



{ GOLF AT ITS BEST }

HEAVENLY HIGHLANDS

Perthshire's world-class inland courses are pretty close to perfection...

WORDS KEVIN BROWN

Perthshire is Scotland's heartbeat, the 'Gateway to the Highlands'... and the gateway to some of the best inland courses in the UK.

While the likes of St Andrews, East Lothian, Aberdeenshire and Ayrshire battle it out for links supremacy within the Home of Golf, perfect Perthshire quietly goes about its inland golfing business when it should be shouting from the rooftops!

For starters, you'll struggle to find a better inland track than Blairgowrie which boasts two superb 18-hole layouts and a lovely nine-holer.

You'll pay a good price to tee it up but there are plenty of cheaper gems too, among them Pitlochry and Auchterarder.

Another plus is that all the courses are within close proximity and a relatively short drive from Perth itself, which happens to be the home of the unique King James VI GC which sits on Moncreiffe island and is Scotland's only self-contained river island course.

TG's Perthshire base was the award-winning Ballathie House, a splendid

country hotel on the banks of the River Tay at Kinclaven close to Perth. In many ways it's the ideal base, specially for peace and quiet, and is just down the road from magical Blairgowrie GC.

Ballathie House manager, Arnaud Merrouche, said: "Perthshire is the heart of Scotland and golf is at the heart of Scottish – and world – sport and our golf packages (see page 138) give guests the opportunity to savour top class accommodation, service and food as well as testing their golfing skills on some of the country's most beautiful inland courses."

Ballathie House is also convenient for the ancient, picturesque town of Dunkeld where Scotland's first king, Kenneth MacAlpin, built a stone church early in the ninth century. It was once the centre of Christianity throughout Scotland though Dunkeld's cathedral was built much later (14th century) only to be plundered by raiding Vikings.

Dunkeld is well worth whiling away a few hours... if you can manage to prise yourselves away from the many nearby golfing attractions available that is.

1. BLAIRGOWRIE (ROSEMOUNT) Par 70, 6,229 yards

Along with Gleneagles, Blairgowrie is widely regarded as Scotland's finest inland venue.

The course was created firstly by Dr Alister MacKenzie and later improved by James Braid – the Rosemount, and Blairgowrie as a whole, is truly a magical place to play.

But, to be honest, with this landscape – you play through generous avenues of firs, pines and silver birches lined by thick, heather – they couldn't really fail.

You'll particularly love the short par 4s (the 9th and 12th) and the climax, which includes a pair of magical par 3s and a sweeping demanding par 4 with the Black Loch on the left.

Make a day of it and tackle the longer, tighter on-site Lansdowne layout.

VITAL STATISTICS

Location: 15 miles north of Perth off A93.
Green fees: All week: £70.
Contact: 01250 872622 or visit www.theblairgowriegolfclub.co.uk
Green fees: £70 a round or £90 to play Rosemount and Lansdowne.



COURSE PLANNER
The town of Perth is at the heart of the county. All the featured courses are short drives away though Pitlochry GC, en-route to Highland country, is a tad further afield.

SEE 1000s OF COURSE PICTURES & SCORECARDS ON THE TG WEBSITE



DATA BANK

PERTHSHIRE ATTRACTIONS...

- The Famous Grouse Experience at Glenturret Distillery, Crieff – sample Scotland's favourite whisky at Scotland's oldest distillery. Open all year. Visit www.thefamougrouse.com
- Highland Safaris, Aberfeldy, offers a unique range of Safari products combining breathtaking scenery, Scottish heritage and adventure. Visit www.highlandsafaris.net
- Scone Palace, Scone, Perth. Once the crowning place of the Kings of Scots, it has a unique position in Scottish history. Visit www.scone-palace.co.uk
- Blair Castle, Blair Atholl, Pitlochry. The 13th century Blair Castle is the ancient seat of the Dukes and Earls of Atholl. The castle enjoys one of Scotland's finest settings in the heart of Highland Perthshire and its history extends over some 740 years. Visit www.blair-castle.co.uk

DID YOU KNOW...

- Perthshire-based, John Dewar Distillers were the first to sell their whisky in bottles.
- Comrie in Perthshire has the nickname 'Shakey Town' due to it lying on the Highland Boundary Fault and experiencing earth tremors for many centuries.
- The interior of the Dome Restaurant, Blairgowrie, was modelled on St Peter's in Rome. It was originally owned by an Italian family.
- Auchterarder not only has a lengthy name but boasts the longest main street in Scotland thoroughly deserving the name 'The Lang Toon' or Long Town.
- Perth Racecourse is the most northerly in Britain. The racecourse, in the grounds of Scone Palace, hosts six meetings per year.



Pitlochry is considered a UK hidden gem.

Crieff offers Strathearn valley views.

King James VI is on an island surrounded by the river Tay.

2. PITLOCHRY Par 69, 5,414 yards

There can be no denying Pitlochry's charm and pedigree. Named by sister magazine Golf World as one of the UK's 'hidden gems', this year also marks the 102nd anniversary of the classy Willie Fernie parkland.

Plotted on the grounds of ancient Pictish forts, Pitlochry is one of Scotland's best kept golfing secrets and best inland layouts.

With sweeping views down the Tummel Valley and in the shadow of the Ben Y Vrackie, the course has been entertaining and thrilling golfers, including legendary names Harry Vardon, Walter Hagen and Max Faulkner, for more than a century.

Not only does it provide a great variety of holes and undulating greens, you'll also find Pitlochry in tip-top condition and blessed by stunning views virtually throughout.

VITAL STATISTICS

Location: 28 miles NW of Perth.
Contact: 01796 472792 or visit www.pitlochrygolf.co.uk
Green fees: Mon-Fri: £35. Sat-Sun: £40.

