

EAT & STAY

THE WHISPERING PINE LODGE

📍 SPEAN BRIDGE, SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS • [BLACKSHEEPHOTELS.COM](https://www.blacksheephotels.com)



THIS TRADITIONAL SCOTTISH LODGE IS BRINGING FIRST-CLASS INDIAN CUISINE TO THE HIGHLANDS

Someone in The Whispering Pine Lodge's kitchen really knows how to cook dal makhani. The black lentils are perfectly soft, the sauce buttery and gently spiced. I can't stop mopping it up with pieces of fluffy garlic naan.

The Scottish Highlands might not be most people's first port of call for first-class curries, but at The Whispering Pine Lodge, on the banks of Loch Lochy, that's exactly what you get. The hotel's Lochside Brasserie — with its vast windows and a terrace overlooking the water — is run by Sinclair Pinto, who oversees all the restaurants at Indian-owned Black Sheep Hotels' three Highlands properties. Here the chef, who also hails from India, has created a menu combining recipes from his homeland with top Scottish produce. The malabar curry, made with fish sourced in nearby Fort William, is rich and coconutty. The roasted cauliflower and potato biryani is earthy and moreish, its charred florets and soft spuds surrounded by perfect rice. And the kulfī — angular wedges of ice cream — is a milky, vanilla-flecked delight.

The lengthy menu feels a little confused in places, with a caesar salad here, miso cod there. And these more random dishes are generally a little disappointing. The 'Scottish

Specials', however, are a triumph, particularly the kedgeree (a dish that, of course, originated in India before being adapted by British colonialists), which is salty with haddock and warm with turmeric and coriander. The bread pudding, meanwhile, is the best I've had, light in texture and drenched in a knockout whisky sauce. The team should have faith in what they excel at — Indian and British dishes — rather than trying to be all things to all people.

Away from the restaurant, The Whispering Pine is the platonic ideal of a Scottish hotel, from the tartan wallpaper and wood panelling to the lengthy whisky list in the Burns Bar. It's classic and chintzy, but in a charming, considered way, without feeling dated. My room, the Mary Queen of Scots Suite, is all floral wallpaper, antique objets d'art and a beautiful four-poster. Its crowning glory, though, is the view of the loch through the French doors and glass balcony. Sitting out there with a wee dram, looking over the water, becomes a nightly ritual, and the room — as different as it is from my minimalist London flat — feels like home. I'm genuinely sad to leave, and not just because of that dal. *Doubles from £120, B&B. Main courses from £15. Nicola Trup*

THREE MORE Highlands highlights

THE WILDCAT, FORT WILLIAM

This vegan cafe is a top choice for speciality coffee, soups, sandwiches and mezze platters, as well as the raw, plant-based 'cheesecake'. [wildcatcafe.co.uk](https://www.wildcatcafe.co.uk)

THE SILLY GOOSE, FORT WILLIAM

Part of the Lime Tree hotel, this elegant restaurant serves dishes with a Scottish influence, from cullen skink (smoked haddock soup) to vegan haggis. [limetreefortwilliam.co.uk](https://www.limetreefortwilliam.co.uk)

ROCPOOL, INVERNESS

Seafood and fish take centre stage at this glitzy spot on the River Ness. Look out for dishes such as Shetland monkfish with risotto, and west coast scallops with chorizo. [rocpoolrestaurant.com](https://www.rocpoolrestaurant.com)