

● **THE** boutique Alfieri Nove B&B in Florence has just eight rooms and is a real gem located in Sant'Ambrogio, just a few minutes by foot to the centre of the city.

Each of the eight bedrooms at this chic property can sleep from two to four making this perfect accommodation for families too.

A small communal lounge area, and a very stylish breakfast room

serving a fabulous continental breakfast, provide all the space required to relax.

It is now available to book through Essential Italy.

Prices start from £80-£160 per night for a double room B&B and from £115-£220 per night for a suite B&B.

Go to essentialitaly.co.uk/alfieri-nove or call 01223 460100.



● **NEXT** year will be an important one for pilgrims to Rome and those looking to walk the Santiago de Compostela, as the year has been declared a 'Holy Year of Mercy' by Pope Francis.

Holy Years only take place every 25 years, unless the Pope requests an extraordinary one, as Pope Francis has for the Holy Year of Mercy.

Special events will be taking

place in both cities. Santiago Cathedral will open the Holy Door of the cathedral (Porta Santa) as will all those in Rome. The 2016 Holy Year will officially start on December 8 and finish on November 20, 2016.

FrancigenaWays.com has a guided tour to Rome departing on March 19 and CaminoWays.com has departures from March to the end of October.

hot spot IT'S 23°C IN GRAN CANARIA — hit the beach on a seven-night holiday at the 3★ Riviera Vista Hotel from £303. Price is based on a self-catering basis and includes return flights departing Prestwick on Dec 2. Go to onthebeach.co.uk or call 0871 4743000

hot spot IT'S 26°C IN TENERIFE — Week at 5★ Hotel Jardines de Nivaria (Costa Adeje) on half-board from £899pp. Price includes return Ryanair flights from Prestwick departing on December 10. Go to prestigholidays.co.uk/tenerife or call 01425 480400.

Planet Heather

7 PAGES OF HOLS WITH SCOTTISH SUN TRAVEL EDITOR HEATHER LOWRIE

BAGGINS YOURSELF A BREAK IN THE BORDERS



HISTORIC...
Traquair House

PEOPLE always think of Scotland's Highlands when searching for home-grown scenery.

And for me, travelling south in Scotland is usually just to get over the border for a visit to my friend in Newcastle.

Little did I know that the Borders are home to some of the most breath-taking views I have ever seen.

My other half Steve and I were lucky enough to spend the night at the Horseshoe Inn in Peeblesshire, which proved to be a perfect base to explore what the area has to offer.

The restaurant with rooms sits on the main road to Peebles in the small village of Eddleston. Despite cars often whizzing by, we were happy to discover that the setting was relatively quiet.

The restaurant building dates back to 1862 and the rooms are in an old schoolhouse built in the 1830s.

As soon as we walked into the tiny main reception we knew we were in for a treat.

We were greeted right away and led through to the lounge bar area which could have doubled as Bilbo Baggins's living room. A large circular window gave it a real Hobbit feel, which was right up my street as a massive Lord of the Rings fan.

The room's exposed beams, button leather sofas and warm lighting created an atmosphere of relaxed luxury — like an aged stately home.

Manager Mark Slaney sat down for a chat about how we would like to spend our day with him. And we weren't getting "special treatment". The Horseshoe Inn specialises in creating personalised itineraries for a small number of guests.

Mark asked us what we would like to see and as a bit of a history nerd I wanted to learn more about the area. He suggested we visit Traquair House, about seven miles from Peebles, by way of a scenic drive through the Borders countryside.

But first, lunch.

Aware we were in for a sumptuous dinner at the Horseshoe later that night Steve and I asked for something light and were served up a



HOBBIT SPECIAL...
Bilbo-esque lounge bar

GO: THE HORSESHOE INN

STAYING THERE: Dinner, bed and breakfast Wednesday to Friday starts from £180 per couple and £200 per couple on Saturdays.

MORE INFO: See horseshoeinn.co.uk, email reservations@horseshoeinn.co.uk or call 01721 730225 for more information.

gorgeous pork, pistachio and apricot terrine washed down with some refreshing Cuddybridge apple juice made in the nearby Kailzie Gardens.

