

Best of British

We scour the British Isles for the best food-filled staycation experiences



THE PLACE TO STAY

SCAFELL HOTEL
BORROWDALE, LAKE DISTRICT

Fiona Gibson enjoys bracing fell walks and some seriously good food.

It sounds crazy to admit this, but I'd almost forgotten the Lake District exists. Living as we do in Glasgow, our default setting is generally to head for the Highlands for weekends away. However, just a three-hour drive south brings us to the splendour of Derwentwater, and the winding, lakeside road to cosy Scafell Hotel, a country-house hotel nestled deep in the lush Borrowdale valley.

As we fall into pre-dinner chat beside the lounge's crackling fire, we meet a mixture of hearty fellwalker-types plus couples who admit, unashamedly, that they're here simply to enjoy the romantic retreat – and, naturally, the fabulous food.

In the hotel's relaxed restaurant, the menu is contemporary but wonderfully homely. We enjoy swoon-worthy gravadlax, followed by fillet of hake with crushed potatoes and kale, chicken with braised lentils and pumpkin, and a grown-up take on Granny's rice pudding served with a deliciously tangy lime and blackcurrant compote.

Keen to eke out our evening, we drift back to the fireside for coffees, petit fours and nightcaps from the well-stocked bar. After a blissful night's sleep in the Barnes Wallis suite – named after the inventor of the Dambusters' bouncing bomb, which was tested

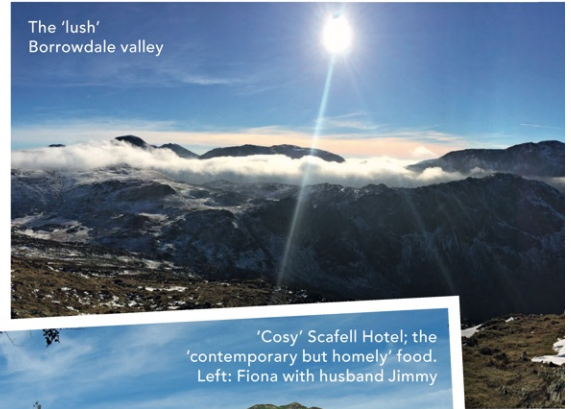
here on Derwentwater – we fully intend to walk it all off in them there hills.

Breakfast is a perfectly cooked full English. The hotel staff could not be friendlier or more helpful; when we ask about local walks, the young man on reception whips out a map and suggests a 90-minute hike around Castle Crag, which turns out to be breathtakingly lovely and just the right level for us (while moderately fit, we are far from seasoned hikers). In fact, we feel quite the Famous Five adventurers with our packed lunches, supplied by the hotel in brown paper bags and including, thrillingly, pickled onions and slices of fruit cake.

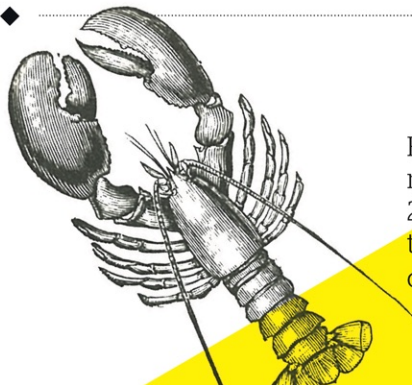
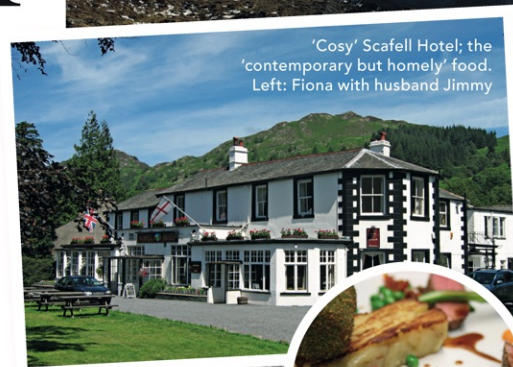
As charming Keswick is a mere 15-minute drive away, we spend the afternoon exploring the town, stopping off at what must be a contender for Britain's quirkiest attraction: the Derwent Pencil Museum. Fellow stationery addicts will surely understand how this excites me. After a second night at the hotel, we return, reluctantly, to Glasgow, having fallen in love with Borrowdale and Scafell Hotel. Now I realise why my parents honeymooned close by. Turns out they knew a thing or two about romantic hideaways after all.

Rates from April to October start at £115 per person for dinner, bed and breakfast. (scafell.co.uk)

The 'lush' Borrowdale valley



'Cosy' Scafell Hotel; the 'contemporary but homely' food. Left: Fiona with husband Jimmy



WHERE TO EAT IN... ...Hove

Former Fat Duck chef Duncan Ray has turned his back on molecular cuisine and now serves up a £65 tasting menu at his tiny 20-cover restaurant, Little Fish Market. Customers lucky enough to bag a booking can enjoy the freshest fish and seafood, all cooked on Duncan's bargain £250 stove. (thelittlefishmarket.co.uk) ▶