

SCOFF THE BALL

Thankfully there was room at Killearn's The Beech Tree Inn for a delicious meal

In terms of the setting and the service - it genuinely felt as if Christmas had arrived a couple of weeks early

BY TAM COWAN

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WELL, boys and girls, have you been good this year? If so, perhaps I can persuade Santa to bring you some gift vouchers for The Beech Tree Inn near Killearn.

We stumbled across this cracking little bar/restaurant after visiting Santa's Woodland Experience a mile away in Balfron (a magical day out that was so good we're thinking of taking the wean next year).



We stumbled across The Beech Tree Inn near Killearn after visiting Santa's Woodland Experience



The inn was perfect for a casual Sunday lunch
And, in terms of the setting and the service — more about our fab waitress in a minute — it genuinely felt as if Christmas had arrived a couple of weeks early.

The Beech Tree Inn is the first stop on the West Highland Way — the famous 110-mile walk which, given the current state of ScotRail, is one of the quicker ways of travelling from Glasgow to Fort William — hence the souvenir T-shirts with the slogan: “What happens on the West Highland Way stays on the West Highland Way.”

Amazing how getting eaten alive by midges on Rannoch Moor and being crippled by bunions the size of golf balls can suddenly sound as exciting as a trip to Las Vegas, eh?

The Beech Tree Inn has loads of animals — and I don’t mean uncouth customers slurping their soup and blowing their nose on the tablecloths.

Buy a bag of feed for 50p and let the kids get up close and personal with the pygmy goats, the mini Shetland ponies, rabbits and goats.

The owners are quick to stress, however, it’s not a petting farm. And, just to deter any weirdos, I should point out it’s also not a heavy petting farm.

As well as the cuddly creatures, you’ll also want to give the prices a clap.



Kids eat free at The Beech Tree Inn if the adults fork out at least £9.95
The bill for me, the wife and my wee lassie (I was only kidding about not taking her to see Santa) was just £45 and, while the food won't win any Michelin stars, I thought it was good, honest, homemade grub. Perfect for a casual Sunday lunch.

I actually left another few quid as a well-deserved tip for our aforementioned server (a Dutch lady, unless I'm very much mistaken) and, as a thank you for this positive review, I want her boss at The Beech Tree Inn to give her a hefty Christmas bonus.

She was very involved, very conscientious and seemed determined to make sure we all had a good time.



We got a table in The Snug as the two other dining areas — The Conservatory and The Bar — were absolutely mobbed

Hands up any restaurant owners reading this review who'd give their eye teeth for staff with those qualities?

Yep, they seem genuinely pleased to see you at The Beech Tree Inn and the little thank-you printed on the menu — “as a small independent business your custom is important” — was miles more sincere than the vomit-inducing “you’ve tried the rest now try the best” claptrap you get from 101 other restaurants.

That menu, incidentally, includes all the pub favourites (burgers, pasta, pizza, etc) and my only grumble is that they couldn't find room — not even on a specials board — for a traditional Sunday lunch.

Don't be alarmed by the “Scottish-style pizza”. That simply means it's topped with haggis and black pudding and NOT deep-fried a la the local chippy.

Another stand-out item was The FB Burger Challenge featuring a trio of 6oz burgers stacked high in a bun. No prizes for guessing what FB stands for.

There is a prize, however, for anyone who finishes it — a lovely “I'm a FB” T-shirt (which, I'm guessing, is probably not available in a small or medium).

Kids eat free at The Beech Tree Inn if the adults fork out at least £9.95 (easy-peasy, I usually spend more on side orders) and that's surely one of the best deals I've encountered in 2016. Yep, definitely a bonus point (6/5) for value.

We got a table (only just) in The Snug as the two other dining areas — The Conservatory and The Bar — were absolutely mobbed.

And, small world or what, we ended up right next to two women who sat behind us on a flight home from Tenerife about three years ago.

Don't need to tell you the meal was much, much better on this occasion. Anyway, folks, Liz kicked off with the haggis fritters. The batter was light and crunchy, while the filling — definitely a superior haggis — was deliciously moist and spicy.

Also, the rugged appearance of the fritters confirmed they were definitely homemade.

On a chilly afternoon, I was in the mood for a warming bowl of soup — but I was put off the idea when I heard the vegetable broth was sweet potato and orange. Eh? Was Heston Blumenthal working in the kitchen?

Come on, chef, what's wrong with old-fashioned lentil or perhaps a wee cream of mushroom?

Never mind, the non-veggie version was chicken broth and, served with warm, crusty rolls, it was absolutely magic. Piping hot and deliciously thick — I could just about stand my spoon in it — all it really needed was a liberal sprinkling of pepper (always white, never black with soup).

Main courses? Well, my chilli con carne (also homemade) was nowhere near as “hot and spicy” as promised on the menu — close my eyes, chef, and it could have been a bowl of my granny's mince — but it was very satisfying thanks to the good quality beef.

Never a big fan of rice (I throw chips at weddings) I asked for fries on the side and — nice and crisp — they were just like McDonald's.

Across the table, Liz really enjoyed the baked fillet of salmon — served with a mountain of potatoes and veg — and she particularly raved about the charred, crispy skin.

Sophie's penne pasta in tomato sauce got a big thumbs up, while her vanilla ice cream with strawberry sauce got a double thumbs up.

Oh, and I nearly forgot the one thing you really MUST order at The Beech Tree Inn — a portion of their cheesy garlic bread.

Made, I think, with a particularly strong cheddar, we all thought it was amazing.

In fact, it was like the best roasted cheese I've ever tasted.

And don't even think about saying it's "toasted cheese" or you're off my Christmas card list, OK...?

NAME: The Beech Tree Inn

ADDRESS: Dumgoyne, by Killearn, Stirlingshire, G63 9LA

TELEPHONE: 01360 550 297

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: Yes

BILL FOR TWO (and a half): £45

Food: Classic pub favourites – 8/10

Service: A Dutch of class – 5/5

Decor: Clean & comfortable – 3/5

Toilets: Small but spotless – 4/5

Value: Terrific kids' deal – 5/5

Total Score: 26/30

DO YOU KNOW A RESTAURANT THAT TAM SHOULD REVIEW? THEN EMAIL HIM AT TAM.COWAN@THE-SUN.CO.UK