

travel

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An idyllic getaway steeped in history



▼ **CHARM** Georgian house was built in 1800

By David Jack

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JUST days before a short break at Altamount Country House Hotel in Blairgowrie, the country was basking in record temperatures.

But as we have seen recently, Scotland is as famous for its changing weather as its whisky, and the night before our departure the white stuff returned with a vengeance.

With my wife, two daughters and the dog in the car, our drive north-east from Glasgow to Perthshire was accompanied by heavy snowfall at regular intervals until the skies finally appeared to run dry on the northern outskirts of the city of Perth.

Granted, there was still a chill in the air when we made our way up the long and sweeping tree-lined driveway in the wonderfully spacious seven-acre grounds of Altamount Country House Hotel.

However, the cold outside was little more than a distant memory when we were shown into our warm, welcoming and spacious self-catering cottage – one of five in the grounds of the hotel, which each sleep up to four people.

Altamount also boasts the same number of self-catering houses, each sleeping up to eight people, and an additional 17 chalets, which are set within the woodlands of the hotel.

The cottage offered the four of us, and the dog, plenty of space, with a large sitting room, a dining kitchen with all your home comforts, two large bathrooms and bedrooms.

There is also ample parking outside every cottage and house, and the view from our patio doors took in the unique bandstand, which was being prepared for a wedding that weekend.

If time away from the kitchen tickles your fancy, guests are welcome to visit the hotel's well-stocked bar or The Peacock Restaurant, where all food served is locally sourced for both evening meals and breakfast.

Booking a table, as we did, in close proximity to the impressive log-burning fireplace, especially when it's nippy outside, is a must.

The hotel itself, a magnificent Georgian house built in 1800, offers guests a comfortable stay in any of

its 20 bedrooms. Restored in some areas, the owners have delicately and painstakingly retained all the character and charm of the house.

It is also home to the resident peacocks and hens, which are regularly seen wandering happily around the grounds.

A two-minute drive, or five-minute walk, from Altamount and you will find yourself in the heart of Blairgowrie. A little town with picturesque narrow streets and a welcoming one-way system, Blairgowrie offers visitors plenty of bars, restaurants, cafes and shops.

The countryside surrounding Altamount and Blairgowrie has plenty of outdoor activities available for adventurous types.

That's usually me, honest, but with the dog in tow it's tricky.

Those who wish to go fishing, shooting, skiing or hillwalking don't have to look far. Or you can always try 4x4 off-road driving, quad bikes or even tank driving.

If golf is your passion why not play Blairgowrie Golf Club, or venturing a little further afield St Andrews, Gleneagles and Carnoustie are all within a pleasant and do-able 30-minute drive of Altamount.

We couldn't let our break pass by without a visit to Perth. Situated just 15 miles south of Blairgowrie, Perth regained its city status this year after winning a competition to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

We particularly enjoyed a visit to the Perth Museum and Art Gallery, as well as a trip to the Black Watch Castle and Museum.

The owner and staff at Altamount go out of their way to ensure your stay is enjoyable from start to finish, and the hotel restaurant serves first-class food and is very child-friendly.

So, our vote is to return when summer arrives.

Factfile

■ David and his family stayed courtesy of Altamount Country House Hotel, Rosemount, Blairgowrie, Perthshire, PH10 6JN.
 ■ For bookings and information log on to www.altamountleisure.co.uk

By James Moncur

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A MASS exodus of adrenaline-hungry Scots will grab their wetsuits and surfboards this summer to catch a few tubes in the south-west of England.

With the launch of a fantastic new Loganair route from Glasgow airport, budding Point Breakers can be "hanging 10" on some of the UK's finest beaches within a couple of hours of leaving Scotland.

And most of them will end up in Newquay, north Cornwall, which boasts one of the most stunning and rugged coastlines in Britain.

The bustling seaside town, which looks out on to the Celtic Sea, has recently revamped its wild image faster than a Gok Wan makeover.

The local council, working in close harmony with the police, have clamped down on the boozy stag and hen parties and loutish university students who once transformed Newquay into a 24-hour nightclub.

And they've been so successful that families are once again choosing the town as a base for their summer holidays, attracted by the huge menu of activities on offer.

Newquay boasts some of the most picturesque beaches in the UK, including Fistral, which produces powerful, hollow waves and a good-sized swell, and the Watergate Bay, backed by its stunning cliffs.

There is also the National Trust-managed Crantock Beach, with the tidal River Gannel along its northern side, which is great for sheltered swimming.

And undoubtedly the best way to appreciate them and get a bit of family bonding in at the same time is by learning to surf.

There are a huge selection of superb surf schools in Newquay, and top of the pile is Errant, based next to the Trebarwith Hotel, which has built a worldwide reputation in the sport.

Max, our chief instructor, ticked all the boxes. As well as looking like a Calvin Klein model, he also indulged a slightly overweight, 40-something

▼ **PEACE** The picturesque Fistral Beach produces powerful, hollow waves

▼ **TEAM WORK** James and the kids at surf school



Learning to surf is one of many attractions which have visitors flocking to Newquay in Cornwall

journalist, and was extremely patient and gentle with a pair of highly excitable kids who were only interested in surfing through a tube "like they do on the telly".

Max's two-hour lesson flew-past and by the end we were all standing up – some people might even have called it surfing!

Balancing on a coffin-lid in a heavy swell won't be everyone's bag and there are plenty of other things to try.

The town's award-winning zoo is a must-see during any trip, and you get a lot of bang for your buck at this wonderful attraction.

Visitors can get up close and personal with more than 130 species and experience some fantastic keeper talks, as well as activity trails, face painting, children's play areas and a Chinese garden and dragon maze.

The zoo also offers private penguin and lemur feeding experiences, where visitors can be keepers for the day and get a sneak peak at what happens behind the scenes. It's worth



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