

Head to the Highland for a memorable experience

Isle of Mull hotel offers superb cuisine and wonderful service

by Alasdair Northrop

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THE Isle of Mull is just a 45-minute ferry ride away from Oban, but from the moment you step aboard the CalMac boat you're on your way to another world.

Time slows down and after a hectic week of work it is a perfect antidote to the rat race.

The island is mostly covered in single-track roads enticing you to ease the pace and take time to admire the breathtaking scenery. It's a case of "wake up and smell the heather".

In one short drive, we saw a magnificent stag, a collection of birds to warm a twitcher's heart and beautiful reflections of a majestic mountain range mirrored in a loch. Postcard idylls round every corner.

Mull also boasts one of the prettiest towns in Scotland, Tobermory, with its line of brightly coloured buildings overlooking a picturesque harbour.

But where to stay? Well, if you fancy four-poster beds, comfortable lounges, thoughtful touches in all the rooms and lots of books to read, then the Highland Cottage boutique hotel might be for you.

The décor is traditional and has the feel of being in someone's happy home rather than a hotel.

When my wife and I stayed, we were given a warm welcome by owner Dave Currie, who runs it with his wife Jo.

They have won numerous awards for their hotel, with Jo the power in the kitchen – her portrait watches over the dining room – while David acts as a very attentive host.

Both are hotel industry veterans and created Highland Cottage by combining buildings in Tobermory's Breadalbane Street. The result is a charming maze of staircases interspersed with little nooks and crannies.

The bedrooms have everything you need including flat screen TVs, DVD and CD players. Home-baked shortbread biscuits and a bowl of fruit in the room are nice touches.

Before dinner, we had aperitifs in a lounge overlooking a pretty garden and were immediately offered some tasty mushroom parcels and salmon and cucumber canapés.

As we sat down to eat, we were treated to an appetiser of cauliflower veloute, which was absolutely delicious; smooth, creamy and very, very tasty. The accompanying home made sun-dried tomato and rosemary foccacia bread was a real treat – definitely moreish.

For starters, my wife chose Croig crab cakes with mixed leaves and chilli caper sauce and did not regret it. The taste and texture were spot on while the salad was crispy and fresh.

I opted for smoked Inverlussa mussels with mango chutney which simply melted in the mouth. I had never tried smoked mussels before and can thoroughly recommend them.

The main courses were delicious and were complemented by a very nice house red – a warm and smooth Cabernet Sauvignon.

I had pan-fried Aberdeen Angus fillet with green peppercorn sauce and fresh vegetables, which were beautifully presented. The steak was cooked perfectly.

Across the table, a pan-fried fillet of lovely fresh sea bass came with sauce vierge. The only improvement would have been to have had more vegetables.

With a bit of guilt and a lot of anticipation, we decided to both have desserts. The lemon posset was delicious – smooth and creamy with just the right blend of lemon. While my crème brûlée was perhaps a little too creamy, I still had to finish it. We completed the meal with a refreshing peppermint tea.

After such a feast, we decided a walk before bed was an absolute necessity

Highland Cottage

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and we took a very pleasant stroll down to the harbour.

It was a perfect evening with barely a breath of wind and the view across the harbour was simply gorgeous.

The next morning we came down to breakfast and were treated to a good choice of breakfast options and a very decent cup of tea. We opted for fluffy scrambled eggs and a generous helping of smoked salmon – setting us up for another day enjoying Mull.

■ HOMELY FEEL: Highland Cottage's traditional décor and delicious food gives the feel of being at someone's home rather than a hotel

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