

Break in the lakes

ETC's MARIE WESTMORELAND visits Windermere

When it comes to the Lake District, Windermere always proves to be a winner for a weekend away. Rolling hills and lush fields filled with grazing farm animals, makes for the most picturesque setting, especially when the sun is shining and blue sky frames the scene.

Along one of the many winding roads leading down to lake Windermere sits Beech Hill Hotel and Spa.

This hotel offers a relaxed, homely vibe that you'd expect to find in the Cumbrian countryside. Creaking floorboards, comfortable Chesterfield sofas dotted around the lobby and a stag's head hanging on the wall adds to its authenticity.

In contrast the shiny new spa offers a much-needed modern touch. You almost feel like you're in a different hotel down in the luxury spa, which is in the basement and is accessed down four flights of stairs.

Inside the stylish spa there's a traditional sauna and steam room overlooking a heated indoor swimming pool that features a mirrored ceiling. It's a great place to escape for some relaxation.

A range of Elemis treatments are available too. I'd recommend booking a treatment during off-peak spa times to ensure you make the most of the tranquil space.

The unisex changing facilities are a little on the small side so it's best not to take many bags down with you, and fresh towels are on hand.

The design of the spa includes huge floor to ceiling windows that frame pretty views of Lake Windermere as well as the spa's garden, which is a great sun-trap.

A large jacuzzi sunk into the garden's decking provides a great vantage point for watching boats sail by on the lazy lake, which is the largest natural lake in England, measuring one mile wide and 220 feet deep.

Such views can be enjoyed from the Burlington's restaurant back up on the ground floor.

Head chef Lukasz Zebryk, from Poland, offers a selection of French and English dishes on the menu and uses fine, fresh local produce and ingredients when cooking.

I found the dining experience a little too formal compared to the hotel's laid-back ambiance, but

nevertheless the food was delicious and beautifully presented.

From the main menu, the Stomaway award-winning black pudding starter, served on a bed of carrot crush and topped with a fried, free-range egg and pork scratching crumble, is a must-try.

While steak fans will enjoy the flame-grilled, Fell-bred fillet steak and rustic chips.

A dish of pesto salmon risotto was spot on too - the fillet was served crisped on top of a bed of creamy risotto and fresh asparagus.

As there wasn't a chocolate option offered on the dessert menu, myself and friend decided to try the passion fruit and ginger biscuit cheesecake, which was a refreshing end to the tasty three-course meal.

The bar's outside terrace is a great spot for after dinner drinks and one of the best places to see the sunset over Lake Windermere, according to a group of locals who'd sailed along to the hotel to enjoy a drink at dusk.

Visit the website www.beechhillhotel.co.uk



Bowness-on-Windermere

Just a short drive from Beech Hill Hotel and Spa is the popular town of Bowness-on-Windermere, which has an abundance of quirky shops, cosy pubs and great places to eat.

Children will love exploring The World of Beatrix Potter, where Peter Rabbit, Jemima Puddleduck and a number of other characters come to life.

You can also hire a rowing boat or jump on one of the many boats that offer cruises around the lake. From Newcastle, Lake Windermere is around a two hour drive, (131 miles).

