

So much to explore

Heather Jones heads north of the border for a fascinating break

The first time I visited Scotland I won £100 on a bet. It was in a bar in Edinburgh and the bet was to drink a bottle of Angostura bitters (don't try this at home). I was paid in Scottish fivers which came in very useful as I was just about to start college.

Decades later I am back in Edinburgh not to revisit that bar but to begin a tour of the Scottish Borders. I am travelling as a guest of The Coach Tourism Council and Visit Scotland, and our journey begins at Edinburgh Station where we board the new £300 million Borders Railway train service from Edinburgh through Midlothian to Tweedbank, which the Queen had opened a few weeks before on the day she became Britain's longest reigning monarch.

The original 98-mile line was closed in 1969 following the Beeching Report and its reopening will enable tourists to easily explore the lesser known, southern areas of Scotland.

At Tweedbank we boarded a City Circle luxury coach, our transport for the four-day trip. Driver Stuart talked us through the route as we enjoyed the autumn scenery on our way to Bowhill House, home to one of the world's greatest private art collections. Our guide showed us works of Canaletto, Gainsborough and Reynolds along with huge tapestries, ancient French furniture and antique porcelain.

Beautiful

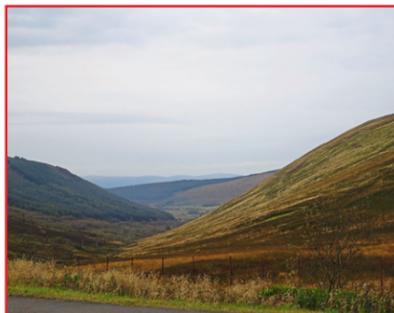
Our accommodation first night was the beautiful Peebles Hydro Hotel overlooking Tweed Valley. The hotel is undergoing a massive refurbishment and many of the rooms have already been restored. There's a spa and gym, a large restaurant with beautiful herringbone hardwood dancefloor and the restored lounge has a Gin Palace Bar with more than 35 different types to try.

Next morning we boarded the coach to visit the Royal Botanic Gardens at Dawyck, home to one of Scotland's finest tree collections including some of Britain's oldest and tallest trees. The 65-acre garden enjoys a continental climate and we enjoyed the autumn colours as we followed the trail of famous plant explorers such as David Douglas, namesake of the Douglas Fir.

After lunch and shopping at Edinburgh Woollen Mill at Langholm we headed to Cumnock to tour the historic gem Dumfries House. This house was dramatically rescued by HRH the Prince of Wales in 2007 who, under his title as the Great Steward of Scotland, headed a consortium of charities



The River Clyde at New Lanark Mill. The 1785 cotton mill was closed in 1968 but has now been restored.

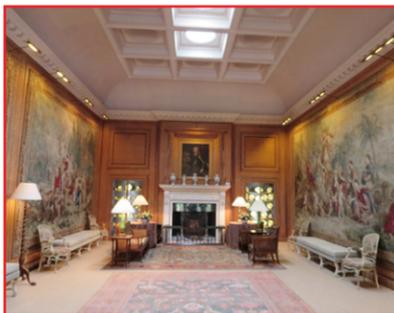


Take the ferry to the Isle of Arran to purchase and save the house, contents and land for £45 million. The house has 50 original pieces of furniture of Thomas Chippendale and you can view the famous Chippendale bookcase, the most valuable piece of furniture in the world (at an estimated £12 million).

The prince regularly visits the house, and the work of the Prince's Trust Scotland at Dumfries House to help young people was recently documented on TV by Ant and Dec in their interviews with the prince.

We then travelled onto the Ayrshire coast to Gailes Hotel, Irvine our resting place for the next two nights.

On Saturday morning the CalMac ferry took us to the Isle of Arran, described as Scotland in miniature. Look out here for golden eagles (there are six pairs on the island), red squirrels, basking sharks and seals. We toured Brodick Castle and Gardens before crossing the island on



Rescued - historic gem Dumfries House the 'string' road to Blackwaterfoot. It was then on to tour the Isle of Arran Distillery at Lochranza and taste a wee dram of malt. I had waited three days for this and wasn't disappointed. Arran's first legal distillery for more than 150 years, it produces world-class single malt made from Scottish barley and the pure water of Arran.

The final day we headed east to visit World Heritage Site New Lanark Mill. This 1785 cotton mill was the birth of social reform for workers as it was where Montgomeryshire-born social pioneer Robert Owen set up a school for pauper children who would otherwise have been sent to work. The mill was closed in 1968 but has now been restored with hotel and working museum. Don't miss it.

Soon I was back on the train home reflecting on the wonders of the Scottish Borders and looking forward to that little taste of Arran I brought home with me.

