

A real treat

Having good neighbours has helped a retired couple turn their B&B into a haven for relaxing, activity-packed weekends, as Rita Campbell finds out

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ISN'T it lovely when a great idea just comes together quite naturally?

Barrie and Olwyn Jack have been running the main wing of Duntrune House, just outside Dundee, as a bed and breakfast for a number of years now.

By happy coincidence, Alison Brady opened her Retreat Salon just a few minutes away, offering a host of treatments, then belly-dancing instructor Caroline Winter moved into another wing of Duntrune House and artist Liz McCarthy built a studio at her home in the grounds.

Delia Gallagher, a local yoga instructor, was also a regular visitor to Alison's salon.

Barrie and Olwyn were keen to hear more about the activities of their neighbours, and before they knew it, the idea of The Real Retreat was born.

Visitors can now enjoy relaxing, activity-packed weekends in rural Angus, just 10 minutes north of Dundee.

I went along with my husband, Sean, to meet the partners of the retreat, while sampling some of the activities and enjoying Barrie and Olwyn's hospitality.

Since the 1980s, they have been lovingly working in the gardens and picking up bargain antiques at auctions throughout the country, furnishing and decorating the house in the regency style of the time.

The charming retired couple are keen historians and have researched the family tree of the Graham family, who once owned the house, and delight in telling their guests all about it.

Built in 1826, guests arriving at Duntrune House are given a real feel for the time.

However, despite their fondness for history, Barrie and Olwyn are very forward-thinking, and use environmentally friendly and organic products throughout the house.

The en suites in all four of the bedrooms are well stocked with organic soaps and toiletries.

The couple are also making a conscious effort to encourage visitors from Scotland and northern England, who will not be using up air miles and leaving a heavy carbon footprint to get there.

Meals are served in the dining room around a large mahogany table, in front of a roaring fire.

The emphasis is on local produce and Olwyn is an excellent cook, serving up her homemade bread and trout caught from the Tay by her cousin – you can't get much more local than that.

A variety of packages are on offer: guests can choose a tailor-made break such as Refresh Body and Mind – yoga, painting and pampering, Retrain your Frame - yoga, belly dancing and pampering, or they can mix and match and choose their own activities.

After a relaxing dinner with Barrie and Olwyn, Caroline Winter came round in a stunningly exotic peacock-inspired belly-dancing costume and demonstrated how to release your inner goddess.

Caroline has been a belly-dance performer and teacher for over a decade and soon had us shimmying our hips and attempting to master the belly-roll.

Belly dancing was originally an exercise to prepare women for childbirth and it can do wonders for the figure, helping women to re-align posture and regain confidence.

Sessions with Caroline take place in the spacious living room of Duntrune House.

The next morning we were up early for a yoga session in the same room with Delia Gallagher.

Both being reasonably fit but complete beginners at yoga, we were amazed at how easy it was to get into our first routines.

Delia's classes blend physical exercise, breathing and mediation, and include a basic chi gong detoxifying warm-up routine.

She first became interested in yoga during a stay in Thailand and has undertaken teacher-training in India with Yoga Alliance and a two-year Yoga Scotland teacher-training course.

We learned that yoga has many subtle benefits, working the muscles of the body, the mind and the spirit – an activity to reunite the body and the soul.

Now feeling suitably relaxed and loosened up, we popped down to Alison Brady's salon, The Retreat, just a three-minute car journey from Duntrune House, for detoxifying full-body massages.

I had been coming down with a bit of a cold before the weekend, and Alison's soothing hands and the beautiful lavender-scented oils she used set me up for a rejuvenating night's sleep.

Alison moved her salon out from Dundee city centre to the countryside to give customers a real feeling of getting away from it all, an idea which has proven popular.

The salon benefits from being in the rolling countryside, but has all of the latest treatments you would expect from an urban establishment, including colon hydrotherapy, crystal facials and ear candling.

The following morning we enjoyed a delicious grilled breakfast of sausage, bacon and eggs before taking a short walk to Liz McCarthy's house, where she has a studio and small gallery in her garden.

Here, guests can enjoy one-to-one painting tuition and reflect on the beauty of the countryside and the subtlety of the colours.

Beginners can recapture their sense of adventure, experienced artists can refresh their talent.

Liz takes only two pupils so they can enjoy all of her attention.

The well-known painter holds exhibitions all over Scotland and graduated with a BA from Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art in Dundee in 1994.

We headed home having met some lovely people and enjoyed a fun weekend.

Whether you go for a tailor-made package or pick and choose, The Real Retreat is a great excuse to go away for a relaxing weekend and try something a bit different.

Prices vary depending on the package chosen. Bed and Breakfast at Duntrune House, based on a two-night stay: Shared occupancy: £35 per person per night. Single occupancy: £45 per night. Dinner: £20.

Painting tuition: Tuition for a half day, including lunch and materials, £65. Full day £120.

Yoga and belly dancing per session: all sessions last about 90 minutes. Individuals: £30 per person. Up to four people: £15 per person. Five to eight people: £10 per person.