

Dryburgh Abbey Hotel

Martin Weir and his family enjoy a night at a prestigious country hotel

Nestling in a magnificently wooded estate on the banks of the River Tweed, Dryburgh Abbey Hotel has long caught my eye but it's only recently that I've visited with my family.

I adore the countryside of the Scottish Borders, its wildly rugged open spaces, heather-clad hills, attractive native woods, fast-flowing rivers and darkly mysterious lochs but have rarely explored them properly. And, as a freelance photographer who lives just over an hour's drive away, I thought this rather remiss so booked a night away with my wife, Elaine and our children.

I chose the Dryburgh Abbey Hotel because it was named *Dog Friendly Hotel of the Year*

by the Scottish Hotel Awards and our adorable Working Cocker Spaniel, Shula, always goes everywhere with us.

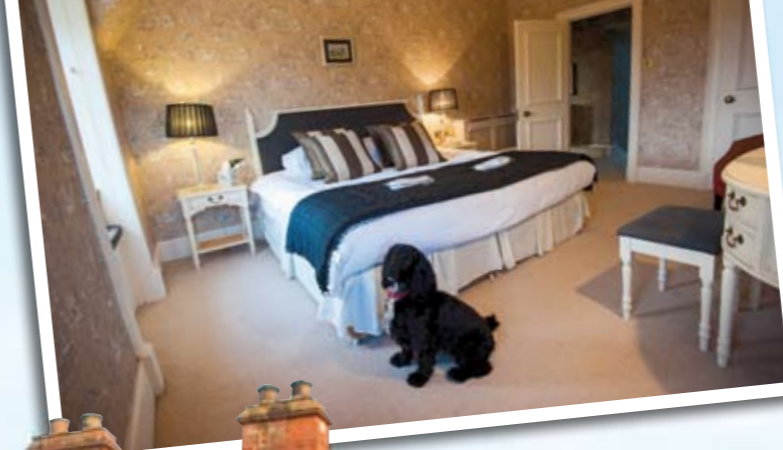
FADED GRANDEUR

A baronial country house in origin, the hotel dates back to the mid nineteenth century and I found its stylish brick façade quite imposing when we arrived.

Inside, it was much more welcoming with a brightly lit entrance hall and, beyond, a choice of reception rooms. After we'd investigated our bedroom, the Tower Suite, we headed back downstairs and relaxed beside a warming fire in the lounge. Shula sat with us and was made to feel very welcome by the staff and other guests. I was tempted by the heated indoor pool but it was so pleasant spending time with each other that we browsed the extensive dinner menu instead. The emphasis is very much on high quality, fresh, seasonal produce many of the ingredients sourced locally or grown in the kitchen garden.

Guests can eat in the à la carte Tweed Restaurant or in one of the private dining rooms (these are upstairs so enjoy amazing river views) but Shula wasn't allowed in these so

The grounds of Dryburgh Abbey Hotel



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on holiday because the hotel has such a good reputation. And our breakfast in the morning wasn't great either. Although I enjoyed a full English, Elaine and the children didn't eat all their pancakes and, since breakfast's only served upstairs, we had to leave Shula in our suite.

WET, WILD, WONDERFUL

The countryside's extremely picturesque around Melrose and the wide variety of greens in nature's palette creates a marvellous tapestry of colour. Shadowy woodland darkens the gently undulating hills while trickling streams add flashes of light when the sun appears. The landscape's littered with castles, abbeys and houses, all with a fascinating past and many of the market towns, isolated hamlets and charming villages are well worth a visit.

Although it's now a crumbling ruin, the most obvious attraction is the abbey. It was established in 1150 by the Premonstratensians but was partially destroyed by fire, war, and the dissolution of the monasteries. Despite these traumas, the cloister and its chapter house are surprisingly complete and the remains of the Warming House, Novices' Day Room and Gatehouse are still visible. Of the church, only part of the North Transept gives any sense of the original structure and this is where you'll find



the chapel in which the writer Sir Walter Scott is buried.

One can sense why the monks built within this loop of the River Tweed, because the abbey's surrounded on three sides by water and feels extremely secluded – you can really sense what a life of contemplation would've been like centuries ago.

The hotel boasts 38 ensuite bedrooms and I imagine that the majority enjoy views across the grounds, abbey or river. The Standard Room is the most basic but other more expensive options are available including an Abbey Room, a Superior Room, a Delux Room and the Tower Suite. We were lucky enough to be in the Tower Suite which overlooked the abbey. It was well-appointed and spacious and had all the mod cons including a remote control TV, direct dial telephone, radio, complimentary beverage trays and, in the bathroom, a tempting

range of Gilchrist and Soames products. The bathroom was large, spacious and clean, with old fashioned fixtures and fittings that suited the period.

LOVING THE COUNTRY

We only stayed one night so didn't have much time to experience all the activities available, but did enjoy walking Shula around the grounds. The next morning, the staff helped us choose a suitable route that included some of the local highlights and we spent a pleasant few hours investigating the village of St Boswells, the Temple of the Muses and the statue of William Wallace. And the hotel was extremely dog-friendly so we weren't worried about getting muddy while we were out.

The hotel is popular with lovers of country sports especially anglers – apparently the Tweed has the longest salmon season in the country and more fish are caught in its waters than from any other river in Britain. The

dramatic natural environment of the Borders also provides some of the finest grouse, pheasant and partridge shooting in Scotland.

If that's not your scene, you can try clay pigeon shooting at Braidwood, place a bet on the races at Kelso or explore the bridleways on horseback. You can play golf on one of several courses, canoe along the River Tweed or simply cycle along miles of local trails.

The hotel offers a range of special packages, including one based around rugby. The sport of seven-a-side was invented in Melrose in 1883 and there's a world-renowned event in April.

We really enjoyed our stay and appreciated how dog-friendly it was. The staff members made us all welcome and the chef even asked Shula if she'd sample some of his homemade dog biscuits which he was adding to the menu as a treat. I can completely understand how it won Scottish Hotel's *Dog Friendly Award* last year.



FACT FILE

PRICE A one-night stay with bed & breakfast costs between £140 and £320, depending on the standard of suite, with a dog costing an extra £7.
SUITS A romantic couple and their dog
CONTACT Tel 01835 822 261 or visit www.dryburgh.co.uk

we ate downstairs in The Abbey Bistro. The Tweed Restaurant's extremely elegant with large bay windows, impressive high ceilings and decorative period features but we found the bistro more intimate and enjoyed eating there as a family.

Our dinner was a little disappointing and I did wonder whether the regular chef was

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