

From tiny squirrels to enormous polar bears and treetop trials to boat trips and fine restaurants, Speyside has it all, writes Susan Welsh

RIGHT on cue, the cutest red squirrel stopped directly in front of the big bay window and, as if coached by a Hollywood director, proceeded to give a star performance. He ran up and down trees, dashed around the garden and posed for long enough to admire his audience time to admire his beautiful bushy tail. Red squirrels, unlike mad dogs and Englishmen, tend to avoid the midday sun, preferring to rest up at this time and come out early in the morning or in the late afternoon or evening. We were enjoying a splendid breakfast in the dining-room of the Pine Ridge Guest House on Main Street, Carrbridge, and had just asked our lovely hostess, Shona Rankin, about the local wildlife when the squirrel appeared. She knows the wildlife and area like the back of her hand and goes out of her way to share her knowledge with guests, writing a daily list of suggestions, along with the weather forecast, on a chalk board in the dining-room. Very useful. My family and I were staying at the comfortable family-run guesthouse for the weekend and, after a peaceful night's sleep and an enormous breakfast, set off to sample



Scotland's outdoor playground

away, to try the Highlands' highest adventure playground, TreeZone, which sits on the edge of the Rothiemurchus Estate. After being welcomed and given suitable hard hats, harnesses and instructions, my teens set off to try the high ropes course – I declined on the grounds of cowardice. They had no fears and had fun making their way around the two courses, which reach heights of up to 40ft in places and include some 23 challenges. My heart was in my mouth watching them, but I needn't have worried as TreeZone uses

“ TreeZone uses the safest belay technology, allowing children as young as seven to take part **”**



Pine Ridge Guest House, above and right



the safest belay technology, which means users are clipped on to a safety wire at all times, allowing children as young as seven to take part. Challenges, which get tougher as you make your way round, include wobbly rope bridges, jump nets and a tightrope walk, finishing with an exhilarating 100m zip-wire finale where you come speeding back down to Earth. Tackling the course can take up to two hours, depending how busy it is or how adventurous users are. My gang completed it in about 40 minutes due to a mixture of adrenaline and picking a quiet time.



Muckrach Lodge Hotel, above, above right and below

After a pleasant walk along the beach at Loch Morlich – again, just a few minutes' drive away – we returned to Inverdrue for lunch at Ord Ban, a cosy wee restaurant which does a cracking line in home-made food. The afternoon was spent looking at a host of animals, including gorgeous tigers, a European wolf, yak, snow monkey and a variety of deer, to name but some of the residents of the Highland Wildlife Park at Kincaig. It's home to a host of exotic animals used to a cold climate, including Mercedes, a gorgeous polar bear and one of the star attractions at the park. Visitors can drive through the main reserve as often as they like. As it's so big, and the animals are often on the move, it means that every drive is different. There's lots to see on foot, too, as unlike a zoo, the animals here have huge skelops of land to roam around. There are opportunities to see the animals being fed and learn more about Scottish wildlife and endangered animals via timed talks held

throughout the day – you should allow several hours to see everything. As the park is within the Cairngorms National Park, the views are spectacular, so apart from taking photographs of the animals, expect to take lots of shots of the stunning vistas. After a busy day, we headed to Muckrach Lodge Hotel, Dulnain Bridge, near Grantown, for dinner. This lovely relaxed country-house hotel has a stylish conservatory where diners can tuck into superb dishes created by co-owner Rebecca Ferrand, who has a real passion for local produce. The set dinner, £38 for three courses, came highly recommended and was, indeed, superb. After a thoroughly enjoyable day, we turned in, and with all that fresh air, slept like babies in our warm and comfortable beds at the Pine Ridge. After another fabulous breakfast – the porridge was particularly good, which shouldn't be surprising as, each September, Carrbridge hosts the annual World Porridge Making Championships – we set off to meet up with John Mason, an instructor with the Full On

Adventure company, who was taking us kayaking on Loch Inch. Fabulous is too small a word to fully describe the fun we had gently paddling around the loch, which is surrounded by dramatic, beautiful mountains and home to a pair of ospreys, who helpfully obliged by putting on a dramatic flying display for us – the wildlife here knows how to impress tourists. Although we had been in the area for only a couple of days, we had done and experienced a lot – but, at the same time, had barely scratched the surface as there are at least 100 things families can do in this area. Proof that Speyside lives up to its reputation as Scotland's outdoor playground.



TRAVEL FACTS

- For further information on the area, visit www.visitcairngorms.com, or call 01479 810200. Other useful contact numbers include:
- Pine Ridge Guest House, Main Street, Carrbridge – www.pineridgecarrbridge.com or 01479 841653.
- TreeZone Aerial Adventure Course, Rothiemurchus Estate, Inverdrue, Aviemore – www.treezone.co.uk or 01479 811426.
- Ord Ban Restaurant, Inverdrue, Aviemore – www.ordban.com or 01479 810005.
- Muckrach Lodge Hotel and Restaurant, Dulnain Bridge – www.muckrach.co.uk or 01479 851257.
- Highland Wildlife Park, Kincaig, near Kingussie – www.highlandwildlifepark.org or 01540 651270.
- Full on Adventure, 24 Cairngorm Avenue, Aviemore – www.fullonadventure.co.uk or 07885 835838.



A tiger at the Highland Wildlife Park at Kincaig. Photograph: Sandy McCook

relaxing made easy

Whatever you want to say... say it in words with YourAds. Updated daily - it's a new shopping experience every day. Check out YourAds every day, only in the Press and Journal.

www.pressandjournal.co.uk

Packages available

Items under £50	1 DAY FREE
Items under £150	2 DAYS £5.00
Items under £150	3 DAYS £10.00
Items under £500	3 DAYS £20.00

Your ad will appear in the Press and Journal, Evening Express and www.pressandjournal.co.uk within a few days.

The Press and Journal
YourAds
Because every day is different

