

Eat, Drink, Sleep...The Reviews

CRINAN HOTEL

by KATRINA PATRICK

ELEVEN kilometres (seven miles) from Lochgilphead, on roads getting smaller by the minute, I wasn't sure what to expect from Crinan.

The village lies in Knapdale, looking out across Loch Crinan to Jura. The Crinan Canal connecting Loch Fyne to the sealoch is still popular with yachts, but its days as a bustling freight route are over.

A right-turn led me on a single-track road. At its end I half-expected to find a tired, run-down old village without much to write home about. This, I was pleased to discover, couldn't have been further from the truth.

There's a buzz about Crinan. The coffee shop was full of families chatting, and strangers smiled "hello" on the canal paths. The warm sense of community is palpable, and at the heart of that community is the Crinan Hotel.

Nick and Frances Ryan bought the hotel 48 years ago, and built it up to a fine standard. In fact, Nick won Hotelier of the Year in 1999. Today, the Crinan Hotel boasts 20 rooms, a Seafood Bar, Michelin Plate-awarded Westward Restaurant,

Crinan Hotel

Crinan, Argyll

The heart of a charming West Highland community



The hotel boasts commanding views over the Sound of Jura

General's Bar, gallery, craft shop and rooftop restaurant Lock 16.

Nick sadly passed away earlier this year, but Frances still runs the hotel with the help of her friendly staff. She is also an accomplished artist under her maiden name of Frances MacDonald, and you can see some of her work in the gallery.

She individually designed all of the hotel's rooms, paying homage to different Scottish artists.

My room had a superking-size bed with

white Egyptian cotton bedding, and a bathroom stocked with Arran Aromatics. The wide bay windows looked out to sea, with a perfect view of one of the hotel's finest assets – restored teak motorboat, the *Sgarbh*.

Skipped by Nick and Frances's son Ross Ryan, the *Sgarbh* runs short trips out to nearby islands, with seafood lunches provided. It also runs popular distillery tours to Oban, Jura and Islay, or you can charter your own expedition.

The hotel also offers a painting expedition following the Scottish Colourist trail out to Iona. Unfortunately, I didn't have time to take advantage of the trips, but simply viewing the *Sgarbh* bobbing in the water outside my hotel window was a delight.

The Westward Restaurant offers gourmet dining, with a mouth-watering menu of seven courses for £49.50. The scallop roe chowder sounded sensational, but I'd had a long day in the



My room, with its extensive bay windows

hills and felt the more casual Seafood Bar was more fitting for my needs!


The traditional *décor* was welcoming, and the menu of a high standard. Most of the seafood on offer was landed in Crinan harbour that day, and I watched a seafood sharing platter, overflowing with jumbo prawns and shellfish, arrive at one appreciative table. I opted for Lindisfarne scallops to start with, but after a hard day there was only one thing on my mind: steak. It was good quality, too, and cooked to perfection.

After a couple of drams (they have an excellent selection, and the brilliant hotel manager Pedro was more than happy to discuss the malts' finer points) I turned in, sleeping soundly in the comfortable, lavishly-

cushioned superking. Breakfast in the Westward Restaurant was heaven – the staff were friendly, and the views were amazing. I went for the full Scottish, naturally, but the kippers looked delicious.

Before I left Frances gave me a tour of the gallery and coffee shop, enthusing about Crinan and the community. I didn't want to leave when the time came – even after a single day, I felt settled in to Crinan life. I can understand why, after 48 years, Frances has no intention of moving.

Seasonal rates begin at £55 per person per night for classic King or Double room, plus breakfast. The website has special deals – and info on their Three-day House Party at Hogmanay!

www.crinanhotel.com 



A double-rainbow shone over the canal and I rushed outside to capture it