

Travel Be as active or restful as you like at scenic Kenmore

Step out of the rat race with a tranquil break in Perthshire

■ JANIS BLANCHARD

THERE'S no escaping the sense of calm that sweeps over you on the drive through rural Perthshire.

The journey from Edinburgh may not take any more than a couple of hours, but in that short space of time, life moves effortlessly from fast to slow mode.

Tranquillity is heralded by miles of narrow winding roads, shielded from daylight under a lacy canopy of trees, then a final bend unexpectedly opens out to breathtaking views of Loch Tay and the picturesque village of Kenmore.

We'd booked a short break at the White House, an impressive mews-style property situated within the grounds of the £8 million, Mains of Taymouth complex – a luxurious mix of self-catering and time share accommodation, purpose-built within a 120 acre site protected by Drummond Hill – a spectacular forest backdrop, rising 300 metres above loch level.

It's a great location and you'll find a heap of attractions, such as quad biking, water sports, nine-hole golf and pony trekking right on the doorstep.

But if you're less adventurous, and prefer to conserve your energy, you might want to while away a couple of hours on one of the signposted walks around the area or perhaps a visit to Castle Menzies – one of the finest examples of a 16th century fortified house and seat of the chiefs of Clan Menzies.

We eased ourselves into our new lifestyle and headed off for the short drive to nearby Fortingall at the eastern end of Glen Lyon.

Spellbinding and beautiful, this whole area is one of great importance and is known to have one of the richest concentrations of prehistoric archaeological sites in Scotland.



PEACE, MAN: The idyllic setting of Loch Tay offers visitors to a Mains of Taymouth holiday let or time share, below, unrivalled views

Walking around this conservation village it's so easy to see why visitors are captivated by it. Most are drawn to the churchyard where the ancient yew, claimed to be between 3000 and 5000 years old, continues to grow, making it the oldest living tree in Europe and perhaps as suggested by archaeologists, the focus of an Iron Age cult centre.

Highlighting an equally charming tableau of another era only yards away is a delightful row of thatched cottages, noted as one of the most important examples of the arts and crafts movement in Scotland.

We rounded off our visit with lunch at Fortingall's Hotel, sitting by a roaring, open fire, listening to the steady tick of the grandfather clock, keeping pace

with this new-found tempo of life free from schedules and deadlines.

Moving up a gear the following day, we made our way to Aberfeldy to sample just one of the many outdoor pursuits on offer.

Local firm, Active8s run quad bike treks through the hills and glens overlooking the loch using Honda "Sportrax" all terrain vehicles. Novice and experienced adult riders are welcome but as safety is of paramount concern, the party is briefed by an expert before setting off, on safety, controls and riding technique.

If you're not quite so energetic, make time to visit the Crannog Centre, an award-winning heritage attraction, where an authentic ancient dwelling



has been recreated based on excavation work carried out by underwater archaeologists.

Oakbank Crannog is just one of the 18 crannogs preserved in Loch Tay and would have housed a community around 2600 years ago. It's a fascinating place.

Back at base, we took advantage of the mild weather and spent a relaxing hour soaking in the hot tub before getting ready for dinner at the complex's Courtyard restaurant, run by South African Jake Schamrel, who holds everything together in a relaxed, friendly manner, and caters for every taste from fine dining to light bites that will satisfy just about everyone, including fussy toddlers.

After a splendid meal of the best produce the Scottish larder has to offer, we brought the evening to a close with a dram of

local malt and a promise that our next visit to this idyllic spot would be booked before we left.

The combination of contentment, country air and utter silence meant we slept like babies and didn't surface until much later than planned, but we were still on schedule for our pony trek at nearby stables.

A one-hour trek will set you back £26 but if you're really enthusiastic, why not try the half day ride with brunch included for £65.

This is a well run establishment, keen to maximise every opportunity, so if you're looking for something a little different, you might want to take part in a floodlit night riding session.

Before loading up the car and heading home, we walked over the bridge towards the village and the banks of the loch for our final fix of tranquillity.

In comparison to past generations, Kenmore may have slipped in popularity, but thanks to major investment in the area, which has created award-winning complexes like Mains of Taymouth, this charming little village is once again emerging as a holiday destination not to be missed.

Who needs the stress of hanging around airports waiting for delayed flights? Swap your passport for the keys to a holiday home set in an unrivalled location acknowledged as Scotland's "Golden Corridor". You'll be captivated.

TRAVEL FACTS

Mains of Taymouth: Holiday lets, time share, restaurant and stables.

Visit: www.taymouth.co.uk or call 01887-830226

Fortingall Hotel: Visit www.fortingallhotel.com or call 01887-830367

Castle Menzies: Visit www.menzies.org or call 01887-82092

Quad Bike Treks: Visit www.active8s.com or call 01887-830292

Crannog Centre: Visit www.crannog.co.uk or call 01887-830583



LIVING IN THE PAST: The Scottish Crannog Centre at Kenmore