

travel

Scotland's best for fest

CELEBRATE the build-up to Christmas with a variety of events on your doorstep. Visit www.visitscotland.com/ for a list of events. You'll also find seasonal special offers on places to stay and things to see and do. Highlights include Santa's Starry Adventure at Glasgow's

Science Centre or The Singing Kettle's Christmas Fancy Dress Party. You can also see some of the most stunning locations brought to life with carols, including the marble hall at Mount Stuart on the Isle of Bute, the iconic Blair Castle in Perthshire and Castle Fraser in Aberdeenshire.

Capital break makes a perfect staycation



By Stephen Stewart

s.stewart@dailyrecord.co.uk

STAYCATIONS in Scotland are the big thing for holidaymakers.

As credit crunch aftershocks continue to wreak havoc, growing numbers of people are shunning the likes of North America and Europe to enjoy time in Scotland.

So I opted for a city break in our glorious capital. That was quite a leap of faith for a loyal west coaster – born and raised in a sweet spot between Loch Lomond and Glasgow.

Even I admit that for a short break, few places can beat Edinburgh with its historic sights, shops, restaurants and nightlife.

First stop was the historic Royal Scots Club – open to non-members – which was built in the aftermath of World War I as a tribute to the 11,162 Royal Scots killed in action.

Perched on one of Edinburgh's finest Georgian streets, the club feels far more cosy than the ubiquitous mega-hotels which seem to litter so many cities.

Staff were friendly and helpful and the building is required viewing for history and military buffs – every wall is dotted with artefacts marking the illustrious history of the famous Royal Scots regiment, one of the oldest infantry units in the British Army.

The club's food was excellent – smoked salmon, roast beef with all the trimmings and a sumptuous fruit and meringue dessert awaited me.

Someone had been busy with the polish as the dining room was immaculate, with shiny silverware and trophies detailing the regiment's triumphs.

After our meal and a relaxing coffee in the well-stocked bar, we headed back to our room, which boasted a large four-poster bed, antique furniture and an excellent view of the Georgian streetscape.

Breakfast was another feast – all made with the finest Scottish fare. It set us up for a day of sightseeing. No visit to the capital would be complete without a trip to the castle.

We visited in the aftermath of the Tattoo but there were no ungainly queues to contend with. No matter how many times you have been to the castle, it always reveals something new.

We stuck to the military theme after staying at the Royal Scots club and opted for a wander around the museum of the Royal

Scots Dragoon Guards. We admired the famed French imperial eagle standard captured from Napoleon's finest by Ensign Ewart at the battle of Waterloo.

On the way back from the castle, we stumbled across Edinburgh's Camera Obscura and World of Illusions just seconds away from the castle's front gate. I had never been to this place so I didn't know what to expect.

The venue is packed with optical illusions and the 150-year-old Camera Obscura offers a panoramic view of the city and an interesting way to learn about its history.

A fun bit of escapism – kids especially would love this place. After trooping round the sights, we were ravenous so we visited La Garrigue on Jeffrey Street.

The bistro offers excellent food. I opted to be adventurous and went for the snails and duck gizzard starter followed by the classic French dish of cassoulet – a meat and bean stew.

We rounded off our jaunt to the capital with something different – a stay in an aparthotel. The Knight Residence on Lauriston Street offers the comforts of a top hotel with the privacy of an apartment.

It was a first for me to stay in an aparthotel but I was quietly impressed. The cleanliness, comfort and facilities were simply top-class. The friendly concierge went out of his way to make us feel at home.

After a few hours there, the place felt like our own comfortable bolthole in the city.

My only criticism? That we couldn't have stayed longer.

Travel facts

● The Knight Residence, 12 Lauriston Street, Edinburgh EH3 9DJ. Tel: 0131 622 8120. Email: info@theknightresidence.co.uk Website: www.theknightresidence.co.uk

Rates start at £95 for one bedroom, £119 for two and £149 for a three-bedroom apartment.

● The Royal Scots Club, 29-31 Abercromby Place, Edinburgh EH3 6QE. Tel: 0131 556 4270. Email: reservations@royalscotclub.com www.royalscotclub.com The Club are offering a 30 per cent reduction on the best available rate for guests staying three nights or more. Book online for the offer.



MEMORIES

Lana and Eva enjoyed a cool ride, while Eva loved skating on a frozen lake, inset

By Lana Montgomery

l.montgomery@dailyrecord.co.uk

THERE are few things more invigorating than cooling off in a lake – especially when it's covered with several inches of ice and you've just been sitting in a sauna with the mercury tipping 110F

Taking the plunge into an ice-hole was one of many highlights I enjoyed during a wonderful winter holiday in Finland.

My eight-year-old daughter Eva and I visited Tampere just as that most Christmassy of all countries was gearing up for the festive season.

Tampere, which is a two-hour drive north of the capital Helsinki, is Finland's third-biggest city.

I'm assured the city, which connects two scenic lakes, is beautiful in summer. I can certainly vouch for the fact that it is stunning in winter.

We flew direct to Tampere from Edinburgh with Ryanair and, with snowflakes fluttering around us on cue, we checked into the elegant

Cool

Sokos Ilves right in the city centre. On a tour of Tampere the following day, we visited Central Square with its charming Christmas markets selling local produce and handicrafts.

We also called at the Spy Museum – the world's first museum of international espionage.

As well as reading about famous spies through history, we got the chance to try out eavesdropping devices, invisible ink, a lie detector and voice changers.

It came as no surprise when Eva passed her "secret agent" test with flying colours. She's been pulling the wool over my eyes for years.

The sun goes down quickly in Finland in winter and it was dark by the time we piled on several more layers of clothing. It was below

Childhood dreams turn to reality in Finland, and there's plenty for adults to explore, too

-20C. We set off on a bracing Nordic walk across a frozen lake.

We walked deep into the blackest of forests and after emerging, tired but exhilarated, from the wilderness, we made pancakes on a campfire and sipped hot chocolate as we warmed our frozen fingers.

We took to another frozen lake in daylight, this time skating across it under a pristine blue sky as ice crystals floated in front of our eyes and formed in our hair.

It really was magical. And just when we thought the holiday couldn't get any better, we spent an evening at Villa Amanda, 22 miles from Tampere.

The house, which offers accommodation for eight people, has a great terrace for sipping hot fruit

