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How To Spend A Weekend In St Andrews

By Caroline Phillips
2 Weeks Ago

We check out Old Course Hotel, a golf resort and spa



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John Pow Photography

St Andrews, Fife, packs a punch with its history, scenic beauty, fresh seafood and student hijinks. It's the home of golf, the English-speaking world's third oldest university, a former ecclesiastical capital and once a pull for pilgrims visiting St Andrew's relics. Go there too for Old Course Hotel, a 5-star luxury establishment that's a magnet for golfers, says **Caroline Phillips**.

Review: Old Course Hotel, St Andrews



STAY

The hotel – which just achieved gold status from Green Tourism – is located on the edge of town, beside the most famous golf course in the world: The Old Course. It's a golf ball's throw to the beach and overlooking the sea shore. You may do your 10,000 steps finding your bedroom – there are 175 rooms, including 34 suites – but it's worth it for its calm décor, plus the view of *that* beach where they filmed *Chariots of Fire*. And for its Kohler bathroom fittings, including three shower heads (but no bath). The hotel lures American and Japanese golfers, doggie people (in pooch-friendly rooms) and Ferrari enthusiasts (during the convention there).

The hotel boasts eight restaurants and bars. Breakfast includes an ooh-ah view of the Links course and coastline, along with haggis, black pudding and moreish muesli. Book dinner in the Swilcan Loft if you want a good seafood platter (lobster, oysters, scallop, dressed crab) and chateaubriand with truffle mash. Or go to the Road Hole if fine dining, white linen cloths and the more ambitious, 3 AA rosette fare is your bag.

A CBD massage with Yanhua – in the hotel's Kohler Waters Spa – is tip-top. There are also two swimming pools; in the fitness centre, you'll be doing front crawl where former uni student Prince William did his lengths, as seen in *The Crown*. The recently renovated spa has the UK's first Espuro Foam Experience steam room, spurting plant-based, chest-high bubbles four times a day, alongside light, music and heat. And there's a hydrotherapy pool,

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TRAVEL

plunge pool, steam and sauna (in which people talk golf). You may even run into one redoubtable fitness club member, a lady who signed up at seventy-something for a postgrad degree at St Andrews in Russian literature. Then pop out to the town, with its 16,000 residents and 10,000 students.



DO

A guided tour with Val Eglington, Blue Badge Guide, is a must: the woman is a walking encyclopedia. (She doesn't do much of the Wills and Kate spiel, although she points out the café where they had a coffee). You may take in the pretty St Salvator's Hall ('Sally's' to the students) and St Mary's Quad, the cathedral and castle ruins and check out the 19th century ladies' putting club, the oldest in the world. But she'll also talk about the fulmar colony to a student superstition (you'll fail your exams if you step on the initials 'PH' on the pavement) based on the execution of a Calvinist.

Catch the Sunday morning service at St Salvator's Chapel – founded in 1413 – for a marvelous 25-strong student choir, pews that (unusually) face the nave, and its student congregants in red gowns. It's even toasty warm.

Even if you're not a cold water swimming fan, you will be after braving the North Sea with Keri-anne Payne, a triple Olympian, silver medalist and thoroughly good egg. An open-water swimming expert, she runs cold water wellness retreats for the hotel. She'll take you out at 6.45am and teach you how to breathe properly in chilly water (one trick is to exhale longer than you inhale) and distract you enough with tips on dopamine to stop you noticing the madness of what you're doing. Afterwards, you'll feel truly exhilarated.

Book yourself into the excellent golf clinic on the range at Duke's (you get to drive a buggy over the beautiful course) where they teach beginners how to hold and swing a club. 'If you're right-handed, right hand at the top, don't split your grip as you would in hockey...' Or if you're already proficient and missed the ballot for a game on the Old Course, why not play here?

If shopping's your bag, Pretty Things sells everything from smoky tweed coats to cosy cardies from Scottish designers, while Islander flogs backpacks and satchels in Harris tweed and sheepskin slippers. Hotfoot it to family baker Fisher & Donaldson, established in 1919 (it got a royal warrant for supplying Hollywood) for its famous fudge doughnuts. Johnstons of Elgin also boasts a royal warrant, and enough cashmere to dress more than a few American golfers. Spoiled Life is a cafe with a small lifestyle store – think sunglasses, jumpers and necklaces. Topping & Company booksellers offer a wood-burning stove,

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By Martha Davies



FOOD & DRINK

A Foodie's Guide to Lisbon

By Bettina Campolucci Bordi

complimentary coffee and a year-round literary festival; buying tomes doesn't get better than that. Surprisingly, this town of independent outlets has a Jo Malone but fortunately no McDonald's.



Quoin Images

EAT

Justin Timberlake and Tiger Woods have bought the only cinema in the area, soon to turn it into a sports bar. Meanwhile, the Dunvegan hotel ('Duny's' to locals) is where the golf caddies drink. Its walls and ceilings are covered with pictures of famous golfers. The 19th century Jigger Inn – in the old station master's house – boasts a ghost, lager and ale-battered haddock and an Ayrshire haggis crumpet. Old Course hotel's fourth floor Road Hole Bar serves 300 whiskies, including Macallan M at £2400 per shot, and those stunning views across to West Sands beach.

Take lunch in the Hams Hame, a sporting pub, if you want to eat in one of the world's most famous sporting buildings, the former Hamilton Hall. Don't miss Jeanetta's Gelateria (which dates back to 1908), a fourth generation gelateria and retro ice-cream shop with fifties-style pastel décor. Little beats their four types of cones, fudge or choc sticks to pop into the best homemade ice-cream – tayberry, wild cherry to cannoli – alongside a velvety hot chocolate. The Seafood Ristorante (with its glass walls) has the sort of sea view, along with impeccable service and excellent seafood (from sustainable and local stocks), that you'll remember forever.

Among all of this, it's the The Steak Barn at Balgove (just 0.2 miles from the hotel) that really hits the spot for zero food miles, sustainability and oodles of rustic atmosphere. It's in an old farm sawmill, with an open, braai-style BBQ that burns wood from the farm, with walls fashioned from repurposed crates (or 'tattie' boxes), communal tables, and benches made by local joiner of beech wood from the surrounding land. Even the signs are painted by local artists. It serves meat from the estate – hands-down the best burgers, fillet, ribeye, sirloin and chateaubriand, with beef gravy, bearnaise or garlic butter (chickpea burgers for vegans) – and Fife onion rings in Loch Leven brewery batter. Plus brownies to send you to heaven. And service couldn't be more charming.

THE FINAL WORD

Whether you want wild swimming, golf or to loll in its spa waters – or to do all three – Old Course Hotel could be the one for you. Its big boast is that it's so near so many good golfing opportunities

BOOK IT

Rates range from £300 at low season to £590 at high season. oldcoursehotel.co.uk



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By Olivia Emily
1 Month Ago

Here are five holiday ideas across the nation