

etc TRAVEL



Highland Perthshire Delights to be rediscovered

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IN THIS technological age there are still many things that Siri doesn't know. Among them is the best driving route to Kenmore (that "short cut" through Glen Quaich at Amulree is not good advice). Another is: "When will we have another summer like 2018?"

This year has been an incredible time to rediscover Scotland and to see it, perhaps, as others see it – as I did on a recent weekend visit to Perthshire. Safely in Kenmore (brakes aglow), I met a couple from Kuwait – well-used to searing heat – limping back to their temporary home in the Mains of Taymouth Country Estate and Golf Course, excited but exhausted after their 14-mile Rob Roy challenge. They flew to Aberdeen midweek and were due back at work on Monday. They love Scotland, it is "just beautiful". There is another group from Holland, dining at the Courtyard Brasserie and Bar, who also have nothing but praise – whisky and golf bring them back each year.

For those of us who can stumble upon these wild spaces after only a matter of minutes, it is sometimes surprising to find people from far and wide enthusing so wildly. It's a cliché, of course ... we take what we have on the doorstep for granted. But every visit reveals greater treasures and new additions, such as the Loch Tay Safari, the most recent offer from the stable of interpretive experiences provided by Highland Safaris.

The storytelling-on-the-move experience reveals that the loch is a treasure trove

of facts in every Trivial Pursuit category: geography – the huge loch lies on a faultline, a shift in which caused its distinctive "lazy s" shape; science and nature – the loch is home to one of the rarest freshwater fish, the Arctic char; history – Queen Victoria visited the area (with a view to buying Taymouth Castle) and was treated to a 15-mile rowing boat trip by a couple of wide-armed locals; arts and literature – a poem reputedly written in Robert Burns' hand can still be seen in the lochside Kenmore Hotel; entertainment – well, there is quite some detail available about how the nuns, confined to the tiny priory island on the loch for 364 days of the year, entertained themselves at the annual Fair of the Holy Women ... but it's really not for these pages. The gleaming new vessel is ship-shape and cosy – and among the highlights for young ones is the chance to feed the mythical kelpies.

The safari boathouse is a few steps from Mains of Taymouth where accommodation includes a fantastically well designed selection of four- and five-star holiday cottages, contemporary mews-style houses, holiday homes and one- and two-bedroom holiday apartments, together with a luxurious country farmhouse for 12 guests. If the loch – which sits stubbornly at around 4C even in summer – is not to your liking for a swim, there are hot tubs in many of the properties, but the luxury baths in these stylish self-catering units look big enough for a couple of laps.

Kenmore is sufficiently off the "main drag" to feel blissfully remote – the highlight of the evening's pre-dinner

Kenmore, on Loch Tay, is sufficiently off the 'main drag' to feel blissfully remote

PHOTOGRAPH: PHIL WILKINSON

entertainment is an avian aerobatic display by house martins, swallows and swifts. There is a quietly professional approach to keeping guests amused, with a nine-hole golf course, riding stables and the excellent Courtyard restaurant (the venison is worth the journey alone).

The location is perfect for a break as by day there are all manner of options. You can start with a walk along the river to Aberfeldy. Then there are Highland Safaris' white knuckle and wildlife options. These include Land Rover charters to hilltop viewpoints, gold panning, red deer feeding and "drop at the top", a bike-and-rider lift service to a summit from where miles of downhill, brakes-only tracks can be enjoyed by cyclists of all abilities (I say all abilities ... I did have to SUD, or suddenly and unexpectedly dismount, a couple of times).

And when it is time to relax, change down a gear and refuel, it is a foodie treasure trove with options including the Watermill Bookshop and Cafe and the caffeine-haven Habitat Cafe in which I, the city bumpkin, was introduced to a dirty chai (a souped up espresso shot).

Day trip options include Dunkeld with its cathedral (one of the best audio tours around), the excellent Spill The Beans cafe, artisanal smoked salmon and Loch of the Lowes nature reserve where even the most jaded teen will squeal at the sight of cutesy red squirrels scoffing peanuts up close.

There is more, of course – with whisky, hillwalking, fishing, canoeing, sailing – but something has to be kept back for another weekend. And next time I will steer clear of Siri's advice.

Travel notes

Five-star accommodation at Mains of Taymouth, Kenmore, Perthshire, from £50pppn. Check www.taymouth.co.uk. Loch Tay Safaris £30 per person. Highland Safaris, adventure and wildlife experiences from £5 (gold panning) to £170 (Land Rover charter for two). See www.highlandsafaris.net