

Stay The Night: The Blackaddie Hotel, Sanquhar

Andy Lynes finds that the six-hour trek to Ian McAndrew's new venture in Dumfries and Galloway is well worth the effort

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Rural Retreat: Blackaddie is a 16th-century stone-built converted rectory set in two acres of gardens overlooking the river Nith

After six hours on the road I finally leave the featureless M6 and drive through the lush green forested, mountainous landscape of Dumfries and Galloway. I'm heading for the small town of Sanquhar, noted for its 13th-century castle and its connection with the poet Robert Burns. A regular visitor to the town in the 1790s, Burns wrote the poem "At Whigham's Inn, Sanquhar" during an overnight stay.

The town turns out to be unremarkable, but I'm not downhearted. Although I could take part in all sorts of outdoors activities in the surrounding area including walking the Southern Upland way, golfing on some of Scotland's most famous courses, shooting game, or even panning for gold in the nearby Mennoch Valley, the point of my road trip is a culinary pilgrimage to a secluded spot on the outskirts of the town.

Set in two acres of gardens, surrounded by fields and overlooking the river Nith (a prime spot for salmon fishing), Blackaddie House Hotel is where chef Ian McAndrew chose to make his comeback after nearly a decade away from the stoves. Never a household name, McAndrew (who trained with the legendary Anton Mosimann at the Dorchester hotel) is nevertheless held in the highest regard by chefs and switched-on foodies.

In 1982 he was the youngest British chef to win a Michelin star and was featured alongside Gary Rhodes in Kit Chapman's book *Great British Chefs*, the definitive round-up of the culinary talent of the time. It was a sad day for restaurant-goers when McAndrew decided to concentrate on consultancy and cookery classes in the late 1990s but now he's back at the top of his game.

The Blackaddie is a modestly sized but handsome 16th-century converted rectory. The centrepiece is the elegant, if slightly old-fashioned main dining room – which is fitting given that this is such as food-driven operation. Apart from the recently refurbished hallway that's decorated with mounted antlers, the public spaces including the bar and conservatory/library are in need of a little TLC. But that's all part of the personal, family-run feel of the place – obviously an ongoing labour of love for McAndrew and his wife Jane.

The rooms

Rooms in the main house are more akin to a good-quality, cosy B&B than country house hotel – fairly compact and decked out with pine furniture. A refurbishment programme is due to begin before the end of 2011. Coffee and tea making facilities are boosted by the presence of delicious homemade shortbread and tablet (Scottish fudge). The bathrooms are basic but stocked with smart Arran Aromatic bath products. There's a comfortable standard double bed and small flat-screen TV/DVD. Wi-Fi is available throughout the hotel.

Three spacious cottages can be rented in the hotel grounds, all offering river views and featuring large sitting/dining rooms and fully equipped kitchens. The two largest have utility rooms and two double bedrooms; good for families. The smaller, one-bedroom cottage has a patio that overlooks a salmon pool.

The food and drink

Dining here is a serious gastronomic experience, but Jane McAndrew makes sure it's a fun one too. "You look like the naughty boy sitting in the corner," she jokes as she delivers my incredibly delicious starter of red mullet and crab salad with asparagus and baby courgettes. I soon get talking to the adjacent table of four who are passionate fans of Ian McAndrew's technically brilliant cooking that's based around top-notch Scottish produce. Unlike many chefs of similar standing, McAndrew is always in the kitchen, even cooking the breakfast that includes natural peat-smoked fillet of haddock topped with a poached free-range egg. Starters range from £5.75 to £12.50, mains from £15 to £28.50 and desserts from £10 to £12.40.

The extras

Book ahead for cookery classes with Ian McAndrew. The hotel can also arrange beginner and improver angling lessons with a local instructor. For more ideas, contact Visit Scotland (surprise.visitscotland.com).

The access

Children and pets are welcome. Two-bedroom Crawick Foot cottage has been modified for guests with disabilities.

The bill

A double room costs £100 per night including breakfast. Self catering cottages from £340 per week.

The address Blackaddie House Hotel, Sanquhar, Dumfriesshire (01659 50270; blackaddiehotel.co.uk).