

TRAVEL



Beech on the lake is right place to relax

KAREN REGN enjoys a weekend beside Lake Windermere in a wedding cake of a hotel...

MANY-TIERED, inviting and topped with a thin layer of frosting, the Beech Hill Hotel in winter is not unlike one of the wedding cakes served up in its function room.

Situated high above Lake Windermere, its lofty vantage point affords an expansive view over the misty, indigo hued water that serenely laps against the shore below.

Ever majestic, the lake is every overlooking hotel's 'wow factor' and can't possibly disappoint.

We can see it from our perch for the night, the Ruskin Suite. The room is immaculately clean, well appointed and, particularly for a hotel built circa 1900, exceptionally large.

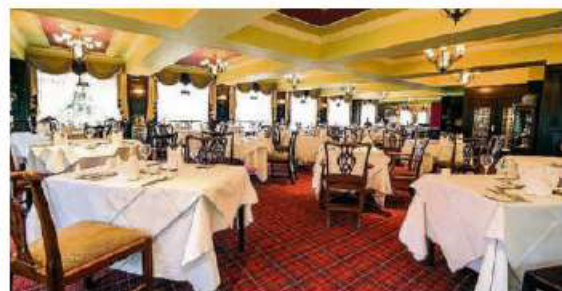
The accommodation

boasts a superking bed – wide enough to sleep an entire family of four if you don't mind a few elbows to the ribs.

So far, so wonderful.

However, as we dined, slept and breakfasted, the Beech Hill earned a split decision, inspiring a spirited debate between me and my other half.

Thanks to a series of minor faults, the hotel left me feeling frosty. By contrast, my husband enthused over each detail



■ The dining room at the Beech Hill Hotel. Above, the frontage on to Lake Windermere

and avowed he wouldn't hesitate to stay again.

In the spirit of marital solidarity, the Beech Hill is taken as a whole, with the overall impression an average of two divergent viewpoints.

The verdict? The Beech Hill is a solid allrounder. It hits all the main points admirably, particularly its cleanliness, value and location.

To begin with, the cosy lounge at Beech Hill Hotel – an outcropping of a

common area containing more leather sofas than a DFS showroom – offers another chance to take in the stunning view, as does its adjoining restaurant.

The dining/function room's decor is traditional, invoking a certain old world opulence.

I made a poor choice for a starter on the blustery day – a watermelon Margarita-pineapple crab tartare. It's a brave offering, however the flavours struck me as overly tropical for a winter menu. My main, a seabass fillet with Mediterranean vegetables and caponata-rocket pesto, lacked the punch of a standout dish.

My husband devoured both his starter, a rich and flavourful Stornaway black pudding with Banerigg duck egg and carrot purée. His poach-roasted chicken main with

dauphinoise potatoes spent barely a moment on the plate.

Continuing on a theme, back in the Ruskin Suite I found the enormous bed far too lumpy and sleep elusive, while my other half slumbered comfortably.

The next morning, he bounded up the stairs to breakfast while only the promise of a brew could have dragged me up the flights of stairs back to the restaurant.

A note about the stairs: Thanks to the placement of its many levels, which are connected by an abundance of stairs and lacking a lift, those with reduced mobility should take care when booking to ensure a suitable room can be arranged on the ground level.

Breakfast overlooking the lake is a treat.

Luxuriating in the

dining room with newspapers and rich roast coffee never gets tired.

Both the hot and cold buffets feature fresh, well presented ingredients, and if there's nothing there to whet your appetite, there's a short menu of to order items.

The Beech Hill does many things right – there is excellent value to be had if your evening meal is added when the room is booked.

Likewise, there is a range of affordable choices on the wine list as well as relatively

inexpensive items on the room service menu.

At every instance the staff was poised, warm and helpful.

On one of the hotel's lower tiers, there is an inviting swimming pool, having a tremendously indulgent atmosphere.

Through the tidy gardens you can stroll down to the water's edge, though this time of year it's more pleasant to kick back on one of the leather sofas and take in the view from up above with a drink in your hand – or maybe a slice of cake.

» Factfile

THE Beech Hill Hotel, Newby Bridge Road, Windermere, Cumbria, LA23 3LR. T: 0844 502 7587; E: reservations@beechhillhotel.co.uk; W: <http://www.beechhillhotel.co.uk/>
Winter rates start from £138 for bed and breakfast, based on two adults sharing.

» 'Luxuriating in the dining room with newspapers and rich roast coffee never gets tired'