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# SCENIC SPOTS FOR A MEMORABLE MINI-BREAK

by VICTORIA MASTERSON

**G**ETTING away from it all is big business in Scotland. Almost 16 million tourists a year take overnight trips here. That's great news for the thousands of venues helping promote the nation's reputation for fresh air, open spaces and unspoiled scenery.

"I always feel Scotland has that sense of being relatively untapped," says Jamie Fleming, general manager of the **Lake of Menteith Hotel** near Stirling. "It's so accessible compared to most of the UK's scenic hotspots, where you'll find yourself on clogged up roads during the tourist season."

"The diversity of what we have to offer – scenery, history, outdoor sports, good food and drink – along with the accessibility of the country, means Scotland is ideal for short breaks. You're never far away from somewhere beautiful to look at, something fun to do and something good to eat and drink."

Part of the Trossachs National Park, the Lake of Menteith is Scotland's only natural lake and is designated a 'site of special scientific interest' due to its exceptional fauna

and flora, including pink-footed geese and rare aquatic plants.

The 700-acre lake is reputed to be one of central Scotland's best fly fishing locations for rainbow and brown trout.

The hotel itself is a former 19th

Above: The Lake of Menteith is Scotland's only natural lake and is designated a 'site of special scientific interest'

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Jamie Fleming,  
Lake of Menteith Hotel (below)

century manse that has won several industry accolades since it was bought in 2005 by Jamie's father, Ian – himself a renowned hotelier and restaurateur. The former owner of The Buttery, Glasgow's oldest restaurant, has since entirely refurbished and decorated the hotel



in a waterfront New England style.

In the Scottish Borders just outside Peebles, the 99-bedroom **Macdonald Cardrona Hotel, Golf & Spa** overlooks the famous salmon-rich waters of the River Tweed and borders Glentworth, an internationally acclaimed cycling hub.

"In every direction, guests are surrounded by picturesque villages and hills steeped in ancient history," says general manager Stuart Maxwell.

The hotel's 200 acres of private grounds include a championship standard 18-hole golf course, designed by former Ryder Cup player Dave Thomas, and a 'Spa & Vital Health' centre with an 18-metre swimming pool.

**Meldrum House Country Hotel & Golf Course** in Oldmeldrum, Aberdeenshire, was named AA Scottish Hotel of the Year in the 2014 AA Hospitality Awards.

A 13th century baronial mansion on a 240-acre estate, it has 11 individually designed rooms reflecting the baronial character of the hotel's history. These feature original antique artifacts associated

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## Business travellers becoming 'business tourists'

ACCORDING to a recent study by GDS giant, Amadeus, hotels are starting to focus more on creating a home away from home for companies, allowing them to take both their business and social life with them when they travel. More and more, company travellers are looking for opportunities to add an element of leisure to their business trips. Hotels appear to be recognising this need and progressively adapting their amenities and services to fit.

Tapping into the trend of fusing business with leisure are chains such as IHG, which has recently launched a new line of health and wellness properties. IHG's EVEN properties feature rooms designed for workouts with coat racks that double as pull-up bars, luggage racks that can be used as a work-out bench, yoga mats and a circuit training guide with routines that can be done without having to leave the room.

Smarter Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are also being introduced to hotel design to allow travellers to access everything they would normally use in their home environment – eg music, video, photos and other data – in the comfort of their hotel room. As most travellers are now equipped with smartphones, laptops and/or tablets, hotels will focus not so much on providing these tools, but on delivering advanced ICT infrastructure.

An increasing number of travellers are choosing to stay in apartments, providing additional space and flexibility. Apartment options are now being integrated into client hotel programmes as companies recognise the savings they can achieve if their employees are able to share apartments for business trips instead of booking multiple hotel rooms. Apartment providers are also responding to the needs of business travellers, by providing more modern 2 bedroom 2 bathroom apartments that offer additional comfort and privacy.

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Perthshire's five-star Mains of Taymouth Country Estate & Golf Course is set in 160 acres of private land by Loch Tay

▶ with the house and the Meldrum family, powerful north-east landowners who owned properties including Fyvie Castle in Turriff, Aberdeenshire.

"We attract people from around the world." We see keen golf enthusiasts, corporate visitors from the oil and gas industry and couples enjoying a romantic break," says general manager Peter Walker. "We also offer several wedding packages, so often have couples enjoying the start of their lives together here."

The five-star **Mains of Taymouth Country Estate & Golf Course** is set in 160 acres by Loch Tay in the Perthshire conservation village of Kenmore.

Framed by mountains and bordered by the Tay Forest Park and River Tay, the estate features 42 luxury self-catering properties, including cottages and houses renovated from original 19th century farm buildings and steadings. Many of these have saunas, hot tubs, spacious gardens and private terraces as well as state-of-the-art kitchens and bathrooms.

The estate has its own award-winning golf course as well as a riding stables and trekking centre. Other activities include white water rafting, tours of the Dewar's Distillery in Aberfeldy, offroad driving and wildlife watching.

City breakers seeking a venue with a difference might prefer Edinburgh's **Old Town Chambers**, a collection of five-star serviced apartments rising from three medieval closes off the city's Royal Mile.

Standard features include double smoked French oak wooden flooring, Italian tiling, exposed stone walls and handmade furniture and furnishings. Guests can also enjoy the latest home entertainment systems and a 24-hour concierge service.

"We worked hard during the fit out

to maintain as many of the historical features as we could, while creating serviced apartments which thrill for their comfort and luxury," says Julie Grieve, chief executive of Later City, the serviced apartment specialist that operates Old Town Chambers.

"The venue itself is unique and comprises 11 buildings, some of which date back to the 15th century. These have been amalgamated into 49 five-star serviced apartments and the oldest townhouse in the Royal Mile, where you can now sleep. There's also a restaurant, a bar bistro and three offices – so it's a thriving business and leisure destination."

According to VisitScotland, UK visitors account for the lion's share of overnight trips to Scotland. "The short-break market is incredibly important, particularly as the UK market accounts for more than 80 per cent of visitors to Scotland," says **VisitScotland** chief executive Malcolm Roughhead.

VisitScotland has created an advertising campaign particularly for this 'staycation' market. Called 'Brilliant Moments', it captures some of the memorable sights, sounds and experiences you might enjoy on a Scottish short break, like looking out from the ramparts of a medieval castle, sipping whisky at a distillery or teeing off at the home of golf.

"It's about encouraging people to explore some of the amazing things all over Scotland," Roughhead says. "This could be anything from staying in a B&B on one of Scotland's incredible islands, to enjoying a weekend in a luxury city-centre hotel or simply enjoying some of its myriad jaw-dropping views.

"Visiting Scotland is on a lot of people's bucket lists – but we want them to tick it off that list as soon as possible!" ■