



Lounging at

Loch Lomond

Gaby Soutar enjoys a life of luxury complete with underfloor heating at a refurbished former grain mill

It's strange how watching other people exercise seems to increase one's own relaxation levels.

I think this, as I lay tea, eat blueberries, and watch a pair of weary walkers in bright rocky aprons and heavy-looking rucksacks trudge past the bottom of our garden, distantly framed between trees and silhouetted against the silvery eastern shore of Loch Lomond.

They peer up at our lovely two-story house. One of them pulls out their phone, to take a snap, perhaps as an aide-memoire so they can look a night here the next time they tackle the West Highland Way.

They're probably staying in a tent tonight. They'll be cold and will have to eat beans. Suckers.

In contrast, we'll be bedding down at Little Eden, a property from Unique Home Stays—a compilation of places where "exceptional living spaces and breathtaking settings combine". Formerly a grain mill, this 19th-century stone building has been restored and refurbished, with an interior that's more like a five-star hotel than your average holiday cottage. As well as sounds of kitchen mod cons, a Sonos sound system, and a huge toilet, there's underfloor heating.

I bet those walkers would like that, once they'd unlaced their hiking boots

and discarded their sweaty socks. They'd probably also benefit from the huge array of midgie fighting paraphernalia that's been provided. The owners have supplied the ultimate artillery—citronella candles, Smeiger, Skin So Soft, Repel and loads of other sprays, everything but a bazooka and flame thrower.

However, we don't need to deploy anything, as we don't see a single midgie. That's not only because we spend most of our time indoors, working our way through the contents of the welcome basket, which contains Loch Lomond Rosauire coffee, eggs, honey, jam, wine and other goodies. The open plan downstairs space is dressed like something you might see on Pinterest.

Along with a fat sofa and a wood burning stove, there's a wooden kitchen table to seat about eight, prints of ferns, pigeon grey decor, a chandelier made of antlers, and idiosyncratic ornaments, such as china artichokes, portlugg spoons, and lots of vintage books, including *British Birds* (jenny awed with "Shells, with love from Granby, 1909").

Down a couple of stairs, there's a bathroom with clawfoot bath, swanky shower and other cute props, like old pharmacy bottles. Up the wooden staircase, you'll find

two peaceful and warm bedrooms nestling under the eaves, one with twin beds and the other a king size.

This house features some lovely outdoor space too.

As a city dweller, who's used to walking in tarmac-baked greens, it's kind of charming to have an enclosed garden amongst acres of woodland, like a little patch of civilization. It includes a rowing that's hung from an elderly looking tree, so I could do my impression of the woman in the famous Fragrant painting, but without losing my (not pink, nor satin) shoe.

Out here, you can also check a couple of logs on their fire pit, wrap

We kept zigzagging off the beaten path to look at pretty views at the shoreline

trunkers round your shoulder and watch the sparks drifting upwards on the breeze.

Their pond is complete with lily pads (but no frogs to be seen) and, of course, the little river, once a source of power for the mill, runs past the house. We paddled in this, too cool (may, cryogenically freeze) our feet, after tackling a portion of the West Highland Way path, from the bottom of the garden to Rowardennan, where you'll find the lodge that serves lunch (think sausage and fries).

Clockwise from main: the living room and exterior of Little Eden; Loch Lomond

The round trip was probably only three or four miles, a fraction of the 96-mile route from Milngavie to Fort William, but it is very undulating and we kept zigzagging off the beaten path to look at pretty views at the shoreline. Every 20 minutes or so, we'd see a walker, who'd say Ciao, bonjour, or just give a tired wave.

For a longer walk, you could take the path from the cottage in the other direction, for Blinna, where, among other things, you'll find the Oak Tree Inn and St Mocha coffee shop, both watched over by the four-year-old statue of the late broadcaster, author and climber Tom Weir.

You can also catch the ferry here, over to the pretty village of Luss, where you'll find Luss General Store and the Loch Lomond Arms, amongst other attractions.

Or it's just a short taxi ride from Luss to Cameron House Hotel & Spa, where you can get a decent massage. Not that I required any additional relaxation. I had got all I needed by watching those poor walkers trudge past, while I was heated up in the cosiest cottage in Loch Lomond. ■

Little Eden, Loch Lomond, sleeps up to four guests at £1,550 a week. For more information, call 08837 88183 or see www.uniquehomestays.com