

# Taste of luxury at island retreat

Only seven months after opening its doors, a luxury island hotel has made it into one of the world's most renowned guides to places to eat and stay. **Shona Gossip** had to find out more

As the rolling hills came into view as the ferry made her approach into Brodick, we stood out on deck trying to guess which seafront building was to be our home for the next few days.

When we realised the cosy-looking red brick building just a stone's throw from the terminal was the Douglas Hotel, we wasted no time in hurrying in with our bags.

We were greeted with a warm welcome, and the manager himself escorted us up to our room, keeping up an easy rapport as he led us through the winding corridors.

The hotel recently un-

derwent a £7million, three-year conversion, and only reopened for business last May - much to the delight of locals, we later hear.

Each of the 21 luxury rooms has been decorated in contemporary, simple tones, but it is easy to see the amount of tender loving care that has gone into the work.

Unfortunately our room was at the back of the hotel, so we were unable to see the sea, but the views from the restaurant more than made up for it as we headed down for the first of two delicious dinners.

After enjoying some pre-dinner drinks in the bar with the locals, we were taken through to the dining



**Brodick Castle.** PICTURE COURTESY OF P. TOMKINS/VISITSCOTLAND/SCOTTISH VIEWPOINT

room where the décor was in keeping with the bedrooms - simple, but modern and homely.

The other half, who had excitedly spoken about all the seafood he was going to have on Arran before the

trip, immediately opted for the mussels for his starter. When they arrived, in a large bowl, covered in a tomato sauce with generous helpings of chorizo, I must admit I had a severe case of food envy. But then my duck salad arrived and I soon forgot about his mussels as I wolfed down the tender duck and orange slices.

Mark's mussels were followed by sea bass with fennel and black olive tapenade, while I opted for something new and went for venison sausages with mash and red cabbage.

Tempted by the mouth-watering desserts, but far too full for one each, we shared the chef's special banana bread and caramelised apples with ice cream - which was quite possibly the best pudding I have had.

After another drink in the bar, we retired to our cosy room to plan our activities in the coming days.

With an hour's pony trekking already booked for the morning, and still being quite full from the previous night, we opted for the continental breakfast selection of Arran ham, cheeses and mouthwatering fresh fruit. There was also a large cooked breakfast option for those searching for a heartier start to the day.

Leaving Brodick behind, we headed the 10 miles to the opposite side of the island to Blackwaterfoot, where we spent an hour taking in the scenery on horseback. The trek, which was a whole new experience to Mark, was over in a flash, but allowed us to see parts of the island we might have missed in the car, riding along the beach and dutifully waving to the golfers who stopped their game to allow us past.

There are seven golf courses on Arran, including a 12-hole course at Skiskane - offering plenty of options for golfers, no

matter how much time they may have on the island.

The group we were riding with were delighted to hear we were staying in the Douglas Hotel, and told us how glad the locals were to see it restored to its former glory, given its close proximity to the island's main entry point.

Arran is 19 miles long and 10 miles wide, and offers visitors a diverse range of rugged landscapes and seascapes. Determined to make the most of our short stay, we decided to drive around the island, stopping off as we pleased.

Lochranza Castle, a former 16th-century reconstruction of a late 12th-century hall house, now lies in ruins, which visitors can explore in the summer.

Even during the winter though, the castle is well worth a look - even just for a quick photograph.

Our next stop was North Sannox Glen, where we ditched the car and headed



The dining room at the Douglas Hotel



Spectacular views from the hotel



One of the spacious bedrooms at the Douglas

for the hills, enjoying a stroll through some stunning scenery, coming across several hidden waterfalls on the way.

After a few more photo stops, we returned to the island's capital, Brodick, and wandered along the seafront, stopping off in some of the independent shops.

After leaving the hotel behind for the final time, we drove to Brodick Castle, which lies on the edge of the village, tucked up in the

hills overlooking the water.

The castle itself is an imposing red brick building, and with a walled garden, hidden summer house and plenty of woodland walks on the estate, it would be easy to spend the day there.

Sadly for us though, we had a ferry to catch, so after a happy few hours at the castle, we returned to Brodick and reluctantly headed for home, promising to return in the not-too-distant future.

## Getting there

The Douglas Hotel, overlooking Brodick Bay and only a few hundred metres from the island's ferry terminal, is giving 15% off the room cost to guests booking for three nights or more, if they make their booking before January 31. Room rates start at £75 including breakfast.

The crossing takes 55 minutes and is operated by Caledonian MacBrayne who offer regular sailings from Ardrossan to Brodick seven days a week.

Call 01770 302968 or e-mail [stay@thedouglas-hotel.co.uk](mailto:stay@thedouglas-hotel.co.uk)

## High praise for the Douglas

The Douglas Hotel has made it into one of the world's most renowned guides to places to eat and stay. The latest edition of one of Scotland's top travel guides describes the hotel as "the new place to go on this or any other island".

The 2012 edition of the Michelin Guide praises the 20-bedroom hotel for

its "spacious, light-filled bedrooms decorated in a contemporary style." It also commends the hotel's "large bistro which offers classical French dishes with slight modern twists". Scotland's Best, compiled by Peter Irvine, says it "seems set to up the ante for all other hotels on the island while remaining very much

part of its affairs". The guide adds: "A high quality and complete renovation of a local eyecore ... this has raised the game in Arran immeasurably ... Best bistro food in Brodick by common consensus ... With the exceptional attention to detail in this enterprise, expect the new top-notch informal diner on the island."

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The newly-renovated Douglas Hotel