

SMOKING — AND — SMOKED SPECIALITIES



Smoking, along with salting and drying, has been used as a form of preservation from time immemorial. The Scots are past masters at all three arts, but of all of them it is smoking which produces far and away the most delicious flavour. Smoking used to be associated with fish, but now a wide variety of foods are being smoked by enterprising smokehouses throughout Scotland.

*Opposite: Dramatic sunset over Loch Linnhe from Ardsheal House.
Above: The Smokehouse at Mallaig where George Lawrie's
family have been smoking fish for generations.*



I FEEL it is a great responsibility to be in a position to welcome people into our home at Kinloch (which is a small hotel) as well as to write about food in Scotland. The Scots have the best in the world when it comes to beef, lamb and pork, game, fish and shellfish, soft fruits and, ever increasingly, cheeses. And they are renowned the world over for their baking skills; not the fine patisserie of France and Italy, but a more homely and comforting sort of baking, incorporating scones and pancakes, and sustaining fruit cakes and shortbread.

The Scots, over the centuries, have perfected the art of preservation by smoking, and smoked salmon has for years been considered one of the greatest delicacies (although, personally, I would as soon eat a really good kipper).

I have specifically been given the difficult task of choosing my ten favourite hotels for this book. There are easily another ten which I would include, given the space. One of the very good things about being in this way of life (it could hardly be described as a job) is the friendship that exists between us – well, most of us, certainly all of us in this book, as well as a good few more. People outside our business imagine that we are all deadly rivals – they couldn't be more wrong.

In the months when we are closed we all like to get together at some point, and we genuinely enjoy each other's company. When we are open, hardly a week goes by without telephone calls between us, usually to see if there is any available accommodation for guests who want to visit another area.

Readers of this book will notice a definite west-coast bias among the hotels. That is because a great many guests plan their Scottish holidays so as to stay at Airds or Ard-sheal House (they are only half an hour apart), followed by Inverlochry, then us, before going up to Altnaharrie.

In fact, so many do this that I often think that some people might be under the illusion that we provide some sort of up-market package holiday. This is not the case! But it accounts for the fact that we all belong in this book, as do Polmaily, at Drumnadrochit, with whom we often exchange guests, as well as the Dower House, on the Black Isle north of Inverness. Pittodrie, near Aberdeen, is a beautiful spot and yet so close (only half an hour's drive) to Aberdeen. And the Peat Inn is one of the best restaurants in Great Britain, let alone Scotland, and also has lovely bedroom suites. Cringletie makes an excellent place to stay and enjoy really good food, as well as the hospitality of the owners, in the heart of the Border country. All the hotels are owner occupied and run.

Other hotels which are not in this book, but which I would like to mention, include the Kinlochbervie Hotel, the Summer Isles Hotel and Tullich Lodge, as well as Dunain Park Hotel. All of these fall into the right category for this book, giving comfort, extremely good food, and really personal service. Ours may not all be super de-luxe establishments – Kinloch certainly isn't – but they are houses rather than hotels, with antiques, old books and objects of interest, and are places where we like to think our guests feel at home.

We all place the emphasis on our cooking. We all take continuing trouble to get the very best produce we can, and this becomes easier as the choice widens, although there will always be logistical problems to contend with. The wider choice is made possible by the increasing numbers of enterprising people growing organic vegetables and fruit, for example: by enterprises like Scotherbs which, in the six years since it was founded, has made fresh herbs available in an abundance never seen before in Scotland; by our butchers, who really appreciate what excellent meat is raised in Scotland;



*Above: The entrance to Pittodrie House, Aberdeenshire.
Opposite top: An alder in the autumn mist along
the River Spey. Bottom: The evening sky, Raasay.*

LADY MACDONALD'S
SCOTLAND

THE BEST OF SCOTTISH FOOD AND DRINK

