

  
**THE SCOTSMAN**  
SCOTLAND  SUNDAY



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*by* **ASHLEY DAVIES**

**SOMETIMES** you stay somewhere that's so perfect you find yourself talking about it to everyone who's prepared to listen. How many "hotels" (I'll explain the quote marks) have fully stocked bars at restaurant prices in their suites, and let you borrow their adorable dog for a walk?

How many have a baby grand piano in one of their suites, and huge working fireplaces in nearly every bedroom? And views of Loch Leven on one side and the Pap of Glencoe on the other?

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Glencoe House, just outside Glencoe Village, used to be part of the estate owned by Lord Strathcona, who left Scotland as Donald Alexander Smith and became a leading light in the development of Canada and its railways. He bought 48,000 acres in 1895 and commissioned Sir Robert Rowand Anderson to design the house. The estate was later cut into chunks, and the house donated in the early 20th century to the NHS, which used it as a maternity hospital. When Richard Niemeyer and Judy Pate took it over a few years ago the restoration project included scraping white hospital paint off the walls to reveal the original wood. They kept the marble staircase and designed seven luxurious suites – enough to accommodate about 22 people altogether.

## **ROOM SERVICE**

One of the many differences between this and most country house hotels is that guests are more likely to spend all their time in their own suites, rather than in communal areas. It seemed a strange notion until we entered our suite, which is more like a large, handsome apartment than a hotel room – classic aesthetics where you want them and modern facilities where you need them. A perfect balance.

Ours had two sizeable bedrooms – the larger one boasting a working fireplace – plus an office area, a vast sitting room, which included a dining area, a fireplace, top of the range TV, iPod and DVDs.

## **WINING AND DINING**

Normal folk tend to eschew hotel minibars because of the ridiculous mark-up but everything here is sold at supermarket prices. Our fridge was stuffed with Colonsay beers, a cupboard of soft drinks and a fantastically put together range of wines, as well as malt whiskies and other spirits. We selected a decent bottle of Prosecco for £12 and took it to the bathroom. Memories are made in bathrooms like this. It had two free-standing bath tubs and our bubbly was sipped as we soaked away our cares watching the pink sunset over Loch Leven. All the bathrooms are stocked with Aveda shower wash and shampoo, and Keihl's handwash and hand lotion.

After wrapping up in fluffiest white bathrobes, we prepared for supper – a five-course meal served in our own dining area by Brian and Fiona Gunn of Bayleaf Catering. Our selection – ordered a few days in advance – included a rich and flavoursome smoked mackerel;; carrot, honey and ginger soup;; salmon on tomato and pea risotto;; raspberry gazpacho with lemongrass and vodka;; a baked pear and a delicately flavoured chocolate pudding.

At first it's a bit strange having someone come into your room between each course, but there's a very relaxed atmosphere so you soon slip into the flow of things.

Glencoe House doesn't have restaurant so a lavish breakfast – included in the price – is also delivered to your room. Another treat. (There is, however, plenty of space for functions, should you wish to hold an event here.)

### **BUDGET OR BOUTIQUE?**

Most definitely boutique, but if you have four people in a suite it's only £90 each, which includes breakfast. The tariffs are the same for all suites, all year round.

### **WORTH GETTING OUT OF BED FOR**

After our morning feast we took Connor, an energetic, friendly, red and white setter, for a walk around the lush ten-acre dam area attached to the property. It's dotted with jetties and is a quite magical setting. Ongoing restoration work on the property has revealed a couple of delightful ponds too, one of which is sprinkled with lily pads. It's all incredibly pretty.

### **GUESTBOOK COMMENTS**

At Glencoe House you almost yearn for bad weather so you can make the most of every moment. I can't recommend it enough. By spring, two of the suites will have their own private garden areas with hot tubs – a tempting proposition for a small party.

Glencoe House, Glencoe, Highland, PH49 4HT (01855 811179,  
**Glencoe-house.com** (<http://www.Glencoe-house.com>),

reservations@glencoe-house.com). Suites: £360 a night. Our supper cost £40 each per night.