



THE GHILLIE GUIDE

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A Handbook To Your Stay At The Fife Arms Hotel



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There is nothing quite like the Fife Arms. In the remote Aberdeenshire village of Braemar, hugged by the fast-flowing Clunie Water and set against a tableau of dramatic, wide-open skies, endless horizons, and the soaring Cairngorm Mountains, this wildly romantic hotel is the passion project of Iwan and Manuela Wirth - the couple behind the acclaimed global Hauser & Wirth galleries - who imaginatively restored this former landmark Victorian coaching inn into a flamboyant art experience. Inspired by the landscape, local community, history and culture, the Fife Arms is where tradition meets an explosion of contemporary art in an extraordinary story that unfolds in wonderfully extravagant detail.

“We often say that Braemar is the most famous village in the world. It has this extraordinary history, the Braemar Games have been happening for over 200 years. They draw a huge crowd, and we are always amazed at how international yet humble these games are, how authentic. And it is this spirit that has inspired our restoration of The Fife Arms.

If people are looking for an authentic, deep and almost spiritual experience, with great food in an extraordinarily comfortable place, with the most astonishing light and landscape, we hope they will find all that at The Fife Arms.”

— **Iwan and Manuela Wirth**

Drawing on the hotel’s rich narrative of art, community and place, we have created this guide to give you a taste of what’s to come and to share with you what our team love about the Fife Arms, the village of Braemar and the spectacular surroundings.

Feel free to dip in for some quick tips on what to see and do in the local area, or soak up the inspiring scenery and culture of Royal Deeside through our extensive reading lists, music recommendations and links to local lore.

The delight is in the detail at the Fife Arms, and we can’t wait to welcome you.

THE GHILLIES

‘Ghillie’ is the Gaelic term for a Highlands attendant who looks after guests, particularly visitors on a fishing, hunting, or deer stalking expedition. Today, the Ghillie team at the Fife Arms not only look after all of our guests, but they are in charge of creating unforgettable memories and experiences too.

Whether you are celebrating a special occasion, or you would like to craft a bespoke itinerary to experience the best of what the Scottish Highlands have to offer, our team can create something exceptional. From thrilling helicopter rides to see the Cairngorms in their full glory, to a private chef-cooked lunch in our remote hut perched in the middle of the grouse moors, to bespoke tastings at a local whisky boutique, to even tailored menus, the Ghillies are happy to assist you. To explore the full range of possibilities, please email our Ghillie team, reservations@thefifearms.com









EXPERIENCE THE
EXTRAORDINARY





ART

As the creation of Iwan and Manuela Wirth, it's no surprise that the Fife Arms is all about the art. Bringing their lifelong passion to the hotel, the duo have curated an extraordinary collection of over 14,000 pieces, including furniture, militaria, archaeology and taxidermy, as well as outstanding works of contemporary fine art.

From portraits by Picasso, Man Ray and Lucian Freud, to images of the natural world by artists as diverse as Archibald Thorburn and Martin Creed, this exceptional collection fills the entire hotel, casually displayed to form an immersive experience, unattainable in a public gallery or a museum setting.

On arrival, enjoy a guided Art Tour with our knowledgeable staff, explore our extensive library of art publications, or simply sit back and bask in the glorious artwork all around you.

CONSERVATION

Situated in the heart of the [Cairngorms National Park](#), the largest National Park in the United Kingdom, among the region's soaring mountains, deep river-cut valleys and swathes of dense pine forests, the very essence of the Fife Arms is inspired by its extraordinary landscape and surrounding nature.

With such natural beauty comes great responsibility and we are committed to supporting the region's delicate ecological balance through our conservation programme. The hotel actively supports many local environmental protection projects, including an initiative aimed at safeguarding the River Dee's freshwater pearl mussels which, at one point, were hunted to near extinction. In fact, the cast bronze mussel shell fobs - on all the Fife Arms' room keys - references this much-loved endangered species.

On a broader scale, Ben Carter, the Director of Sustainable Growth at Artfarm (our parent company), works closely with local estates, landowners and environmental agencies across the region to ensure that our working practices and educational programmes do everything they can to champion the importance of environmental stewardship to our staff and guests.

Our enthusiasm for the local environment is undoubtedly fuelled by the passion of the Deeside residents who embrace the mantra 'by leaves we live', first said by the pioneering environmentalist, sociologist and town planner Patrick Geddes, who was born in the nearby village of Ballater in 1854, and whose ideas continue to resonate today.