Travel facts

- Heather travelled as a guest of Visit Scotland (www.visitscotland.com) and the Coach Tourism Council (www.findacoachholiday.com)
- Local operators offering tours to Scotland include:
 - Johnsons Quality Coaches - 01564 797000, www.johnsonscocoaches.co.uk - has a seven-day holiday starting in Irvine and featuring visits to the islands of Arran, Mull, Iona and Islay. From £819pp for six nights half-board and including home pick-ups.
 - Harry Shaw - 024 7645 5544, www.harryshaw.co.uk - has a range of west coast tours starting from just £199.95 for four nights DBB and featuring Cumbrae Island and the Isle of Bute.
 - Owens of Oswestry - 01691 652126, www.travelmasterholidays.com - has a variety of Scottish tours including a five-day trip to Dunoon and the Ayrshire coast. Departing in August, from £379.
 - Other operators with tours to other parts of Scotland include Elcock Reisen of Telford, 01952 585712, www.elcockreisen.co.uk and Parrys International, 01922 414576, www.parrys-international.co.uk

Shakespeare anniversary is ideal time to visit area



The RSC will perform a varied programme

Shakespeare's England is gearing up for April 23 when the region celebrates 400 years of William Shakespeare's legacy.

It is 400 years since the death of the world famous playwright and this special anniversary year is a unique opportunity to visit his home of Stratford-upon-Avon and the surrounding area.

Shakespeare's England will celebrate his legacy with a range of exciting new exhibitions and events including a new immersive theatrical experience at the Royal Shakespeare Company; a reimagining of Shakespeare's final home, New Place, and Shakespeare's Schoolroom at King Edward VI School will open for the first time to the general public.

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust is transforming New Place, the site of Shakespeare's family home in Stratford-upon-Avon for the last 19 years of his adult life, to create a new heritage landmark where visitors can discover Shakespeare at the height of his success. The re-imagining of this unique site will be the single most significant Shakespearian project anywhere in the world to commemorate his legacy.

The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC)'s 2016 season includes productions of A Midsummer Night's Dream, Hamlet, Cymbeline, Doctor Faustus, Don Quixote and The Alchemist.

A major new exhibition, The Play's The Thing, will open in June in The Swan Theatre front of house areas. It will celebrate the magic of Shakespeare on stage and reveal the secrets and stories from 100 years of theatre-making in Stratford-upon-Avon. The Other Place is the RSC's research and development hub, and home to the company's new studio theatre, rehearsal rooms and costume store and café bar. It will reopen in April and a new discovery tour will take visitors on a journey from Page to Stage, from the first day of rehearsals to the first performance, with an opportunity to look inside the RSC's store of 30,000 costumes

For more suggestions and information on accommodation please visit <http://shakespeares-england.co.uk/shakespeare-2016>

AH361980

The Award winning



Offers affordable and comfortable Ensuite accommodation in the heart of the English Riviera



- Seasonal outdoor swimming pool (June to September)
- Pool table
- Cosy bar
- Good food
- Homely atmosphere
- Pet friendly

Special Free Night Deals ALWAYS available over the Richwood website: www.therichwood.co.uk
email: office@therichwood.org.uk

01803 293729

TOWYN NORTH WALES CARAVANS TO LET
Small, quiet family run site
★ Good rates ★ Close to sea ★ All facilities
01745 334897

AH361982

Featured on Channel 4's

FOUR IN A BED

THREE NIGHTS B&B FROM £199
ADULT
CHILDREN FROM £69
3-11 YEARS

Disneyland PARIS

Departures: Feb & March
Includes B&B, Disney Hotel, Coach Travel Channel Crossing
2 Day Park Passes
Prices based on a minimum of 2 adults sharing

PICK-UP POINTS NATIONWIDE

FOLLOW US ON [twitter](https://twitter.com/ferriscoach) TEL: 01443 844222 LIKE US ON [facebook](https://www.facebook.com/ferriscoach)
www.ferriscoachholidays.co.uk

Minfordd Caravan Park
Anglesey, North Wales



5* quiet Garden Caravan Park situated close to beaches and the quaint village of Moelfre.
Modern spacious caravans to choose from - sleeping 2-6 people.
Dog friendly and dog free vans available
Small play area

Call us on 01248 410555
www.minforddcaravanpark.com

STATIC CARAVAN



BK Contessa 35x12 2 bed
Cambrian Coast
Caravan Park. SY24 5JU

£14,995
07462 343 698

PAIGNTON
The Kingswinford

FEB & MARCH OFFERS

- 3 Nights room only £49pp
- 3 Nights B&B only £59pp
- 3 Nights B&B & 2 Course Evening Meal £84pp

FAMILY ROOMS AVAILABLE
CHILD DISCOUNTS
All rooms en suite
100 yards to beach and pier
Contractors Welcome
01803 558358
www.kingswinfordhotel.com