

Inside the Highland hideout where rebels once roamed

Once a haven for fleeing outlaws, Kinloch Rannoch now shelters stylish travellers thanks to Dunalastair Hotel's chic refurb. **Mhairi Mann** becomes the first journalist to stay there

Kinloch Rannoch has long been a place of refuge. During the 16th and 17th centuries, clans and cattle rustlers would hide out in its wild glens and bens; after

his defeat at Culloiden, Bonnie Prince Charlie passed among its heathered crags. Then in spring 2026, it became a hideout for me, as I became the first journalist to stay at Dunalastair Hotel Suites after an extensive multimillion-pound refurb.

My escape began with a two-and-a-half-hour drive north from Glasgow, but it was the final 30 minutes that pulled me under the region's spell. Squeezing onto a narrow road we skirted along Loch Tummel, with the summit of Schiehallion soaring across the water, glowering above the glen. Dropping down past the CornerStone, a community-owned bar and restaurant at the edge of Kinloch Rannoch village, we arrived at our destination, Dunalastair Hotel Suites.

Occupying a turreted stone lodge, the hotel was rescued from administration by the team behind the neighbouring Loch Rannoch Hotel, Estate and Spa. Smart interiors unfold in cool and glossy grey tones, while Highland wildlife looms large: mounted stag heads, stuffed foxes and birds accent each space. Framed on one wall is the costume worn by Liam Neeson in *Rob Roy* (1995), which was filmed a claymore toss from the hotel on Rannoch Moor.

New are the Tippy Stag bar and lounge and the Macnab restaurant, which takes its name from the Macnab Challenge: to catch a salmon, a stag and a brace of grouse in a day. The menu is anchored by locally caught game, fish and foraged vegetables, served in the freshly outfitted dining room that opens onto a courtyard.

I was here with my husband and two small children, in a plush family suite that had a separate living area with a sofa bed and handy kitchenette. But there was no time to hang about bouncing on beds while the great outdoors beckoned. Forget the Macnab Challenge: the real test when you're staying in a hotel is trying to match the energy of a five-year-old boy. We necked the welcome refresher of Perthshire raspberry lemonade and headed for the hills.

We hired bikes (£25pp for four hours or £40 for ebikes; children £10pp) at the hotel's marina, a hub offering indoor courts, a climbing wall, paddleboarding and kayaking (from £20pp), then trundled along woodland tracks through a foreverness of rolling green countryside. Visiting in spring meant that birdsong was a continuous companion, whether meandering along the River Tummel or pausing at the neighbouring Allt Mor waterfall.



Clockwise from top: Dunalastair Hotel Suites; the rooms are stag-hunt-chic; the hillside above Kinloch Rannoch

Sheep dotted the fields, Munros jagged against the skyline; had I not been tethered to a two-year-old, I would have scrambled up Craig Varr, a steep craggy bluff promising sweeping views from the top.

Instead we followed the Clan Trail, stopping with the kids at storyboards scattered around the loch that traced centuries of Jacobite risings and rebellious clans. Standing by the tranquil water, it was hard to imagine this serene stretch was once a boiling pot of history. Later, we took the 30-minute drive out to the Rannoch Moor Visitor Centre at remote

Rannoch station, where the kids pressed their faces against the glass of the quiet outpost, hoping to catch a glimpse of the Jacobite Steam Train.

Back in Kinloch Rannoch, we took advantage of our guest privileges to use the swimming pool at the neighbouring Loch Rannoch Hotel, Estate and Spa. The hotel felt delightfully reminiscent of places from my own childhood, complete with Walker's shortbread-esque tartan carpets and shelves stacked high with board games, which we played over plates of piping-hot venison chilli and haggis croquettes.

Weeks after our visit, Loch Rannoch still lingers in my mind: its mewling buzzards, wildflower fields, and that zesty raspberry lemonade. Memories of wet-haired children playing skittles in the games room and counting sheep through the window, sunsets overlooking the loch and pine trees that bristle with history. Tillidh sinn, as they say — we'll be back.

Mhairi Mann was a guest of Dunalastair Hotel Suites; dunalastairhotelsuites.com. B&B doubles from £199, B&B doubles at the Loch Rannoch Hotel, Estate and Spa from £159

West on the Green, Glasgow

"Glaswegian heart, German head" is the tagline at this Bavarian beer hall in the historic Templeton building, which has a cracking beer garden looking over Glasgow Green. Beers are still brewed on site in accordance with German purity laws. There is a great draught selection with ten unique lagers and ales on tap. westbeer.com

Salisbury Arms, Edinburgh

Best view of Arthur's Seat? Hard to argue with the beer garden at the Salisbury Arms in Newington — especially if you're kicking back on the outdoor sofas with a watermelon fizz spritz or one of the five beers on draught. Open until 11pm, the garden has lounge-style and upright seating, kept cosy by outdoor heating. thesalisburyarmsedinburgh.co.uk