If you are interested in learning more about our conservation programme and how this delicate landscape is managed, our Ghillie team can organise guided walks with our respected researchers. For those who wish to go into more depth on the subject, we can arrange private tailored briefings with our conservation experts.







THE EXCEPTIONAL

When we welcome a guest to the Fife Arms, we want to share with them an experience which is personal to their own passions and inspirations. Our dedicated Ghillie team specialise in crafting exceptional guest experiences, whether it's a picnic in the woods with a private chef, or a guided walk across the Highlands finishing up with a candlelit dinner overlooking a grouse moor. We also work closely with local artisans to create bespoke heirloom pieces, unforgettable mementos guests can share with future generations, such as a family tartan or your own whisky cask.

BRAEMAR AND BEYOND

We want to take you beyond the realms of Braemar and be your local guide to the area, to show you just how dynamic this part of Scotland truly is. From our favourite local eateries, to excursions shaped by the surrounding natural beauty, encompassing wild mountain peaks, lush river valleys, sprawling heather moorlands, magnificent forests and grand estates. Whether you choose to explore on foot, by car or even by air, our Ghillie team can point you in the right direction and make sure you experience the best of what Scotland has to offer.

Here, in the following pages, are just a few of the activities we look forward to sharing with you at the Fife Arms.



BRAEMAR AND BEYOND

ARCHITECTURAL GEMS

From the Victorian grandeur of the Fife Arms to ancient castles, to contemporary cabins, Braemar and the surrounding area are home to a charming collection of architectural styles. So lace up your walking boots and join one of our knowledgeable local experts for a guided architectural walk around the village and the wider area.





Scottish Castle Country

Known as ‘Scottish Castle Country’, there are over 300 magnificent castles within Aberdeenshire alone, with many of these gems accessible on a full-day excursion from the Fife Arms.

Contemporary Architecture

Pair your architecture excursion with a fine whisky tipple and make your way to the new state-of-the-art visitor centre at the Macallan Distillery. Cut into the hills of Speyside, the new distillery, with its rippling wildflower roof, is the work of international firm, [Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners](#) and sits on the Easter Elchies estate, which has been home to the single malt whisky since 1824.

V&A Dundee

Embrace all things design and spend the day at the [V&A Dundee](#). A two-hour drive on the stunning east coast of the country, along the banks of the River Tay, the striking building was designed by Japanese architect Kengo Kuma and took its inspiration from the dramatic rocky cliffs that line Scotland’s coast.

To arrange a castle or architectural excursion, please speak to our Ghillie team.

CAIRNGORM CLASSICS

Home to one quarter of Scotland's native forests, five of the country's six highest peaks and many rare and endangered species of wildlife, the magnificent Cairngorms National Park is often described as nature's playground thanks to its outdoor pursuits, from its incredible walking and cycling routes to water sport and snow sport activities, 12 golf courses and even the first permanent bridge-based bungee jump in the UK.

With the Fife Arms set right at the heart of the park, there's no excuse not to make the most of what is right on our doorstep.





Guided Hike

Boot up and head into the wilderness, either with an estate ranger, a mountain guide or a history buff for company.

From £225

E-Bike Hire and Guiding

A fun and eco-friendly way to explore this rugged landscape. For those looking for more of a workout, a range of regular bicycles are available too!

From £200 per guest

Foraging

Connect with nature and head out with our professional in-house forager, where you'll gather all sorts of wild foods and then learn what to do with them at one of our workshops.

From £90 per guest

Horse Riding at Glen Tanar

Escape to Glen Tanar, which boasts some of Scotland's most breathtaking scenery. It's a 45-minute journey from us, but it's worth the ramble through the romantic pine forests and heather-clad hills.

From £50 per guest

Whisky and Food Pairing Workshop

Learn about Scotland's most famous export with food and travel writer Ghillie Basan at this fabulous and rare whisky and food pairing workshop in a cosy farmhouse perched in a remote corner of the Cairngorms.

From £500

BRAEMAR AND BEYOND

CREATIVE PURSUITS

Our surrounding landscape with its extraordinary light has been the source of creative inspiration for many artists over the centuries, and under the guidance of experienced professional artists you'll have everything you need to create your very own Scottish masterpiece.



