

travel

Dram fine time in the whisky capital



FORGET the trams, come for the drams – there's something about Edinburgh that lends itself to drinking whisky.

It could be the brewery smell that wafts along Princes Street Gardens.

Or it could be the cold winter winds that whistle up some of the city's ancient and narrow passageways.

The Whiski Rooms in North Bank Street are heaven if you like a dram or two. They have a fantastic restaurant but we wanted to start in the shop next door for an organised tasting.

My wife – who prefers her booze a bit more grape-based – and I sat down to four whiskies each and a guided taste tour by the Rooms' resident expert Mark Adam Noble.

There's not a lot about whisky that Mark doesn't know, covering everything from the distilling process to packaging. And he even knows a fair few things about Scottish history and jazz – both of which seem to crop up when there's whisky at hand.

Our four whiskies, all single malts, were Glenkinchie, Glenfarclas, Highland Park and Ardbeg drunk in that order, taking us from the Lowlands, up through Speyside to the most northerly distillery before heading back south and over to the isle of Islay.

It's a tasty tour of Scotland but travel broadens the mind, even if this trip was shrinking my liver.

Mark talked us through what makes whisky taste the way it does, from the light sweetness of the Glenkinchie – also known as the Edinburgh Malt – up to the peaty warmth of the Ardbeg.

He explained how the different casks made the Scotch look, smell and taste different and he let us smell from little jars with examples of cask wood shavings and even a lump of peat, for peat's sake.

Our whisky tour was fascinating... and we were ready for food.

Thankfully, it was a 20-second walk to our table. The Whiski Rooms bar and bistro is one of the more popular places to eat in the city.

It's right next to the specialised whisky shop and serves fresh Scottish grub till late at night.

My wife said her steak was one of the best she had eaten in a restaurant – high praise indeed.

We wandered off with a whisky-induced glow ready for the best way to finish the perfect evening – a delicious cocktail in a trendy bar and a deep, sleep in the luxury of our hotel. We stayed at Tigerlily in

By Paul Bryson

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George Street, one of the most sought after boutique hotels in the capital.

It's one of the coolest 65 hotels in the world, according to the experts at Conde Nast Traveller, and is a four-star hotel with "a five-star ethos".

It's hard to argue with that, frankly.

The hotel is just a couple of minutes walk from Princes Street but far enough away from those tram works and is just a wallet-opening wander from some of the trendiest clothes stores in Scotland.

Inside, the cocktail bar with its comfy couches and open fires, is brilliant for chilling out and just a stagger from the hotel restaurant, which is always in demand.

The bar was busy on the Saturday evening we were there, and no wonder.

The cocktails are perfect and, with the temperature dropping outside, it's hard to get the motivation to move from the comfort of the soft settee beside the fire.

Tigerlily has 33 rooms, all equipped with iPod players, flat-screen TVs and king-size beds. Our room was luxurious, with fantastic views down over the city to the port of Leith.

And come morning, with a slightly dry mouth, what better way to start the day than with a full Scottish fry-up in the comfort of your room.

The capital may get a bad press due to the tram fiasco but the Whiski Rooms and Tigerlily show that it's hard to beat a great night out in Edinburgh.

Facts

■ Whiski Rooms, 4, 6 & 7 North Bank Street, Edinburgh EH1 2LP. Bar & bistro – 0131 225 7224, whisky shop – 0131 225 1532. Email: info@whiskirooms.co.uk Website: www.whiskirooms.co.uk
 ■ Tigerlily, 125 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4JN. Tel: 0131 225 5005. Fax: +44 (0)131 777 8119. Email: info@tigerlilyedinburgh.co.uk. Website: www.tigerlilyedinburgh.co.uk Rates start at £165 for a classic room to £275 for a Georgian suite.

Highland safari facts

■ There are January or February breaks on offer, including Valentines where you can enjoy a two course dinner in the spectacular Courtyard Restaurant or one free beauty treatment and free golf on the Mains of Taymouth Golf Course (weather permitting).
 ■ New for 2012 are winter activity packages, including a

door-to-slope ski service to any of the Scottish Ski centres, or try snowshoeing or building a snow fort.

■ Kenmore is always a winter wonderland – see www.winterweek.co.uk for details.

■ Enjoy 25 per cent off an alpine safari and a free Red Deer Encounter for Record readers until end of March.

So near



▲ COSY SPOT
The Maxwell



► WILDLIFE
David with deer

By David Ure

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DO you fancy the idea of wild animals roaming free around the Serengeti but the thought of a long flight and sweltering African heat is putting you off?

Well, the answer could be right on your doorstep. Armed with cameras and binoculars, my wife Kirsty and I headed to the Safari Lodge, home of Highland Safaris based at Aberfeldy in the heart of Highland Perthshire.

With more than 250,000 acres of untouched wilderness and breathtaking scenery, guide Pete, our very own Bear Grylls, gave us copious amounts of information on not only the wildlife but also the history and

heritage of the surrounding environment.

To Kirsty's disappointment, the usually kilted safari ranger opted for trousers as the two foot of snow and -2°C temperature was a bit too much.