Ben Nevis Inn, Fort William

Its beer garden may be minimalist, with only a couple of benches outside the 200-year-old barn, but this makes any top five on views alone. Hunkered at the foot of the UK's tallest mountain, it has stupendous views down one of Scotland's most dramatic glens. Menu highlights include three locally brewed Hanging Tree cask ales. ben-nevis-inn.co.uk

The Taybank, Dunkeld

Take one boutique hotel on the Tay's banks, add a can-do new owner with a background in events, and what you get is perhaps the single best beer garden in Scotland. South-facing, gazing upriver to Thomas Telford's magnificent arched bridge, the Taybank garden comes alive at night, with fairy lights, fire pits and lanterns. thetaybank.co.uk

Karma Lake of Menteith

You'll have to download the Karma hotel group app before they'll even serve you, but blimey, what rewards. Dipping a toe in the lake, the beautiful lawn looks across the water to Inchmahome Priory, with only the occasional trout fishing boat or diving osprey to disturb your pint. There's a sauna at one end of the lawn. karmagroup.com



Test your building skills at the new Lego Masters academy in Billund, a hands-on workshop that isn't just for kids

Old dog, new bricks: Denmark's home of Lego is great for all ages

From building classes to robotic chefs, **Mike MacEacheran** and family go block-mad in Billund

Come on, Granny, even a six-year-old could do that!" It wasn't the nicest thing I've said to my 80-year-old mum, but hear me out. We were

sat around a table strewn with building blocks at the new Lego Masters academy, a hands-on workshop for all age groups in Billund, Denmark, the birthplace of the little bricks. Mum's screwed-up face told me this was another thing she couldn't handle. Just like smartphones, digital banking and stubborn jam jars.

The vibe was television studio-like, with booming electro music, spotlight wizardry and a high-energy audience. "Everything really is awesome!" boomed our brick-building guide — or "play agent", as they say in Legoland — during a 75-minute session where we learnt building techniques, created a custom character and doubled down in Lego's own world while savouring quality, screen-free family time. My kids, aged six and nine, were loving it. Frankly, despite her best attempts, my poor old mum was all fingers and thumbs.

It had seemed such a good idea at the time. The plan was a long weekend of Lego time, taking advantage of new flights from Edinburgh to Billund with Norwegian airlines, which stepped in after Ryanair cut its route last year. After a series of family holidays at home, the thrill of Lego dinosaurs, Lego ninjas, Lego dragons, a Lego museum and a Lego school (rather than actual school) seemed the perfect fit for all of us. Most toy companies don't have Ed Sheeran, Daniel Radcliffe, Brad Pitt and Spider-Man (well, Tom Holland) as hardcore fans — but Lego is not most toy companies. Settling in at our accommodation — a pretty-as-pie cabin at the



Enjoy the Flying Eagle coaster, and the Lego Statue of Liberty in Miniland, below

Lalandia holiday resort next to Legoland — involved a swim at Scandinavia's largest water park then a ride on the train shuttle around the grounds. The kids were barely able to keep a lid on their excitement. Sing-song accents and beaming families flashing perfect teeth reminded us that we weren't at any old Center Parcs.

It was a similar story of squeals the next day at Legoland. Mum joined in too. At her top speed we toddled between the blockbuster 3D Ninjago ride, the block-tastic jungle log flume and, new this year, the block-rocking Minifigure Speedway, a dualling Grand-Prix themed coaster. For dinner: chunky chips shaped like rectangular Lego bricks.

Legoland doesn't really go in for the overly sentimental stuff of Disney — the emphasis is always on education through play — and that feeling really grabbed us at Lego House the next day. Essentially a monumental tribute to the construction toy, it is a riot of interactive games and play zones featuring an astounding 25 million bricks. Want to design a mini figure and animate it, or create a digital Lego fish? We were in fits of giggles when creating our punk-rocker sugar fairies, zombie pirate captains and

laser-firing sharks. Want to shoot action scenes from your own Lego movie? We did that too.

If your family is anything like mine, they'll love it all, especially the Duplo rainbow waterfall, rooftop playgrounds and stacks of the world's most impressive Lego models, including a 50ft centrepiece oak tree. My mum and kids stood agog, looking as though their eyes might pop at any moment.



Even the food is worth raving about. Our Korean chicken, miso trout, oven-baked salmon and hot dogs appeared in brick-shaped bento boxes from the kitchen along a plastic tube and conveyor belt lorded over by robotic Lego chefs. The idea might have stepped out of *WALL-E*. Taking an octogenarian

to Legoland to play with toys for the overly sentimental stuff of Disney — the emphasis is always on education through play — and that feeling really grabbed us at Lego House the next day. Essentially a monumental tribute to the construction toy, it is a riot of interactive games and play zones featuring an astounding 25 million bricks. Want to design a mini figure and animate it, or create a digital Lego fish? We were in fits of giggles when creating our punk-rocker sugar fairies, zombie pirate captains and



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