Wild Sketching

Whether it's in our beautiful hotel garden or out on the heather-clad hills, enjoy an inspiring day of sketching outdoors in the company of a professional artist.

From £270 per guest

Landscape Photography

Grab your camera and head out to stunning beauty spots and dramatic viewpoints in the company of a professional photographer to capture Insta-worthy shots of the wildlife and dramatic scenery on our doorstep.

From £320 per guest

Design your own Tartan

Should you long to have a family tartan or tweed of your own, our staff can connect you with experienced textile designers who will work with you to create your very own tartan design.

From £1500 per guest

Creative Writing Workshop

Harness your inner wordsmith and enjoy a fun and supportive writing session with a professional writer and poet, using the interiors and art collections of the Fife Arms as your inspiration.

From £270 per guest





BRAEMAR AND BEYOND

FAMILY EXPERIENCES

At the Fife Arms, your family adventure awaits. We offer a range of family experiences from treasure hunts, foraging and nature trails, to private guided tours to learn about the wildlife that inhabits this unique landscape, art classes and so much more.

Please speak to our Ghillie team to arrange personalised experiences to suit your family's wishes.

Don't forget to check out our family room, too, which is a treasure trove of fun for all ages.





BRAEMAR AND BEYOND

GOLF

Lying in a natural amphitheatre created by the imposing Grampian Mountains and part of the magnificent Cairngorms National Park, Braemar is the home of Scotland's highest and wildest golf course, where play is watched by endangered ospreys, watchful stags and rare red squirrels.

A great 18-hole course, it is suitable for all levels of experience, but for beginners who want to try their hand at this ancient sport, personal instructors are available too.

A round at Braemar golf course costs £35 per guest. To book a round of golf or a lesson, please contact our Ghillie team. If you are looking to experience other local golf courses, Royal Deeside is home to many wild courses and golf clubs including the Aboyne, Banchory and Ballater golf clubs. Please speak to our Ghillie team to organise a round at one of these courses.

BRAEMAR AND BEYOND

HIGHLAND TOURS

Whether it's exploring Scotland's majestic and wild scenery, marvelling at ancient castles, meandering through tiny villages packed with history and culture, or visiting a distillery, we can arrange a tailor-made tour and show you the best of what the Scottish Highlands has to offer, either by car, on foot or both.





Off-Road 4x4 Safari

Head off the beaten track and admire the regal Highlands scenery, deep within the local estates.

From £90 per guest

Distillery Tour

Learn the secrets behind Scotland's national drink and sample a 'wee dram' of *uisge beatha* - the 'water of life' and the name given to Scotch whisky by the ancient Celts - at the nearby Royal Lochnagar Distillery.

From £25 per guest

Balmoral Castle

This is your chance to visit the Highland home of the British Royal family since Queen Victoria's reign, which is open to the public for tours when the Royal family is not in residence.

From £25 per guest





BRAEMAR AND BEYOND

LOCAL HEROES

From bakeries to restaurants, there is so much to experience, so here are a few of our favourites, found in the neighbouring villages of Braemar:

