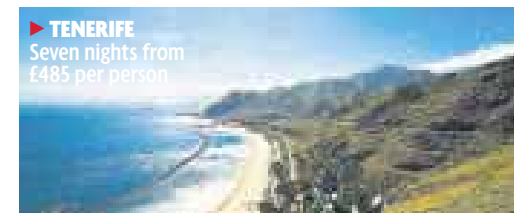


Late deals

■ Flying from Glasgow on December 10, for seven nights in Fuerteventura staying at the three-star Costa Caleta on all-inclusive from £349 per person.
 ■ Flying from Glasgow on December 12, for seven nights in Gran Canaria, staying at the three-star Interclub

Atlantic on an all-inclusive basis, costing from £329 per person.
 ■ Late deals from Barrhead Travel. For these and other holiday ideas, log on to www.barrheadtravel.co.uk, or call 0871 226 2673.



▶ **TENERIFE**
Seven nights from £485 per person

Late deals

■ Seven nights in Costa Blanca from £325 per person, staying at the four-star Deloix Aqua on half-board. Flying from Glasgow on December 24.
 ■ Seven nights in Egypt from £565 per person.

all-inclusive, staying at the five-star Melia Sharm Hotel in Sharm el Sheikh. Flying from Glasgow on January 9.
 ■ Seven nights in Tenerife from £485 per person all-inclusive, staying at the five-star

Bahia Tenerife Hotel in Costa Adeje. Flying from Glasgow on December 17.
 ■ Late deals from Thomas Cook. Visit www.thomascookstyle.com, call 0844 412 5970, or go to Thomas Cook, Going Places or Co-operative.

Countryside retreat is a wonderful hidden gem



▲ **SUPERB** The luxurious Craigsanquhar House is the perfect place to relax and unwind

By Paul O'Hare

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CRAIGSANQUHAR House, near St Andrews, is one of Scotland's true hidden gems.

Indeed, it is so well concealed that it wasn't for the map on my wife's iPhone we might never have found it.

The estate, which dates back to 1385, is in the heart of the Fife countryside and its mansion-style hotel is at the end of a long driveway.

Set in 36 acres of pristine gardens and woodland, it became apparent why it is a popular wedding venue.

The history of Craigsanquhar, which means sanctuary on a hill, is celebrated inside the hotel.

Among the artefacts in the lobby is a portrait of Dr Nathaniel Spens, a member of the noble family that used to call the estate home.

The four-star property also boasts a sweeping staircase and has 13 suites and bedrooms, all of which feature four-poster beds.

Given the choice we opted to stay in one of the luxury three-bedroom lodges, which were only built last year ahead of the Open golf championship at St Andrews.

If Rory McIlroy had spent the week of the game's oldest Major here he would not have been disappointed.

Each room has a huge bed, which is so high off the ground you almost have to climb into it.

The bedrooms also come complete with antique furniture, while the en-suite bathrooms feature giant walk-in showers.

After unloading our luggage and supplies, I opened the large sliding doors in the living room and walked out on to our patio.

The sun was shining and the rolling countryside stretched as far as the eye could see.

That night my wife and I walked through the gardens to the hotel for a meal prepared by double AA Rosette chef Billy Thomson.

We were alone in the Capercaille restaurant but the easy-listening music created a nice atmosphere.

The food was truly exceptional and

we both agreed Craigsanquhar deserved to be a new entry in our all-time dining top 10.

If you don't fancy fine-dining, you can try out the Wee Keep bar for locally sourced fish and chips and Aberdeen Angus beef burgers.

If you want to do more than simply chill out, the staff at Craigsanquhar are happy to arrange specially tailored activity packages for golf, fishing and shooting.

I started day two with a superb cooked breakfast, which included haggis and arguably the best scrambled eggs I have ever tasted.

We hopped in the car and headed for St Andrews, just six miles away.

