

Local couples enjoy Scottish castle digs

By Betsy Taylor
special writer

When we invited Lori and Roger Spry from Birmingham and Joan and Dale Stevens from Orchard Lake to join us on a recent trip to Scotland, both couples had the same provision. We must spend one night in a castle!

We found several possibilities, but they were either booked or closed for the season. An alternative solution was to settle for Shieldhill Hotel in Lanarkshire. Located in the Clyde Valley, this Norman keep (translation: small castle) was built in 1189 and remained in the Chancellor family until 1959.

The succession of innkeepers who followed did little to enhance the building and, according to Jack Greenwald, who purchased the hotel in 1987 with partner Christine Dunstan, the building was a disaster. The new owners closed the hotel for a year and devoted their energy and talent to a miraculous facelift.

When we arrived late in the day at Shieldhill, we were miserably wet and cold. It had rained for days and the rivers, now swollen, had overflowed, causing some local roads to be closed. To top it off, we found the road signs from the village of Biggar

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to Shieldhill to be slightly off the mark. And, to compound our woes, the hotel had lost its electricity!

Our congenial innkeeper, Jack Greenwald, lifted our spirits with a candlelight tour of this marvelous nine-bedroom facility, telling tales of historic note, and giving a detailed explanation of the hotel's renovation. We were sorry his partner, who looks lovely in photographs, was in America (tending to the couple's other enterprise, the Cheshire Cat, a bed & breakfast created from two adjoining Victorian houses in Santa Barbara, Calif.).

The couple's creativity is seen in Shieldhill as well. Each bedroom is beautifully appointed and decorated, in coordinating Laura Ashley fabrics. The room names are taken from famous Scottish battles like Culloden, Glencoe and Bannockburn. Our room was cosy with a pair of

window seats overlooking the gardens. In the falling light we could just make out the expensive lawns and the woodlands beyond.

The owners had spared no expense in the overhaul, spending close to 400,000 pounds on the project. The result is stunning! Wide hallways and stairs are covered with carpet made for the hotel with the Chancellor family crest. The halls lead to a mahogany-paneled lounge with a huge fireplace, a cosy bar and a spacious dining room.

After tea and time to rest, we joined the other guests in the lounge for cocktails. The only Americans present, we were joined by several Europeans as well as a May-December couple from nearby Edinburgh. Dinner reservations were made automatically for us, and due to the remote location, it was easy to see why everyone stays in for dinner.

The dining room serves from 7 to



From left, Roger Spry, Betsy Taylor, Lori Spry and Joan Stevens of Orchard Lake stand outside Blair Castle in Scotland.

9:30 p.m. and was set this particular evening with pale pink linens and beautifully fresh flowers. The prices were reasonable, the menu varied and prepared by a world-class chef. Local girls with shining faces and Laura Ashley country-style dresses gave us excellent service as we ate a memorable meal. Our spirits rose even higher with the return of electricity while we drank our coffee.

The next morning we rose re-

freshened and ready for our early departure for Glasgow, 31 miles from Shieldhill. Even the Sprys, who had slept in the bedroom of the Lady in Grey, had no complaints.

Every castle must have a ghost and Shieldhill is no exception. Locals report the lady walks the property, looking for the grave of her infant child, but maybe she, too, was glad to be in out of the rain!

We were sorry to forego break-

fast, but Jack gave us coffee, fruit, and scones before our fast getaway for the airport. But we'll be back. The Shieldhill Hotel is a place to savor, to enjoy and to repeat.

For reservations, write Shieldhill Hotel, Quothburgh, Biggar, Lanarkshire ML12 6NA Scotland or telephone (011) 44 899 20035.

Betsy Taylor is a resident of Birmingham.

travel notes

SHANTY CREEK-SCHUSS

Shanty Creek-Schuss Mountain Resort in Bellaire offers a Spring Recreation Spree through May 31. The cost is \$57 per person, double occupancy and includes one night's lodging, breakfast and a choice of dinner or 18 holes of golf on The Desklin.

Other amenities include a health club, bicycle rental, tennis court, day care and welcome gift.

MORELS & MORE

The Spring Hills Resort in Walloon Lake, Mich. offers weekends of hunting for morel mushrooms through May 19. Larry Lonik, author of "Curious Morel" will share his 30 years of experience in the hunting, studying and cooking of the morel.

The weekend costs \$139 per person, including two-night accommodation, Friday-night welcome party, stocked refrigerators for breakfast, slide show, Saturday mushroom hunt, Saturday refreshments and lunch, steak cookout, wine and sparkling-juice tasting and sampling.

For more information, contact Spring Hills Resort, Walloon Lake, MI 49796, (616) 535-2227.

