

HOLIDAYS

Life looks pretty good from here

Tom McCooley takes it easy at Ravenstone Lodge

A moving orange sky ghosting behind the gorgeous Lake District scenery, boasting why it is a favourite place for so many people, provides a fitting encore to a memorable meal and conversation deepened by a bellyful of beer.

For tomorrow, proximity to Ullock Pike, Bassenthwaite Lake and Keswick make the day enticing to plan.

Inside, a room with as thought-provoking a view and a mammoth four poster bed awaits sleepy guests, but before then there is a cosy bar to see, set in a former stable complete with Victorian features reflecting the heritage of the building. It is home to an impressive collection of whiskies to try.

And magic like this isn't hard to find. From the North West, The Ravenstone Lodge is easy enough to reach with three steps written on the back of the hand in ballpoint pen.

The simple route, incorporating the fun to drive A591 for the final few miles, allows for a relaxed journey, and the terrace overlooking the garden – the first thing guests see – provides an inviting opportunity to relax

after a couple of hours on the road.

Lodge owner Mike Cornish is on hand to offer greetings and proves to be a knowledgeable host – genuinely pleased to chat to the guests scattered in little groups through the conservatory and on the terrace.

It is on his recommendation Spirit of the Lakes' Bedrock Gin finds its way to the table, the first gin to be made with Lake District spring water – mixed with Fentimans Tonic Water and delivered on a wooden tray to give a sense of occasion. The taste test

confirms the small ceremony is warranted.

From the bowels of the building, the kitchen looked over by Head Chef James Cooper is chugging into full steam. Awarded an AA Rosette in April this year, starters of fishcakes and beetroot tart tatin delicately laced with goat's cheese mousse tempt the nostrils and taste buds before forkfuls of monk fish and then venison, juicy and tender, are passed around the table as everyone wants to try.

The useful website: www.ravenstonelodge.co.uk offers ample pre-visit information

but not even its persuasive photographs illustrate the full extent of the welcoming atmosphere, show off the true size of the room's bathroom or boast the comforting power of the refreshing shower above the generously-sized bathtub. Nor does technology allow browsers to smell the spirits, the Lake District air or the food which all contribute to a stay to remember – not forgetting desserts like cheese boards or chocolate tarts which satisfy without making their recipients uncomfortably full.

Guests retire and the bar gradually empties but Mike's

company is welcome as he helpfully points out a whisky worth trying.

He explains the Lakes Distillery near Bassenthwaite Lake is up and running.

Cumbria's first whisky distillery for over 100 years and open to visits, its single malt will be available in 2017, and slightly peated, it will share characteristics with a Highlands rather than Islay drink.

Along with Lakes Gin and Lakes Vodka, a premium blended whisky is already on the market.

With the last of the sunlight behind the hills, the

Bakestall room awaits – and before a handsome breakfast, the rolling hills beyond the window sill makes leaving a chore undertaken with a heavy heart, prompting passengers on the drive home to check the website's live booking system for a swift return.

Fact File:

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Ravenstone Lodge in Bassenthwaite