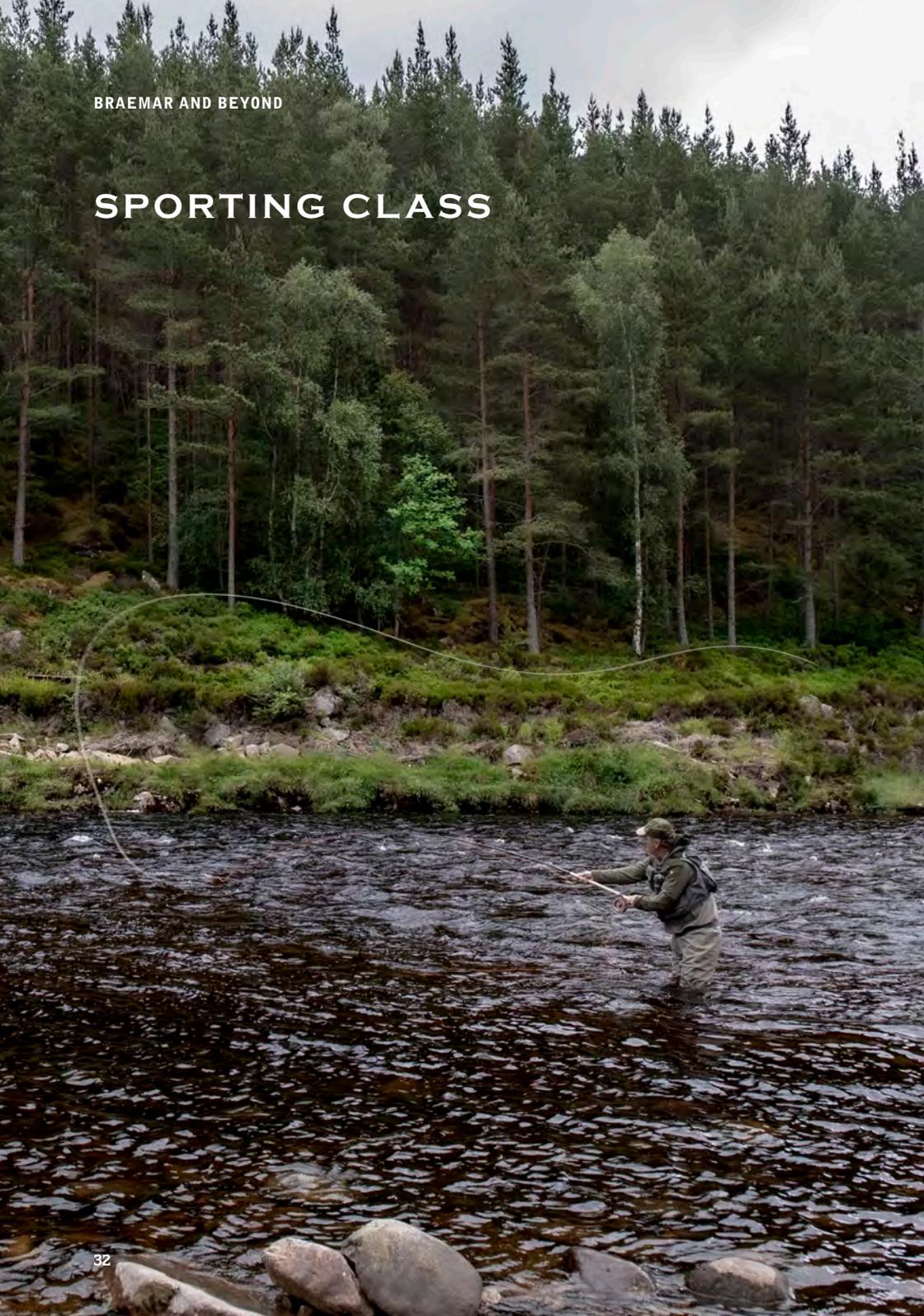
The Highlanders Bakehouse is a wee bakery in the nearby village of Crathie and is a must-visit to try Aberdeenshire's famous 'buttery'. Also known as a 'rowie', this wonderfully buttery, flaky bread roll - similar to a croissant - is best served toasted with a good lashing of butter, jam and a strong cup of tea.

In the picturesque Highland village of Ballater, Rothesay Rooms pays tribute to the best of Scottish flavours, with light, modern dishes using only fresh, seasonal and local produce. The restaurant's menu changes with the seasons but expect perfectly executed plates such as the seared scallop and pressed oxtail, served with celeriac, burnt leek and topped with truffle.

Finally, for casual dining, enjoy delightful riverside eateries along the banks of the River Dee – like The Boat Inn and Banchory Lodge Hotel, offering delicious hearty food and local ales. Maryculter House, an all-day dining spot, is home to Poachers Brasserie serving classic favourites from juicy beef burgers to baked rice pudding.

BRAEMAR AND BEYOND

SPORTING CLASS





Fishing

Try your hand at salmon or trout fishing in the Dee, Don or Tay rivers with local experts to advise and instruct.

From £200 per guest

Stalking

Talk to our Ghillies who can advise on a wide selection of shooting estates across the country.

From £700 per guest

Clay Pigeon Shooting

Whether you're a complete beginner or an established shot, clay shooting is a great day out for everyone who is willing to travel. Remember to pre-book.

From £205 per guest

Rough Shooting

Dip into the world of hunting and enjoy the camaraderie and relaxed, fun atmosphere of a half-day of rough shooting.

From £180 per guest

The Macnab Challenge

The ultimate Scottish achievement, start at dawn and stalk and shoot a deer, catch a salmon, and bag a brace of grouse in one day! Are you up for the challenge?