Driving to heights of nearly 3000ft, the Land Rover eased through the snow and thick ice in our search for rare wildlife,

stop, spring from the 4WD, whip out his telescope and point out the herds of more than 100 deer roaming over the mountain tops.

With all this stunning scenery and fresh mountain air I didn't think our trip could get any better until we stopped off at the mountain bothy.

With offerings of hot chocolate, local Highland shortbread and a wee dram of whisky, this stunning setting

Highland heritage show is a match for Serengeti

including the famous grouse, the elusive mountain hare, the majestic red deer and the soaring golden eagle.

Travelling through forest and moors on private hill tracks, our eagle-eyed guide would suddenly

was the perfect place to defrost our feet in front of the log fire.

After our return to the lodge, which offers homemade lunches in front of the peat-burning stove, we were taken to Red Deer Park, where we came face-to-face with Britain's





Late deals

■ Flying from Glasgow on January 9, seven nights in Gran Canaria, staying at the four star Barcelo Margaritas on all inclusive, from £419 per person.
 ■ Flying from Glasgow on January 21,

seven nights in Tenerife, staying at the four star Luabay Tenerife on half board, from £369 per person.
 ■ Flying from Glasgow on January 23, seven nights in Gran Canaria, staying

at the three star Dunas Mirador on all inclusive from £419 per person.
 ■ For these and other deals log on to www.barrheadtravel.co.uk or call 0871 226 2673.

yet safari

News..

ITALY isn't short on beautiful cities, but Verona is one of its most sparkling. Situated in the north east of the country, it's an ancient place packed with charm, from its medieval lanes, archaeological sites and, of course, Juliet's house and balcony, named after Shakespeare's heroine.

Verona makes an ideal holiday destination, and it's a short flight from the UK.

The ancient Roman amphitheatre is stunning and has been brought back to much of its former glory.



▲ **SHAKESPEARE** Pay a visit to Juliet's house and balcony

Whereas once gladiators would have competed here, nowadays it is home to less violent pursuits, including the world famous Arena di Verona Opera Festival.

Verona's centre is stuffed with fine churches and museums, and the city's medieval past is much in evidence via its architecture.

Take a trip to the top of the octagonal bell tower Torre del Lamberti, in Piazza del Signori, which gives you panoramic views of the city.

There's no better way to get a real feel for the place than to visit the vibrant market that's held daily in the Piazza delle Erbe.

Italians are extremely sociable, and the best place to see and be seen is the Piazza Bra, with its pavement cafes.

But restaurants, cafes and bars provide excellent food and drink across the city.

If you find yourself hankering after open spaces, then the magnificent Lake Garda is for you.

Its gentle slopes are swathed in cypress trees and lemon groves.

Striking, picture postcard perfect buildings seem to hover above the lake.

Cobbled streets bustle with colour and life, yet it's easy to get up into the hills for walks or hikes.

Lake Garda is a holiday haven, and on a visit here it's only right you enjoy one of the local wines at a waterfront cafe as you take in the scenery.



◀ **TRAIL**
In search of red deer, below

largest land mammal. We were given the chance to feed these magnificent animals or, if you get intimidated by their size and boisterous nature, just throw the grass pellets at them and run.

Highland Safaris have also launched their exciting new mountain bike skills loop BikeTRAX.

Designed by Pete Laing, the respected name behind Glentworth in the Scottish Borders, it is Highland Perthshire's first purpose-built skills loop.

Covering a length of about 900 metres, BikeTRAX is free to use and can be as easy or as challenging as the rider dictates.

Featuring a warm-up skill-zone area with ramps, seesaws, drops and rock steps, riders can also tackle some of the more technical features such as The Fault Line, The Plateau and the Corrie Berm -

giving them a real taste of bang-up-to-date mountain biking thrills.

With the other activities, such as gold panning, walking safaris, 4x4 off-road driving lessons, kids' play areas, trike park and nature discovery garden, this is a place that offers everything for the whole family.

If you want to stay in this stunning part of the country, then Mains of Taymouth Country Estate is the perfect location.

Situated by the picturesque village of Kenmore at the head of Loch Tay, surrounded by breathtaking mountain scenery, this classy 160-acre country estate boasts a mix of stunning four and five-star cottages, lodges, mews houses and apartments.

We stayed in the Maxwell - a fabulous contemporary house set over two floors. The Maxwell featured underfloor heating, solid

oak furnishings, a high specification kitchen and the biggest bed I have ever slept in.

The bedroom also features a balcony and extensive floor-to-ceiling windows, which give you incredible views of the wonderful Highland scenery.

Other properties offer a variety of private gardens, hot tubs, saunas and games rooms.

Together with the stylish Courtyard restaurant, in which we had a fabulous meal, there is also a delicatessen, shop, riding stables, Loch Tay boating centre and golf course.

It is part of an area fast becoming known as Scotland's Golden Corridor. Mains of Taymouth Estate is in the heart of Scotland and is the perfect holiday destination to enjoy the very best this country has to offer.