After a walk around the town, we joined the queue outside the legendary Janet's Ice-cream parlour, which boasts a whopping 52 flavours.

Weather permitting, be sure to take a stroll along West Sands beach, one of the finest in Scotland.

On our final night at Craigsanquhar we opted for a takeaway and a relaxing night in the lodge as it would have been a waste to go out.

The next morning we took a final walk through the perfectly manicured gardens and paused by the wishing well to take in our surroundings.

We knew we had found somewhere special for one simple reason – we did not want to go home.

Travel facts

- Three-bedroom lodges from £600 a night
- Standard hotel rooms from £60 per person per night, including breakfast.
- Deluxe hotel rooms from £70 per person per night.
- Hotel suites from £75 per person per night.

For more information visit: www.craigsanquhar.com or contact 01334 653 426.

By David McCarthy

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IT was a real money-can't-buy moment and, fittingly, just happened to be free.

Our little boys, halfway up a mountain, hand-feeding reindeer just a month before they are strapped to THAT sleigh for THAT night snift.

OK, maybe none of the 49 furry, walking coat stands we met on the windswept mountain in the Cairngorms were Donner, Blitzen, Prancer or Dancer – although I'd have given Rudolph a run for his money with the colour of my hooter.

However, to four-year-old Sam and 18-month-old Jamie, these deer were the real deal.

We'd followed a herdsman named Zack (surely he should have been a Hamish or a Dougal) through a gully, over a rickety bridge and then the climb began.

There's no point in lying, it was a bit of a slog and Jamie had to be carried but it was worth it when we reached the grazing grounds and were able to mingle with these magnificent mountain beasts.

The boys loved it but, for a little while, the adults became children too and smiled as the reindeer nuzzled into our cupped palms filled with feed that looked like muesli.

The trip was organised by the Cairngorm Reindeer Centre, a few miles from Aviemore and about seven from the Highland village of Boat of Garten, where we were lucky enough to be spending the weekend.

That's where the "free" bit comes in.

Book into a family room at the four-star Boat Hotel and they throw in a free trip to meet and feed Britain's only free-ranging reindeer herd.

It's well worth doing but even if reindeer are not your thing, this hotel is still the place to stay if you are travelling to the area with kids.

Many hotels claim to be family-friendly but few live up to the boast as well as this one does.

It has set aside six family rooms with doors leading out on to a lovely garden that winds down to a marvellous attraction on the doorstep.

Unfortunately, the Strathspey Steam Railway was closed the weekend we visited, as it was being prepared for a series of Christmas specials that will run throughout this month.

That didn't stop us having a good wander around the station and it wasn't only our Thomas The Tank Engine-daft boys who admired the steam engine at the platform.

Maybe next time, boys. Actually, definitely next time.

But I digress. Back at the hotel they operate a kids' concierge, which is unique in my experience.

You are contacted in advance and asked what your children are interested in.

The hotel will then do its best to have the relevant DVDs and books available for them when they arrive.

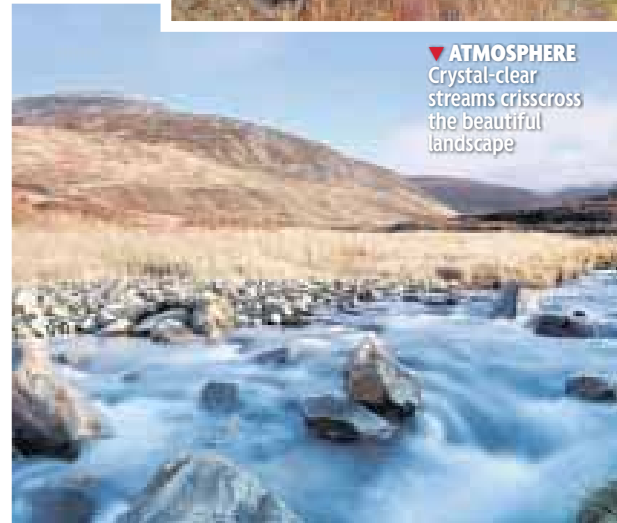
All children aged under 12 eat and stay free when a booking is made for a family room.

