



Day 1 (Monday)

It was an early start, coach picked us up at 7.15am from Rustons. Daryl, our driver, introduced himself to us all, but didn't know what he was letting himself in for. It wouldn't take long before he knew and it would be too late to turn back. Daryl was very informative explaining everything on the way, including how there is a shortage of workers in the hotels, especially the further out of cities you are, including ours.

Everyone looking forward to a trip to Bonny Scotland. It wasn't the usual, get on the coach, couple of coffee stops until we reached our destination. We had a comfort break, then headed to the World of James Herriot where we all went into where it all began, at his home in Thirsk. We then had time to look around Thirsk, the market and shops. For lunch, we all dispersed into Thirsk and went to Wetherspoons, local pub, cafe or for fish and chips.

Back on the coach, we headed to Moffat Woollen Mill where we had another break. There were lots of Christmas decorations, kilts, clothes, cards, pens, well everything really and it was hard not to buy lots of things.

Back on the coach we headed to our destination Loch Long Hotel, Arrochar. Daryl advised that we would reach it earlier than expected so dinner had been moved forward. The staff took our suitcases to our rooms, whilst we had mince pies and mulled wine.

We all got ready and went down for our Christmas Eve Dinner. Daryl made sure we were all ok and we had the pleasure of meeting his good lady too.

After which we were kept really entertained by Kevin, who sang the night away, whilst we danced, watched football and chatted. Kevin did survive the evening, he enjoyed it that much he didn't have a break.

After an enjoyable evening and a long day we all retired to our beds, in readiness for our next adventure.

Day 2 (Tuesday)

Despite there being fewer staff at the hotel, those we have, Naven, Albert, Alex and Mercedes are lovely and can't do enough for us. We have yet to see the chef who has managed to keep us all well fed.

Today, after breakfast, is a trip to the Kelpies and Stirling.

We got dropped off and after a five minute walk we saw what can only be described as a majestic view of two horses heads, breathtaking in fact. We were lucky enough to have a guided tour inside one of the structures where we learned, how and why they were built. There was more than just these to see and do here.

We then headed to Stirling to explore another city in Scotland, we had the opportunity to visit the castle, some people took the low road and others ran up the steps to it. Those that didn't go to the castle remained in the town, shopping, drinking and eating. It was a clean city and locals were really friendly.

We then headed back to the hotel, where we had a couple of hours to get ready for our Christmas Day theme dinner. Again there was entertainment. He was a nice man but a bit more subdued than Kevin and needed a break. He was out of breath unlike our girls dancing all night, some who were 10 years older than him. He said he was retiring but don't know if that was after his experience with us, or, it was already planned. All in all another lovely day and evening had by all.

Day 3 (Wednesday)

Rise and shine..... another early start, breakfast at 7.30am, ready to leave at 8.30am to head for Edinburgh. We all had a giggle at the chef's expense since choosing our evening meals. Tonight for those who wanted it, was the Scottish delicacy of 'traditional mice 'n tatties', obviously a typo, but it brought a bit of fun and laughter throughout the day.

Today, for the first day since being here it's pouring down but that doesn't deter the REA Lincoln folks who just march on regardless. By the time we got to Edinburgh the sun had come out.

Some of the group were dropped off at Leith where they went on the Royal Yacht Britannia. Daryl then kindly took the rest of the group on a tour of Edinburgh, pointing out different attractions before dropping off for them to do as they wished. Some went shopping, others went to the museum and others to The Whisky Experience, on the Royal Mile near Edinburgh Castle. Daryl picked the group up from Leith and dropped them in Edinburgh to finish their time there.

On the return journey to the hotel Daryl took a detour by The Kelpies to enable us to see these amazing structures lit up in the darkness.

When we got back to the hotel, we were greeted with a glass of champagne by Mercedes, which was most welcome. It was then a quick change and down for New Years Eve dinner, followed by Laura who sang the night away and saw in the New Year with us, the Scottish way. Even Chris, Brian and Alan joined in.

Day 4 (Thursday)

Everyone up for breakfast in readiness for our boat trip on Loch Lomond. It was raining but it didn't deter us and we travelled on down. By the time we got there, yet again, the weather had changed for the better and it had stopped raining. We all got safely onto the boat, we warmed up with a beverage of coffee, tea, or hot chocolate. The skipper gave us a tour of the Loch explaining the history as we went along. Near the end of the tour he explained the meaning of the song 'I'll take the high road' after which he sang it and got us to join in with the chorus.

All back on the bus we headed to a quaint village called Luss, where we stopped to look around but it started to rain so most of us found a coffee shop to have a drink and a bite to eat. We spent about an hour here before moving on to Balloch where there was a small shopping outlet. Some bought Christmas presents whilst others (Steve and Brian) decided to treat themselves to a new hat. There were three people now with this style hat and we said they looked like the men out of 'Last of the Summer Wine' which made us chuckle.

Next stop was a tour around the Glengoyne Whisky Distillery. We were split into two groups and Gordon and Bill took us around, explaining how the distillery had started, who owned it and how it had got to be as successful as it is today. At the end of the tour, we were all given a tot of whisky and shown how to taste the whisky properly, instead of just knocking it back. It gave us all a better

understanding and appreciation of what it takes to produce whisky. After our tasting session, we were let loose in their shop where people purchased goods, yes, Whisky.

We left the distillery around 4.30pm to head back to the hotel where we were given mulled wine and mince pies. It was then down for dinner at 7.00pm for another hearty three course meal. Frank was our entertainment for this evening. We presented the staff with a collection we'd had for them and they celebrated the New Year, all-be-it, a little early, with us and they gave us all a complimentary glass of champagne. There weren't so many dancers this evening as everyone was now beginning to tire from the full days we'd had. It was however, yet again another lovely evening.

Day 5 (Friday)

It's an early start for our return journey home. After breakfast at the Loch Long Hotel, we said our farewells to Naven and his team who had done a great job of looking after us all week.

Daryl, our driver, was always thinking of us, stopping the coach for us to take photos of scenery, making sure we were comfortable and safe at all times. We stopped at Gretna Green, where we could have got married or renewed our vows but on this occasion there were no takers. So, instead, we got refreshments, bits of shopping and a had a leisurely stroll around Gretna Green.

Back on the coach to head home, with another comfort break on the way.

We got back to Rustons in good time where we all said our goodbyes, after an absolutely great week.

After what can only be described as a brilliant trip from start to finish. The itinerary was full and busy. Yes, there was the odd hiccup, whether it be dinner was a bit cold one day, no toilet roll or mice for dinner (you had to be there, misspelling on menu, it should have read mince) but none of it was anything that couldn't be resolved. The hotel had just been taken over, the young staff at the hotel were wonderful and caring, nothing was too much trouble. There was entertainment every night which was lovely.

Brilliant trip!

Debbie Hoy