

CHECK IT OUT CROMLIX, SCOTLAND



HOTEL OF THE WEEK

TENNIS champ Andy Murray has opened his much-anticipated country house hotel in Perthshire, counting 16 guestrooms and suites, chapel, private loch, Albert Roux restaurant and a brand-new court in Wimbledon purple and green among its many attractions.

Purchased by Murray early last year and given a savvy makeover that has breathed new life into the old Victorian pile and its once rabbit-riddled grounds, Cromlix is set in 14ha of woodlands and gardens, and is less than an hour from Edinburgh and Glasgow airports, and just 5km from Murray's home town of Dunblane.

Together with all the usual trappings of country life — clay pigeon shooting, cupboards crammed with fishing rods and squishy sofas arranged around crackling fires — Cromlix offers plenty of 21st-century essentials: flatscreen televisions (cleverly disguised as mirrors), free WiFi and a very smart restaurant where the well-priced menus will ensure a busy local trade. More: slh.com.

Also try: Coworth Park Hotel, Berkshire; Huka Lodge, New Zealand; Belmond Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, Oxfordshire.

CHRISTINE McCABE

GALLERY: theaustralian.com.au/travel



Cromlix is set in 14ha of woodlands and gardens

ROOMS TO MOVE

• There's 20 per cent off rooms at the boutique Park Regis Dunedin in New Zealand if you stay three nights; from \$147 a night, valid to May 31. More: parkregisdunedin.co.nz.

• Beyond Travel is offering a free night pre-tour at Crowne Plaza Harbiye in Istanbul for guests on a 14-day Marvellous Turkey tour in July or August. More: beyondtravel.com.au.

• Sheraton Mirage Port Douglas Resort has savings of up to 50 per cent through May with rooms starting at \$175 a night; good-value Sneak Away rates and family packages are also available. More: sheratonportdouglas.com.

• Melbourne's Art Series Hotel Group has 24-hour Saturday-to-Sunday deals (2pm-2pm) from \$179. The 24-Hour Party People offer is valid to December 31 at The Olsen, The Cullen and The Blackman. More: artserieshotels.com.au.

• The Heritage Auckland has a "100-year leisure package" for \$269 a night for two, with suite upgrade, Heritage High Tea with sparkling wine, full breakfast, WiFi, parking and noon checkout. Valid to September. More: heritagehotels.co.nz.

BEST NEW BEDS

• ANA Holiday Inn Sapporo Susukino has opened on Japan's Hokkaido island; the 178-room hotel is the group's fourth to open in Japan and follows ANA Holiday Inn Kanazawa Sky on Honshu in March.

• Grand InterContinental Seoul Parnas, with 424 rooms and 92 suites in the South Korean capital, has reopened after a refurb to mark its 25th anniversary.

• Al Nahda Resort & Spa in Muscat, Oman, will open a 30-room desert annexe, Dunes by Al Nahda, this year; the new property, a short drive from its sister hotel, will offer dune bashing, sand-boarding and camel rides.

Tunnel visions of survival

THE INCIDENTAL TOURIST

MARIAN McGUINNESS

ON Easter Sunday 1917, 24,000 soldiers crammed into the netherworld of tunnels beneath the city of Arras in northern France. They were metres from the German frontline.

At an improvised altar lit by candles resting on grey chalk pillars, and with a crucifix carved into the wall, they attended the mass of the resurrection and prayed for those about to pass from life to death. At 5.30am, they received their last letters from home. They marched along the exit tunnels, up the hacked-out stairs into no-man's land and its apocalypse of bitter sleet, blown fields and bodies.

During the centenary of the Great War, battlefield tours are big business, but I'm in Arras to explore its unsung attraction, the Wellington Quarry. The medieval town of Arras was built over a rabbit warren of chalk tunnels called *boves*. Centuries later, with the 15km German front gridlocked with barbed wire, machinegun nests and concrete bunkers, the *boves* became strategic in the British war offensive of building "the secret city of Arras".

The New Zealand Tunnelling Company was called on for its expertise. The 446 tunnellers used picks to link the quarries into a 24km pathway beneath no-man's land. The tunnels were sealed at the end of World War II and reopened just eight years ago. I join a guided tour and we are kitted out with tin helmets and headsets for the



The Wellington Quarry, a collection of tunnels dug under the French town of Arras

20m descent in a glass lift to the cavern floor. In subdued light, we enter the sobering last hours of Private Harry Holland, a midden of Super Creme Toffee tins, discarded stone flagons of rum and life on the Western Front.

It was a subterranean city with all the essentials — electricity, rail, kitchens, latrines, a 700-bed hospital, operating theatre and a morgue. The Kiwis named the tunnels after their homes: Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and all the way to Dunedin.

The words of war poet Wilfred Owen are heard in a voice-over: "The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells..." Sepia images of soldiers are projected on the walls. We stop at various pieces of graffiti. There's poignancy in a crucifix scratched into the limestone. "The carver had just been in a bloodbath above ground," our guide tells us. Farther along, there's an etching of a beautiful young woman. I wonder who was drawing his sweetheart.

There are moments of humour as the word "latrine" comically points to two rusty buckets beneath wooden holes. Apparently, at night they were emptied near the German line. A sign reads: "Housekeeper required".

The laughter quietsens when we come to No 10 Exit. The reality is grey

and chilling. The dozen roughly hewn stairs rise before us, then veer right, through an arched exit. There are discarded helmets and stone flagons. I can hear shellfire. I shudder at the incessant thumps and bangs. "On Easter Monday morning, these young boys stepped up and out into hell," says our guide. "What did they think before they died?" Projected images show the boys penning their last letters home.

Private Holland wrote, "Kiss our Harry for me. When I see him again, it will take me all my time to catch him." He didn't survive the day.

Our group emerges from the dark in bonds of stillness and silence. You don't have to be a war history buff to be moved. And do take time to see the rest of Arras, an enchanting gabled town, once blitzed but beautifully restored.

Checklist

Apart from three weeks in January and from June 28 to 30, the Wellington Tunnels are open daily from 10am to 6pm (closed from 12.30pm to 1.30pm). There is a free car park; guided tours are run regularly, but departure times vary so check at the Arras Tourist Office. Temperature in the tunnels is 11C all year, so take a jacket. More: explorearras.com.



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