3. CRIEFF Par 71, 6,091 yards

Crieff is just 10 minutes from Gleneagles but more than £100 cheaper to play!

Wonderfully positioned at the Gateway to the Highlands and surrounded by breathtaking countryside, the main Crieff attraction is the Ferntower layout, originally the handiwork of Old Tom Morris and improved by James Braid.

The gently undulating Ferntower gives exquisite Strathearn valley views and starts with a par 3. Equally unusually you'll find the only three par 5s on the course on the front nine, including the back-to-back 5th and 6th which are preceded by the shortest hole – a 115-yarder known as 'Wee Knock'.

Crieff is also the home of the nine-hole Dornock course, a testing warm-up for the Ferntower.

VITAL STATISTICS

Location: 17 miles west of Perth.
Contact: 01764 652909 or visit www.crieffgolf.co.uk
Green fees: Mon-Thurs: £37. Fri-Sun: £43.

4. KING JAMES VI Par 70, 6,038 yards

King James VI is a unique place to play. It's the pride of Perth.

Not only is it steeped in history, it is located in one of the most unique settings in Scottish golf – breathtakingly plotted on an island and surrounded by the river Tay. As a result, a hook on several holes is guaranteed to get wet.

Designed by Old Tom Morris at the end of the 19th century, the club was so named in tribute to the King's encouragement of "gowf" after his predecessors had banned it.

The course itself is a fast-draining parkland layout with trees which line most fairways and shield golfers from the never far away Tay... and that includes tight on the left of the short but tricky par-4 opening hole.

VITAL STATISTICS

Location: Moncreiffe island, Perth.
Contact: 01738 632460 or visit www.kingjamesvi.co.uk
Green fees: Mon-Fri: £25 (Tues special: £15, includes coffee & bacon roll). Sat-Sun: £28.
2-FORE!-1: All week.



**'ALYTH IS LITTLE-KNOWN
DESPITE BEING A QUALITY
HEATHLAND COURSE
CREATED IN 1894'**

SEE 1000s
OF COURSE
REVIEWS
ON THE TG
WEBSITE

Murrayshall's
Lynedoch course
requires accuracy.

5. ALYTH

Par 70, 5,990 yards

Something of a hidden gem, Alyth is little known outside the area even though it's a quality heathland course created in 1894.

That's when the original nine holes were created by Old Tom Morris – though it wasn't until 1934 that James Braid, 'completed' the job and turned Alyth into an 18-holer.

Severe winds at the start of 2011 felled more than 40 trees, causing damage to tees and greens, but it's back in fine form now and should be treated with plenty of respect despite being relatively short. You certainly can't afford to be distracted by the setting overlooking Perthshire hills.

Narrow fairways – they're well tree-lined – and undulating terrain put the emphasis on good course management and accurate shots.

VITAL STATISTICS

Location: 16 miles NW of Dundee on the A91.

Contact: 01828 632268 or visit www.alythgolfclub.co.uk

Green fees: Mon-Fri: £30. Sat-Sun: £35.

MORE MUST-PLAYS

● Auchterarder

A worthy neighbour of Gleneagles.

Factfile Par 69, 5,347 yards. **Green fees:** Mon-Thurs: £35. Fri-Sun: £40. **Tel:** 01764 662804.

● Strathmore

Modern golf centre with 27 holes and top practice facilities.

Factfile Par 70, 5,848 yards. **Green fees:** Mon-Fri: £32. Sat-Sun: £38. **Tel:** 01828 633322.

● Dunkeld & Birnam

Scenic parkland layout overlooking historic Dunkeld. **Factfile**

Par 69, 5,249 yards. **Green fees:** Mon-Fri: £25. Sat-Sun: £30. **Tel:** 01350 727524.

● Whitemoss

Opened in 1994 but is maturing well and offers good value.

Factfile Par 69, 5,639 yards. **Green fees:** All week: £25. **Tel:** 01738 720300.

6. MURRAYSHALL

Par 71, 5,868 yards

Murrayshall is a fine stay-and-play venue boasting two contrasting Hamilton J Stutt-designed 18-hole courses (Murrayshall championship and Lynedoch) which are plotted on 350 acres of rolling countryside.

Most Murrayshall visitors understandably tee it up on the longer Championship layout with its tree-flanked gently undulating fairways, white sand bunkers and meandering burns, but its considerably shorter neighbour presents a serious all-round challenge itself being much tighter and densely tree-lined.

We can guarantee you'll be cursing the tall stands of Scots pines on at least one occasion! Good value at its normal price but even better with a 2-FORE!-1 voucher.

VITAL STATISTICS

Location: Scone, Perth.

Contact: 01738 554804 or visit www.murrayshall.co.uk

Green fees: Mon-Fri: £42. Sat-Sun: £48.

2-FORE!-1: All week.

PICK A PERTH DEAL

Three great offers to consider



PEACE AND PERFECT GOLF

At Ballathie House near Perth you can enjoy a peaceful stay-and-play break taking in the impressive course at Blairgowrie Golf Club. The following packages are available:

- One night bed and breakfast plus one round of golf – £136 per person.
- One night B&B plus two rounds of golf – £169pp.
- Two nights' B&B plus three rounds of golf – £299 per person.
- Three nights' B&B plus four rounds of golf – £399 per person.

Prices are based on two sharing a twin room. To book call 01250 883268, e-mail: e-mail@ballathiehousehotel.com or visit www.ballathiehousehotel.com/short-breaks/golf-offer

Accommodation and golf are subject to availability (golf not available on Wednesdays or until 2pm at weekends).