From £9,500 for the experience

Snow Sports

With two ski centres on our doorstep, your winter sport choice is only influenced by the depth of the snow on the mountains when you visit. The months between December and April are best.



PRE-ARRIVAL CONSIDERATIONS



APPAREL

Whether you prefer the comfort of a much-loved Barbour jacket or have a fondness for more formal evening wear, at the Fife Arms we are relaxed, and your attire will fit right in, whatever you choose to wear.

This being Scotland, though, make sure to prepare for our notoriously changeable weather and pack plenty of layers along with a comfy pair of walking shoes to make the most of the breath-taking landscape surrounding the hotel.

And should you forget to bring anything, our Fife Arms Shop is at hand with everything from blankets, scarves and gloves to wraps made in the finest wools and cashmere, including a bespoke range of wearables in our signature Fife Arms tartan.

If you arrive with a suitcase brimming only with evening wear, no problem, we have a sturdy selection of outdoor clothing that you can borrow during your stay.







WEATHER

Aberdeenshire has been described as a place of big skies and wide horizons, loved for its fresh clear air and the quality of its light. Summer nights are lengthy and light with only a few hours of true darkness. In contrast, winter nights are long and star filled, occasionally lit by the spectacular Northern Lights (*Aurora Borealis*).

Braemar has twice entered the UK weather records with the lowest-ever UK temperature -27.2°C (-17.0°F), on 11 February 1895 and 10 January 1982.

It also entered the record books on 1 October 2015 as being both the hottest and the coldest place in the UK – all in the same day! The mercury soared to 23.3°C (73.9°F) during the day but dipped dramatically to -1.3°C (29.6°F) in the early hours of the morning.

It's fair to say that you just never know what the Scottish weather is going to throw at you. And it's also no surprise to learn that Prince Albert donated a weather station to the village of Braemar, which is still in situ today.

A popular seasonal pastime is to check out the live weather conditions on the Glenshee snow gates webcam. Essential viewing in the winter months.

DOGS

Following faithfully on the heels of both HM The Queen Victoria and our reigning monarch, HM The Queen Elizabeth II, we love dogs. We have artworks immortalising them and a hotel bedroom dedicated to one, so it goes without saying you are welcome to bring your four-legged friends to stay with us at the Fife Arms.

We have a range of dog-friendly rooms and a supply of comfy dog beds, feeding bowls, blankets or anything else your dog may need to make themselves at home. Should the Highland weather prove too chilly for your pet, our Fife Arms Shop stocks a range of dog coats, while a visit to the Ghillie's desk may well become a highlight for your dog, not least for the stash of delicious treats they keep at hand.

The only restrictions we have are that dogs are not permitted in the Drawing Room, Clunie Dining Room or Spa, but are welcome in all other public areas, including the Flying Stag bar where food is served all day.







PODCAST

From working with local artisans and suppliers, to contributing to village life, community is at the heart of everything we do at the Fife Arms, and is imperative to building a sustainable future.

The People of the Fife

There's no doubt, too, that the Fife Arms wouldn't exist without the many members of the Braemar community who played a central role in the redevelopment of the hotel, and their stories are something we take pride in celebrating. Hosted by Braemar resident and former BBC producer and presenter, Doreen Wood, our "People of the Fife" podcasts offer a fascinating insight into the development of the Fife Arms and the diverse range of individuals involved in bringing this special hotel to life. Listen to the experiences of some of the key people here, from local historians Maureen and Tom Kelly to architect and lead contractor Ben and Tom Addy.

Architect and Lead Contractor - **Ben and Tom Addy**
Local Historians – **Maureen and Tom Kelly**
Fife Arms Forager – **Natasha Lloyd**
Director of Wild Resources – **Ben Carter**

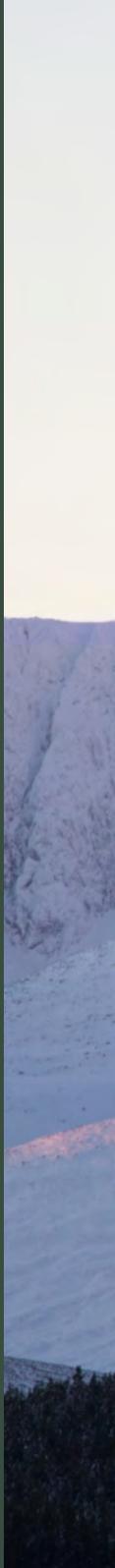
FILM, LITERATURE AND MUSIC

Film

From the whimsical romanticism of Vincente Minnelli's *Brigadoon* to Danny Boyle's darkly comic *Trainspotting*, Scotland, in all its forms, has inspired filmmakers of the world.

