

Slice of decadence steeped in history

Ballathie House Hotel

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I didn't think I would ever reach the age when I fancied a drive in the countryside on a Sunday. This is something my grandparents do and I rib them for it regularly. But alas, that time has come and as Mr Kerry and I wanted a nice cosy lunch somewhere with our wee one, we picked a restaurant that required us to take the stunning Perthshire back roads.

Ballathie House Hotel needs to be destination in its own right as it's rather out of the way. After 40 minutes of enjoying the scenery, that silly non-word "hangry" was starting to make a lot more sense.

However, as we swept up the long driveway to this hotel and estate, and headed through the heavy front door, it was clear we were entering a special part of Scotland's history.

Upon arrival we were led through a traditional lounge with an open fire, and into the dining room.

I've always felt first impressions count for a lot when it comes to dining out as this is when the mood is set. Admittedly, my heart sank when I first saw Ballathie House Hotel's dining facility.

The tables had been meticulously dressed with heavy dark cloths and covered in white linen. Our waiter was formally dressed and our table by the window looked odd with a high chair in place of one of the comfortable armed dining chairs.

That said, the room is beautiful and traditionally-styled. Intricate birds and flower patterns don the walls and the large, draped picture windows draw the eye to the River Tay outside.

It often seems to be the case that when there is no music in a dining room, patrons tend to talk more quietly. This makes for a very still and stifled atmosphere, which made me even more nervous about the high chair situation in this instance.

I hadn't looked at the menu prior to arriving but had visions of prawn cocktail served in a wine glass, followed by steak Diane. But I was wrong about this – very wrong.

The service we received from the moment we arrived was highly efficient but relaxed and incredibly cheery.

Our bubbly waiter made such an effort to be friendly to our toddler and include her in our dining experience. She warmed to him instantly and there were waves and high-fives throughout our lunch. He was a credit

Price: Special lunches:
Wednesday – Saturday
£19.95 for 3 courses;
Sunday lunch £27.95
for 3 courses

Value: 10/10

Menu: 7/10

Atmosphere: 7/10

Service: 9/10

Food: 9/10

to the hotel. The Sunday lunch menu had a choice of four dishes for each course and no 80s classics in sight.

Mr Kerry had salmon tartare to start and I had the goat's cheese. The presentation was immaculate – bright white plates were lit up with intricate bursts of colour. Mr Kerry's bright gleaming salmon surrounded a potato salad packed full of creamy, vinegary, mustardy flavours and the addition of the cucumber relish topped off a light delight.

My goat's cheese had been whipped and was accompanied by fresh figs, small cubes of compressed apple, candied nuts and a spiced granola crisp. Each delicate element had been prepared with care.

Mr Kerry had slow roasted lamb as his main course and given a choice between that and the roast beef, I think it was the idea of the roasted baby onions that swung it for him.

The delicate vegetables and lightly mashed potatoes went well with the tender meat, but it was the jus that really made it with its rich flavour.

I chose puy lentil Wellington, which would have been a tad on the dry side if it hadn't been for the spiced butternut squash velouté which was creamy, velvety and decadent.

The pleasingly al dente vegetables dotted around the plate had been shaped and trimmed and placed to form a really attractive dish. We were really pleased with our choices.

Usually at this point, as we're trying to be good, we would have decided to skip dessert.

However, as it was a set three-course menu we gladly obliged. And I'm thankful we did – the starters and main courses were great but the desserts were simply heavenly.

Mr Kerry's creme brûlée was not served in a ramekin but stood proudly on its own. Sous vide rhubarb, sorbet, gel, and gingerbread all worked together to enhance the creamy dream, and it was prepared and presented with fabulous flair.

My baked chocolate tart was divine. The pastry was buttery and crumbly, the filling custardy and rich and the accompanying marmalade ice cream so deliciously bitter it reminded me of my favourite tippie, Campari.

It was served with a jug of sauce anglaise which Mr Kerry ended up pouring on to his spoon and lapping up. Uncouth and a terrible dining role-model for our daughter but a testament to the calibre of the puddings.

We had a really lovely lunch at the Ballathie House Hotel. It is steeped in so much history that on our next visit we would love to cosy-in by the fire and learn a bit more about it and its wealth of interesting historical visitors.

Although the setting seems traditional and formal at first, the service is charming.

We discovered a little slice of fine dining in the hotel and all at gastropub prices. Incredible value for real quality.

Total:
42/50



by Kerry Moores

