

Chill in the lap of luxury on Leith's floating hotel

Fingal once plied the shores of Scotland from Oban, ferrying lighthouse keepers, essential supplies and maintenance staff to remote lighthouses.

It was retired from service in 2000 and now, after a £5m, two-year refit, the luxurious floating hotel is permanently docked in the now fashionable Port of Leith housing guests in five-star surroundings.

Attention to detail is evident in all aspects. Storerooms have been replaced by 23 luxury cabins each named after a lighthouse.

The tastefully decorated ballroom, which was once the hold of the Northern Lighthouse Board ship, can host 60 people for a corporate dinner or wedding and up to 100 for an exclusive drinks reception.

It features a raised gallery for music and entertainment – a dance floor can be laid – and food and drink served on-board pays homage to the best of Scotland's world-famous larder.

Fiona Strauss, the brand director, stressed that clients can walk on and enjoy the delights of this ship which oozes class.

Tasteful design is everywhere. Lovingly prepared sycamore wood on the walls in the individually designed spacious cabins feature cushioned headboards with carefully stitched maps of Scotland featuring lighthouse locations.

Fabrics take their colours from Scotland and are sourced

locally as much as possible with small businesses reaping the benefit.

And black and white photographs by Ian Cowe, many featuring lighthouses, are featured on the internal walks.

The Skerryvore Lighthouse was renowned as being one of the most beautiful lighthouses in the world and the most lavish cabin on board is named after it. Staying there costs £1,200 a night, incidentally.

Head chef Brendan Wills features seasonal foods on the menu which does not include lunch but does feature breakfast, afternoon tea and supper.

We visited for afternoon tea in the stylish Lighthouse Bar on the top deck with a view of dockside Leith and the extensive Ocean Terminal shopping and leisure complex.

Yes, cakes and sandwiches were served and they were deliciously decadent.

Sumptuous coronation chicken, ham with a tasty twist were just two of the selection which arrived on a bulging two-storey stand.

My specially-produced lactose free package included sauerkraut with fennel, a pleasant surprise, plus delicately-prepared carrots with a delicious, tangy jus plus delicate dairy-free sandwiches including artichoke and smoked garlic.

There was also hummus and roast pepper and roast mushroom and each element was explained to me by attentive staff so I had no fear about what I was eating.

The arrival of the cake stand packed with deliciously dainty offerings had a wow factor. The selection included a rich, red prosecco jelly which had everybody in the party talking.

The fruit scones with strawberry jam (sourced from a company

in Gatehouse of Fleet) were well received.

Once again, my package was delightfully different and included tangy cherry compote and subtly, sweet shortbread and strong-tasting goosberry fruitcake. The selection was washed down with a refreshing Earl Grey tea mix which had a pleasing woody aroma.

Fingal opened in January and latest statistics indicate that around 80 per cent of visitors have been from Great Britain and 60 per cent of them from Scotland.

However, the marketing campaign has recently been extended and inquiries are coming from all over the world from people who want something different.

The ship has proved really popular with local people keen to see this unique addition to the Leith leisure scene.

Many have chilled in the spacious bar which also features a new cocktail menu featuring “vibrant” and “sophisticated” alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks with a nautical twist.

They are served with real style – my Martini arrived instantly frosted glass and it carried a real kick – by knowledgeable staff.

So, if you are looking to escape to somewhere exclusive in Leith then walk up the gangplank, savour the smell the teak wood, take the stairs covered by thick pile carpet to the bar and indulge.

For the record, the ship also has a lift and toilets to cater for disabled people. Remember, I did stress earlier that there was great attention to detail on board.

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The top suite on board Fingal in the Port of Leith. Picture by Nigel Duncan