The extraordinary Aberdeenshire landscape has featured in major studio productions including Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises*, Disney/Pixar's *Brave*, and Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*, as well as low-budget sci-fi classics like *The Planet* and *Outpost 11*.

Our area, too, has inspired one of the most iconic visual motifs of the Disney film empire; within an hour of the Fife Arms, you'll find the pink, turreted splendour of [Craigievar Castle](#) - a fabulous example of Scots Baronial architecture - which is believed to have been the inspiration for Walt Disney's Cinderella Castle.





Literature

Stories loom large in Scottish culture and Braemar and the Cairngorms have their own rich heritage as an inspiration for writers. From Robert Louis Stevenson's penning of *Treasure Island* whilst holidaying in Braemar to the Victorian period's most notorious poet Lord Byron, and his intoxication of the Cairngorm landscape, our location has inspired much literary greatness.

*Away, ye gay landscapes, ye gardens of roses,
In you let the minions of luxury rove,
Restore me the rocks where the snow-flake reposes,
Though still they are sacred to freedom and love.
Yet Caledonia, beloved are thy mountains,
Round their white summits though elements war,
Though cataracts foam 'stead of smooth-flowing fountains,
I sigh for the valley of dark Lochnagar.*

[Read Byron's full "Lochnagar" poem here](#)

If you were to read one book before coming to visit us at the Fife Arms, we highly recommend *The Living Mountain*, by Scottish author Nan Shepherd. Completed in 1944, *The Living Mountain* has come to redefine the experience of hillwalking and mountaineering from being 'on' the mountain to being 'in' the mountain. Her lyrical descriptions of her homeland have become the source of pride and inspiration to many beyond the mountain sport community and Shepherd's national importance is recognised by her image being carried on the country's five pound note.

"In September dawns I hardly breathe - I am an image in a ball of glass. The world is suspended there, and I in it."
— **The Living Mountain, Nan Shepherd**

For the poetic of heart, we urge you to dive into the pages of Scotland's national bard, Robert Burns, or seek out the hidden gems of Marion Angus, a turn-of-the-century poet who often wrote in her native Scots's dialect. Through these poets' words, you will see the land of Scotland but also the character of its people.





Mary's Song by Marion Angus*

*I wad ha'e gi'en him my lips tae kiss,
Had I been his, had I been his;
Barley breid and elder wine,
Had I been his as he is mine.
The wanderin' bee it seeks the rose;
Tae the lochan's bosom the burnie goes;
The grey bird cries at evenin's fa',
'My luve, my fair one, come awa'.'
My beloved sall ha'e this he'rt tae break,
Reid, reid wine and the barley cake,
A he'rt tae break, and a mou' tae kiss,
Tho' he be nae mine, as I am his.*

Music

Scotland is internationally known for its traditional music, which is instantly recognisable from its beat to its fiddles and bagpipes. This proud tradition has been re-embraced by a raft of new Scottish singer-songwriters who have returned to and re-imagined the music of their native land and seas, such as Lau, Jenny Sturgeon, Karine Polwart and Julie Fowlis.

But Scottish music isn't all about the past. It is also home to a thriving indie, pop and dance music scene – and a few major mainstream acts out there, including Lewis Capaldi, Calvin Harris and Biffy Clyro.

When with us in Braemar you will have a chance to hear many of the different sounds of Scotland with regular weekly folk nights in our Flying Stag bar; intimate indie and contemporary folk gigs hosted by - and in - the Braemar Gallery; and a varied programme of folk, classical and choral music in St Margaret's Art Centre in the heart of the village.

A regular performer within our Flying Stag Bar is the internationally respected local fiddle player, Paul Anderson. Paul is a highly skilled musician and holds a wealth of knowledge about Scotland's traditional music history and culture. He hosts regular musical sessions on his social media pages and has even composed a tune for the Fife Arms.

* scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk







We look forward to welcoming you soon.
If you have any queries or questions, please get in touch.

The Fife Arms

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