The dining room was just as impressive as the lounge without being pretentious.

You can tell that there is hardly an expense spared but instead of stiff white linen and gloved waiters, it features mismatched antique tables

and tweed-wearing staff putting customers at ease.

After lunch, Mark personally drove us — as he often does for guests — on a stunningly scenic journey to Traquair House.

He is an endless source of information about the Borders and local history, knows the land like the back of his hand and has sussed out some breathtaking secret spots.

One of which is the view over the Talla reservoir near Tweedsmuir where the rolling hills slope down into the sparkling water.

We arrived back at the Horseshoe and went to our room in the old schoolhouse. It was cosy and comfy with a queen-size bed and shower room, ideal for resting up after a busy day exploring.

Before we knew it, it was time for dinner — and what a meal it was.

Steve and I headed to the lounge

bar for a quick drink and were handed that night's menu options — which change daily — inside an art book. A quirky touch. It was cooked by acclaimed chef Alistair Craig, and I chose a starter of blackcurrant cure salmon with fennel, cherries, red pepper and pesto, followed by roast veal rump with Anna potato, swede, broad beans and salsify.

It was all amazing and the dishes were so perfectly proportioned that I still had room for dessert — warm dark chocolate tart with coconut sorbet, mango custard and pineapple.

Washing all that down with some wine, Steve and I slowly waddled back to our room to enjoy a good night's sleep after a packed day.

Heading back home it was clear The Horseshoe Inn is a real treat. And the Lowlands are just as good as the Highlands any day.

ANNA GAULT

Southern comfort



WATER VIEW...
Anna loved scenery at Talla reservoir

ACE MILAN...Four nights B&B at the 4★ Litta Palace Hotel in Milan is from £187pp leaving Glasgow on February 27. See barrheadtravel.co.uk or call 0141 222 2223.

GER ONTO A WINNER...Three nights' room only at the 5★ Steigenberger Hotel am Kanzleramt in Berlin is from £189pp leaving Glasgow on selected dates between January 10-31. See a Stewart Travel store or call 0800 091 2757.

LUX LIKE A GOOD DEAL...A week all-inclusive at the 5★ Atlantis De Lux Hotel in Belek, Turkey, is from £367pp leaving Glasgow on February 26. See barrheadtravel.co.uk or call 0141 222 2223.

PRICE IS RIGHT...Novotel is offering up to 30% off winter stays at its 33 hotels across the UK, with a further 10% saving for those booking direct online at Novotel.com. Available for stays from December 14-April 10. Edinburgh stays from £49.

ALL ITS GLORIA...Three nights' B&B at the 3★ Hotel Gloria in Prague is from £269pp leaving Glasgow on November 26. See jet2citybreaks.com or call 0800 408 5594.

CORNISH XMAS...Spend a family Christmas by the sea at Jordan House, on the edge of the North Cornwall fishing village of Boscastle. Sleeps four and is available on December 22 for £589. Pets welcome. See westcountrycottages.co.uk or call 01803 814000.

EASTERN PROMISE...Tour Vietnam at Christmas from £2,455pp including flights from Heathrow, nine nights' hotel accommodation, 1 over-night cruise, and internal flights, transfers and entrance fees. Leaves December 25. See insiderjourneys.co.uk or call 01865 268 940.

HAPPY CAMPERS...Butlin's has four-night family breaks at their Skegness resort from £84pp self-catering based on a family of four sharing a silver apartment from December 30. See butlins.com or call 0330 100 6648.

MADEIRA MAGIC...A week all-inclusive at the 4★ Calheta Beach Hotel in Calheta in Madeira is from £363pp leaving Edinburgh on December 8. See lowcostholidays.com or call 0800 116271.

KING OF CASTLE...Four nights over Christmas at Bod-elwyddan Castle, North Wales, including half-board and entertainment is from £309pp arriving December 23. See warnerleisurehotels.co.uk or call 0330 100 9774.

GO WEST...Head to London's West End to see Jersey Boys and stay at the 3★ Bayswater Inn Hotel including breakfast for £94.75pp arriving December 1. See superbreak.com or call 0800 042 0288.