suites



One of the hotel suite's bathrooms