DETROIT TO BERMUDA

Beginning May 15, Northwest will inaugurate one-stop service between Detroit and Bermuda. The new flight will leave Detroit Metro Airport 7:15 a.m. and, after a stop in Boston, arrive in Bermuda 12:55 p.m.

Northwest will fly a 146-passenger Boeing 727-200 on the route, offering the only service to Bermuda that does not require you to change planes.

STRATFORD

The Stratford Festival launched its annual playgoing season April 29 in Stratford, Ontario. The season runs through Nov. 19. This year's Shakespearean plays include "Much Ado About Nothing," "Hamlet," and "Timon of Athens."

You can also see "contemporary" works such as "Carousel" by Rogers and Hammerstein, "Our Town" by Thornton Wilder, "Love Letters" by A.R. Gurney, Jr., and "Homeward Bound" by Elliott Hayes.

For more information, contact the Stratford Festival, P.O. Box 520, Stratford, Ontario, N5A 6V2, or call them through their Detroit telephone number, 964-4668. Tickets range from \$35 to \$50 Canadian, except for some premiere performances that are slightly less expensive.

Alma celebrates Scottish spring with Highland Festival & Games

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"I have a Scottish name, but as far as I know, my ancestors were lowlanders and therefore not entitled to wear tartan," I said. Dinwoody's quick research showed me that the Snodgrass family does have the right to wear a tartan, two of them, in fact. They can wear the tartan of the Snodgrass clan and that of the Irvines, a clan that allied itself with the Snodgrass family in war.

McDonald's of Alma probably won't serve Scottish food in the near future, especially not the traditional haggis. "But I think haggis is very good," Dinwoody said. Haggis will be served at the Ceilidh, a traditional party to be staged Saturday, May 25, at the festival.

There are always two questions concerning Scottish customs, according to Dinwoody. One asks, "What does a Scotsman wear under his kilt?" That's a military secret. Next question: "What is haggis?"

"It's cooked in a sheep's pluck," Dinwoody says. That's the stomach, and if you're still with us, it contains oatmeal, onions, ground mutton and leeks. It's first boiled, then baked.

Both Dinwoody and I found the idea of eating something cooked in a sheep's stomach less revolting than eating something cooked in a pig's guts, sausage. Take that, you Germans and Poles, and especially you English with your tasteless bangers.

The Scots are fond of ceremony, and the haggis is "piped in" to the skirt of bagpipes. The ceremony includes a reading of a Bobbie Burns poem, "The Piping of the Haggis." The party continues with traditional entertainment like fiddle playing, country dancing and

piping. Often the entertainment is spontaneous.

Also held Saturday night is the Pub and Dance. This fetches an even bigger crowd than the Ceilidh, 600-700 last year. It will be at Snifter's Restaurant, featuring contemporary music with a disc jockey.

Crowd favorites at the festival are the massed kiltie bands, a spectacular sight as they perform at 1 and 5:30 p.m. Saturday and 5 p.m. Sunday. Another favorite is the Highland Fling and the Sword Dance. Just as interesting to me are the border collies, super-intelligent dogs that keep their masters' sheep in line.

Food concessions feature international dishes, including American food and Scottish meat pies. Authentic Celtic clothing and crafts will be on sale.

The Scots need a lot of help from their friends to put on a festival like the one at Alma. When the brawny lads in their kilts take the field for the caber toss, flipping a 12-to-19-foot pole end over end, you may note names that look more Polish or Greek than Scot.

Even this year's festival president has a name that's suspect. Bruce Moegeberg, an administrator at Alma High School. The name "Bruce" works fine for a Scotsman, but the last name doesn't ring Gaelic.

Other Scottish athletic games will be the Weight Throw for distance; it weighs 28 pounds. The hammer in the Hammer Throw weighs 22 pounds. In the Weight Toss for height a 56-pound weight is swung between the knees and tossed backward over a bar using one hand. (A berna on the first try disqualifies a contestant for a second try.) Finally there's a Sheaf Toss, in which a stack of hay is tossed by pitchfork over a bar.

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returnd are close to the fun but far from the pace of the theme park.

The new Sandcastle Suites Hotel and a camper's village, also on the grounds of Cedar Point, offer alternative nearby accommodations, but you must reserve early. For information, call your travel agent or Cedar Point at (419) 627-2119.

Theme park admission this year is \$21.99 for adults and \$11.99 for anyone of any age who is 48 inches or shorter. You may find discounted tickets through one of the organizations that you belong to. Groups of 25 or more can buy tickets for \$16.

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Cedar Point on a 'Mean Streak' with new coaster

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