Our spacious room had a king-sized bed that could have accommodated all four of us but Sam had his own bed and Jamie's travel cot was far

Here for the deer



▲ **MAKING FRIENDS**
Jamie meets the reindeer herd



▼ **ATMOSPHERE**
Crystal-clear streams crisscross the beautiful landscape

Don't miss the Boat if you're after a family getaway where kids really are welcome

more comfortable than some that we've had foisted upon us in hotels in the past.

Before bedtime The Boat offers a terrific service for kids, where you ring down and order warm milk and cookies, duly delivered to your room for devouring before the lights go out.

Jamie didn't really want his but, in the interests of this review, I forced myself to down them. Verdict? Yum.

Actually, I had a cheek because we had just eaten like kings in the hotel's Osprey Bar.

The Boat's restaurant has just received a two-rosette rating from the AA for the 11th year in a row and the only problem was choosing what to have from the mouth-watering menu.

The fillet steak with peppercorn sauce I plumped for was sublime.

My wife's venison carpaccio starter got a similar thumbs-up and the kids' ice-cream selection was so good that it was a shame to waste it on such

young palates – so I nicked most of it. As we ate, the real log fire crackled and, outside, the snow floated down from the night sky.

If you didn't feel Christmassy at this point, you must have signed the register E. Scrooge.

All in all, it was a special experience, made all the better by our trip on the funicular railway up Cairn Gorm upon our arrival.

The eight-minute trip was spectacular and Sam described it as "the best adventure ever".

Really? What about the fortune we spent taking you to Florida this year? "No dad, the fun-icular railway was better," came the reply. They loved it. And we loved them loving it.

The hotel's reindeer package runs from now until March.

A bed and breakfast family room costs about £139, per room, per night.

Go on, treat them and yourselves to a wonderful experience. Don't miss The Boat.



Contact

● The Boat Hotel, Boat of Garten, near Aviemore, Inverness-shire, PH24 3BH
 For further information
 Tel: 01479 831258
 Fax: 01479 831414 or
 Email: info@boathotel.co.uk

▲ **INVITING** The hotel and some of the chef's award-winning food

News..

THINK of Venice, and think of canals and gondolas, palaces and piazzas.

This destination is unique and one of the most beautiful in the world.

Each season is different in Venice – winter is quieter and atmospheric with its buildings more mysterious through chills and mists.

Summer is when the city gets into tourist mode and the sunny weather brings the colours of the palazzos and water into focus.

Travelling around the waterways, and from Venice



▼ **GRAND A** Venice gondola

to its Lido and islands in the lagoon, doesn't have to be difficult or expensive.

Waterbuses are numerous, frequent and punctual.

Water taxis, on the other hand, can be expensive.

And, of course, there are the famous Venetian gondolas – very touristy, but most visitors do it once and have the pictures to prove it when they get home.

For a more down-to-earth experience, try a traghetto – large, unadorned gondolas, in which you ride standing up across the Grand Canal.

There are certain sights that are must-sees – St Mark's Square, the Doge's Palace, the Rialto Bridge and the The Bridge of Sighs.

Other things to do in Venice include visiting Harry's Bar, where the Bellini cocktail was invented, and taking in some of its many museums and galleries.

But one of the most addictive activities is simply to order a coffee outside in a piazza.

Here you can relax and sit back while you watch the world pass by.

Fly direct from Glasgow on Barrhead Travel's new direct flight next summer and you can discover the wonders of Venice for yourself.

There are plenty of options available for the perfect trip to this gem of the Adriatic coast, and you can tailor your holiday exactly as you like it.

Venice is a busy cruise port and the flights have been specially scheduled to connect with boat departures.

