

Flying visit to Inverness lifted by memorable meal

Our sat nav took us the long way round to the four-star Marriot Courtyard at Inverness Airport and we did find out a quicker route later, but the drive was worth it as this is a modern hotel with much to commend it.

The reception area is bright and spacious and the rooms small but comfortable. They are well-appointed and the shower area works well with toiletries I could read without my glasses, a great benefit to those who wear specs.

The bed was super comfortable and we did not detect any airport noise, however, for those who like fresh air during their slumbers, there are no windows to open.

The car park is extensive. Yes, the hotel is on a open spot which is dreich when it rains as it did in the morning we left, but this hotel delivered.

The breakfast selection was admirable. Fruit, cereals, granola even extra raisins and nuts, with soya and oat alternatives to straight milk. The cooked selection, however, was a disappointment, unhappy hash browns, indifferent sausages and bacon and unappetising scrambled egg.

Yes, I know it is difficult to keep things warm on a buffet, particularly scrambled egg, but these were tasteless and the

sausages lacked flavour as did the bacon. Better quality may assist here. The mushrooms were good, however.

It takes around 15 minutes by car or 20 minutes by bus from the hotel to the city centre in the Stagecoach Jet Service. Buses run every 30 minutes. There is a station which is a 15-minute walk to the airport with regular services (18 a day). Single fares start at £3.55.

Our reason for going was to visit the atmospheric battlefield of Culloden where the 1745 Jacobite Rising came to a bloody end and changed life in the Highlands forever, according to the official website.

Sadly, the battlefield was a major disappointment. Two sets of flags, red for the English and blue for the Scots. A cottage and some paths with information boards scattered around providing snippets about that tragic day on April 16, 1746.

We expected more, much more, from the site of the last pitched battle on British soil where, in less an one hour, around 1,300 men died, about 1,250 of them Jacobites.

We made our way back to the visitor centre disappointed and then strolled into the on-site museum. There we bumped into a man holding a musket.

He was full of information about the battle – for example, the Jacobite soldiers were on rations of three biscuits a day – and the battlefield itself and he helped lift the disappointment.

We also had coffee in the spacious, busy, café. The site is administered by The National Trust for Scotland and thousands come every year from all over the world. I wonder how many other visitors leave disappointed.

Nearby, sit the Clava Cairns, built around 4,000 years ago to house the dead and the cemetery has provided clues to the

beliefs of Bronze Age society. The significant and well-preserved site is well worth a visit and it is minutes from the battlefield.

We then ventured into the centre of Inverness. It has seen better days, en route to dinner in the Torrish restaurant in the five-star Ness Walk Hotel. This oozes class and the six-course tasting menu, created by Chef Gerard Chouet, was memorable.

We opened with gruyere then followed with Orkney scallop with delicious buttered parsnip and winter truffle velouté. The distinctive nduja and Minger ravioli followed then halibut, bouillabaisse and cavolo nero, a brilliant combination.

There is more. Succulent saddle of venison with a dash of elderberry ketchup and rich mushroom puree was perfection and the milk chocolate mousse delectable. The meal finished with a salted caramel macaron and the experience was something to savour. You could add an optional local cheese selection, but we declined.

An exceptional night in a stylish hotel on the leafy banks of the River Ness but one thing to note, it is only hotel guests who can use the hotel car park. We found on-street parking nearby.

MAIN PICTURE: The five-star Ness Walk Hotel. The other picture is Marriott Courtyard Inverness Airport. Both by ***Nigel Duncan***

