

Discover Scotland's
Ultimate Luxury
Destination

A Romantic Royal Retreat

BY JENNIFER SCHAEFER

I

It may be too late this Valentine's Day, but next year consider saying "I love you" with a getaway your sweetie will never forget—a stay at historic Inverlochy Castle Hotel, located in the rugged West Highlands of Scotland. "I never saw a lovelier or more romantic spot," Queen Victoria wrote in her diary after spending a week sketching and painting at the castle in 1873. Today's guests clearly agree—recently, Inverlochy was voted the Top Hotel in Europe 2006 by *Travel + Leisure* magazine.

Inverlochy's History

Inverlochy Castle Hotel is actually one of two Inverlochy Castles, located about two miles apart. The elder castle, built around 1270, is now a crumbling ruin. Once one of the most important castles in Scotland, it is now a popular tourist attraction.

The second Inverlochy Castle, where the hotel is located, was built between 1863 and 1866 by Sir James Scarlett, first Lord Abinger. Sir James built the castle as a country home for his family, and it remained a private residence until 1944, when it was sold to Joseph Hobbs, a Canadian entrepreneur. In 1969, Hobbs' son opened the castle to the public as a luxury hotel.

In the century-plus since Inverlochy was built, the castle's many updates and renovations (including the recent addition of six additional guest suites) have all been in keeping with its original Victorian grandeur.

Luxurious Guest Suites

Each of Inverlochy's 27 guest suites has its own unique design and character. Most are larger than the average New York City apartment, with a separate sitting room and marble bath. Antique furnishings give the suites a luxurious Old World charm, but each also boasts an array of modern amenities, including a laptop computer with Internet access, a DVD player and even a PlayStation 2 on request. All have large picture windows with postcard-worthy views of snow-covered Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in Scotland.

While all of Inverlochy's suites are ultra-romantic, the most romantic of them all is



the pink-draped Queen's Suite (also known as the Honymoon Suite), where Queen Victoria stayed during her visit to Inverloch. If this is your suite of choice, we recommend that you book early, as reservations fill quickly.

Inverloch also has two spacious, well-appointed common areas where guests often linger to sip tea or mingle—an elegant drawing room and a great hall with a striking blue frescoed ceiling and crystal chandeliers.

An Award-Winning Restaurant

Like the hotel, Inverloch Castle Restaurant has won many prestigious awards, including a Michelin Star. Chef Matthew Gray specializes in creative British cuisine, with an emphasis on locally caught fish and vegetables and herbs from the castle's kitchen garden. Recent menu items included caramelized loin of tuna with red pepper chutney; saddle of rabbit with roast prawns and a bisque-style sauce; and a carpaccio of black pudding with white truffle scrambled eggs and roasted veal sweetbreads. Guests enjoy the gourmet fare in three sumptuous dining rooms—the Red Room, the Green Room and the Library—each of which is appointed with furnishings given to Inverloch by the King of Norway.

Those who like to fish, take note: Guests are encouraged to bring their local catches to the kitchen, where Chef Gray will expertly prepare them to order.

Inverloch's Surroundings

Located among the dramatic glens, lochs and mountains of the West Highlands of Scotland, Inverloch offers one of Europe's most peaceful settings. The castle is surrounded by 500 acres of beautifully landscaped gardens, including a path to a private loch. There is plenty for guests to do on the spacious grounds, ranging from playing tennis to clay pigeon shooting to fishing in the loch.

Those who opt to leave Inverloch's grounds don't have to travel far to find a host of interesting things to see and do. Just three miles away is Fort William, a bustling town known as the Outdoor Capital of the United Kingdom. Hotel guests frequently make the short jaunt to shop on the lively high street, golf on the 18-hole course, mountain bike on forest trails or take an afternoon sail to picturesque Sea Island.

During the winter months, skiing and snowboarding on nearby Ben Nevis (fondly called "Ben" by the locals) is a popular pastime. At the foot of the mountain, the Ben Nevis Distillery and Visitor Centre offers tours of one of the oldest licensed distilleries in Scotland and samples of Scottish whiskey.

History buffs will want to check out the Commando Memorial and Museum, located seven miles from Inverloch. The memorial is an imposing 17-foot-bronze sculpture of three British World War II soldiers surveying their

training area to the west. At the museum, visitors learn about the celebrated Commando Unit of the British Army and view historic items from the war, including a bully tin, medals and a ceremonial sword.

A short, scenic drive from Inverloch is the famous Loch Ness, home of the legendary Nessie. The Original Loch Ness Monster Visitors Centre, open 365 days a year, screens a film daily that tells the history of Nessie, with footage showing what some believe to be the mysterious creature. For those who want to try catching a glimpse of Nessie for themselves, several tour companies offer cruises on the loch.

For more information about Inverloch Castle Hotel, visit www.inverlochycastlehotel.com.

More About Inverloch

GETTING THERE

Most guests from the United States fly into either Glasgow (105 miles from Inverloch) or Edinburgh (145 miles from Inverloch). Inverloch's Rolls Royce (or Jeep, if you prefer) is available to pick up guests at the airport.

SMOKE-FREE

New Scottish Parliament legislation banned smoking inside the castle as of March 26, 2006.

KID-FRIENDLY

Kids are welcome at Inverloch. Activities for kids include snooker, a boat trip on the loch, a children's high tea and a selection of videos and games. The concierge will arrange a baby monitor, crib and babysitting on request. Parents are asked to keep their kids out of the great hall and drawing room after 6 p.m.

RATES

Suites at Inverloch range from approximately \$550 US to \$1,063 US a night. Special promotions (especially during the winter months), such as two nights for the price of one, are often available on www.inverlochycastlehotel.com.

