

TRAVEL



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Relaxing in royal luxury that everyone can enjoy

● By Ally McRoberts

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YOU get the impression, through her unsmiling portraits and the fact she was “not amused”, that Queen Victoria was hard to please.

So the fact she came to Kenmore for part of her honeymoon – and loved it – says a lot, while the scenery and sheer beauty of the place fills in the rest of the story.

It's a 16th-century village in Highland Perthshire, bang in the heart of Rob Roy country and located at the head of Loch Tay.

I'm not sure if it's remained a royal retreat but Victoria and Albert stayed in nearby Taymouth Castle after their marriage in 1840 and even had their own island constructed in the loch for picnics.

My motto has always been, ‘good enough for royalty, good enough for me’, although to be honest I was sold when I heard our place had a hot tub.

We were staying in Mains of Taymouth, a 120-acre country estate in Kenmore with an array of accommodation from holiday cottages to Highland lodges and contemporary mews-style houses.

Going by the guest book in our cottage, the estate is still a popular place for honeymooning couples and visitors from all over the UK and abroad.

Mains of Taymouth is officially four- and five-star luxury and there's also the stylish Courtyard restaurant, complete with a large showpiece log fire, a delicatessen/shop as well as a boating centre, riding stables and golf course on site.

It began life as a caravan and holiday park but

has, over the years, been tastefully converted into some of the most desirable holiday homes in the country.

There are 24 ‘self-catering’ properties that range in size whether you're planning a quiet break for two, a family holiday, a larger gathering of friends or relatives or even a wedding.

We were staying in The Bothy, one of seven Mains Cottages which have been converted from a 19th century farmhouse and form a courtyard.

It's in the ‘cosy’ bracket, a one-bedroom apartment, although there are properties that can take larger groups, including the five-star Farmhouse which sleeps 12 comfortably.

The Bothy had a wood-burning stove, open plan lounge with Gourmet Italian kitchen and dining area, underfloor heating, granite worktops and solid oak finishings as well as an ensuite bathroom.

At the very top of the range, you can enjoy private gardens, floor-to-ceiling glass windows, wet rooms, bedroom balconies and games rooms.

The country estate is linked by bridge to the village of Kenmore – it means ‘big head’ in Gaelic seemingly – which is a conservation area. It boasts Scotland's oldest inn and enjoys stunning views towards Ben Lawers and Glen Lyon.

It's hard to beat the scenery, the surface of the loch has that ‘mirror-image’ look that all the best brochures have, while for the more adventurous, Schiehallion, a Munro that's more than 3500 feet high, looms over the valley.

Britain's oldest tree is also nearby (a 4000-year-old yew apparently but we didn't find it).

Apart from clambering up imposing peaks, there's salmon fishing on the Tay, cycling and ca-

noeing while Mains of Taymouth has its own nine-hole golf course and stables for horse-riding.

With a pregnant wife in tow we were looking for a more laidback break and it's just perfect for woodland walks and gentle strolls in the countryside.

Aberfeldy is six miles away and the Birks of Aberfeldy, made famous by Robert Burns, is a beautiful spot to explore.

I didn't require their services – there's only so much skilled professionals can do! – but beauty treatments and pampering sessions such as massages and facials are on offer via a partnership between Bespoke Beauty and Mains of Taymouth, something my wife made use of.

And don't underestimate the powers of the hot tub, just perfect for easing the stresses of the day and forgetting about how much memory is left on the Sky Plus. Luxuriating in a bath of bubbles, with a glass full of bubbles in one hand, was a highlight appreciated by many of the visitors to the Bothy – we know, we read the visitors' comments.

Kenmore is an area becoming known as Scotland's ‘golden corridor’ and a look in various estate agents windows confirmed that property there commands a premium price.

It's obviously working for the Menzies family who own Mains of Taymouth as their first buy-to-let scheme sold out within eight weeks and their PR people say it's very successful in the holiday letting market.

It may have changed since the days of the Queen Vic but now offers the type of luxury that everyone can enjoy. A range of different packages and offers are available, go to www.taymouth.co.uk or call 01887 830226 for more information.

