

# Midweek

# TRAVEL extra

4 pages of  
holiday ideas

## LET THE SPARKS FLY ON ROMANTIC ARGYLL GETAWAY

# The Loch of love

By WILLIE COCHRANE

**I'M a hopeless romantic – just ask my wife.**

Missed anniversaries, half-dead flowers from the petrol station on birthdays and a ring-in-one-hand, kebab-in-the-other marriage proposal that I couldn't even remember the next day.

Yup, it's fair to say that when it comes to being romantic, I'm completely and utterly hopeless.

So when my long-suffering missus Tracy told me it was time I reignited the old spark, I was left scratching my head – and everything else an unromantic bloke tends to scratch in front of his wife.

But thanks to Google – and a few key words like 'romantic', 'hotel' and 'Scotland' – I quickly found the answer to my prayers.

"Loch Melfort Hotel – Scottish Small Romantic Hotel of the Year Award 2011. Located on the romantic Argyll coast 16 miles from Oban."

"Bingo," I said to myself. "Even I can't fail to look a teeny bit romantic at this gaff!"

I wasn't wrong. In fact, just telling Tracy I'd booked a room and arranged for our two boys to stay with Gran earned me some much-needed brownie points.

### Gorgeous

It got even better when we arrived. "Make yourself at home," owner Calum Ross told us as he showed us to our luxury suite.

That was easy, especially after stepping out on to the balcony and being greeted by an incredible view over the water to Jura, the island I grew up on and where we got married seven years ago. Nothing like a bit of sentimentality to get the old romance going!

Throw in a nice bottle of bubbly followed by a relaxing stroll through the gorgeous National Trust-owned Arduaine Gardens adjacent to the hotel and we were soon the west coast's answer to Richard



**HIGHLAND FLING... Loch Melfort Hotel & luxury suite, top; Tracy on Jura boat trip**



Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. Not bad, considering we'd been like George and Mildred beforehand.

And when it was time to eat, the hotel's Asknish Bay Restaurant was the ideal place to savour the locally-produced food of love.

The Asknish Bay has two AA Rosettes – marking it out as one of Scotland's top 100 restaurants – and offers a fine-dining experience not to be missed.

I opted for a four-course feast, with a delicious duck starter then sweet potato and coconut soup followed by the most succulent fillet steak I've ever savoured.

And for afters, I tucked into a yummy dark chocolate and peanut butter tart with caramelised popcorn and marshmallow ice cream, before retreating to the lounge for a nightcap. Next

morning we upped the pace with a boat trip through the infamous Corryvreckan whirlpool – the second biggest in the world.

This awesome tidal maelstrom sits between Jura and its neighbouring island of Scarba and can produce waves up to 30 feet high.

Locals call the whirlpool 'cailleach's cauldron' – cailleach is Gaelic for witch.

The cauldron didn't quite reach boiling point that day but it still left us in a real spin – and soaked through.

After that it was back to the Loch Melfort to dry off and get some dinner, this time in the hotel's Chart-room Bistro for a less formal but no less delicious meal. Then it was up to that balcony to take in the gorgeous sight of the sun setting over the distant Paps of Jura.

As we sat there gazing out towards the sea, the tranquillity was suddenly broken by the cheesy strains of a disco classic coming from the radio I'd left on in our room.

"Go west. Life is peaceful there." Never before had a Village People song made so much sense.

### GO: Loch Melfort

**STAYING THERE:** One night dinner, bed and breakfast in August and September is £98pp with second night for £39pp B&B. Or stay two nights DB&B at £98pp per night and third night for £25 B&B. Two-night breaks are also available through August and September from £165pp, including a four-course candlelit dinner in the Asknish Bay restaurant each night. See lochmelfort.co.uk or call 01852 200 233.

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