

Saddle up for family fun



Michael Alexander enjoys a short break at Mains of Taymouth Country Estate in Highland Perthshire where he embarks upon a horse riding lesson and enjoys the food, accommodation and glorious weather.

Leaving aside the times I rode on the donkeys at the St Andrews Lammas Market as a child, my only other attempt at equestrian glory was 15 years ago on a once-in-a-lifetime trip through the Belize jungles of Central America.

Back then, after 10 days canoeing and camping in the wilds, my group of adventurers were led through the undergrowth on horseback to explore the ruins of Mayan temples and experience at first hand the balmy joys of tropical life.

It was a memorable experience and hopes were riding high as I made my return to the saddle on a very different adventure at the Mains of Taymouth Riding Stables at Kenmore in Highland Perthshire.

The hour-long riding session had been arranged by Mains of Taymouth Country Estate to give me and my family a flavour of the tourism activities on offer in the Kenmore area.

And a wonderful introduction it was too.

Arriving at the riding stables, sited on the edge of Kenmore near Loch Tay, we were met by the friendly riding school staff led by Christa.

As we filled in the mandatory accident avoidance liability forms, we were kitted out with helmets and taken down to the all-weather outdoor riding school area to be introduced to the ponies.

My six-year-old daughter, who had been pony trekking in Fife a couple

of times, was delighted when she discovered her Shetland Pony was called Lucy – the same name as one of her best friends at school.

My 10-year-old son made his acquaintance with a similar sized friendly pony called Angel while I was introduced to my horse, Bailey and shown how to climb aboard. So far so good.

My wife's horse, Star, seemed a bit more temperamental and as she took a few attempts to persuade it to stand at the mounting block, I thanked my own lucky stars for Bailey's steady nature.

Before long we were all safely in the saddle and being led off by our two instructors, taking in a beautiful stretch of path along the bank of the River Tay known as The

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Gallops, where we were able to admire the beautiful countryside.

Bailey proved to be an amiable companion. Only occasionally did he attempt to deviate from the path to munch on some apparently delicious fresh beech tree leaves and thankfully for my wife, Star also settled into her stride.

The temperatures weren't of Belize proportions and there certainly weren't any howler monkeys swinging from the trees above but it was a lovely sunny morning as we trekked along the river bank.

The views were stunning and the instructors explained that depending on age and experience, riders can explore tracks throughout the



Clockwise from left: a family splashing in Loch Tay; the view from the saddle; canoeing is another popular activity and the Gallops interior.
Picture above: Rob McDougall.

area. We were all smiles as the session ended.

The children, particularly the youngest, were delighted to be presented with their “I rode at Taymouth stables” rosettes and even my son, who’d never ridden before, said he’d really enjoyed it.

However, our visit to Highland Perthshire wasn’t over yet.

Making the most of the weather, our hosts at Taymouth Estate had recommended we have a go at playing Mains of Taymouth Golf Course – billed as “Perthshire’s finest nine-hole course”.

Issued with golf clubs and motorised buggies – available to hire at reception – we set out in blazing sunshine to have a go at what

turned out to be an abysmal scoring game.

That didn’t detract from the amazing setting, with the mildly undulating layout providing an excellent venue amid magnificent scenery, or the great fun that was had by all.

Mains of Taymouth offers a selection of luxury self-catering cottages, lodges and houses, all retaining the atmosphere of a country retreat.

Our accommodation for the night was Number 1, The Gallops, which offered peaceful, luxurious and very well-equipped ground floor accommodation with patio doors opening out onto a landscaped grass area.

For a longer stay, the dog-friendly

self-catering facilities would have been ideal for spending a bit of chill-out time. Our activities had given us an appetite so we took ourselves off to The Courtyard Restaurant on the estate.

It was a lovely place to enjoy a meal with a friendly atmosphere and great service – and best of all, a succulent steak cooked to perfection.

The staff couldn’t have been more accommodating, with my wife requesting veggie fajitas instead of the chicken version, while the children’s faces lit up at the prospect of a very generously proportioned pizza each followed by chocolate fudge cake and ice cream.

The Courtyard also features an outside decking area for eating and drinking which tends to get very busy

information

- A group lesson (maximum five riders) at Kenmore costs £25 per person for an hour.
- An hour ride is £35 (from age 13) or £30 (12 years and under). The minimum age to ride is four and weight restrictions apply.
- www.taymouthstables@yahoo.co.uk
- For general information about Taymouth Estate visit www.taymouth.co.uk

in good weather.

An adjoining gift shop sold a selection of high quality clothing, kitchenware, toys and cards as well as prints by local artists, plus grocery provisions.

Taymouth Estate is ideally placed for visiting the wider Highland Perthshire area, with attractions such as Schiehallion, the Scottish Crannog Centre and Fortingall, home of the famous Yew tree, nearby.

Our short break coincided with a remarkably warm spell of weather which saw many people taking to the shimmering waters of Loch Tay for a paddle or simply sitting enjoying a snack and admiring the view of the still snow-capped peaks at the Loch Tay Boathouse and Cafe.