

The Avid Traveller Wanders through his home town of Gourock, Scotland - Travel Blog

I have recently written travel blogs exploring the south coast of Barbados and the little white village of Frigiliana, Southern Spain. These blogs were subsequently published by a national newspaper, online travel magazines and travel services companies.

Reflecting on those travel blogs and realising I live in a beautiful place called Gourock, a small coastal town on the River Clyde in Scotland, I decided to write a blog highlighting the many attractions, amenities and wonderful people that Gourock has to offer.

Arriving at the transport terminus in Gourock by taxi, train, ferry or bus you are faced with the open garden space at the start of Kempock Street. For decades holiday makers have been transiting via Gourock for a trip 'Doon the Watter'.

In summer months and on the last Saturday of the month, you maybe lucky enough to experience the Farmers Market in the railway station car park. The brainchild of the Reverend Teri Peterson and others, it has been a huge success with stalls selling goods from all over the West of Scotland and beyond. Across the road, Kempock or Pierhead Gardens can be impressive and contain a bit of history in the McPherson Fountain and a Japanese cherry tree planted by Queen Elizabeth in 1958. It is also home to a Tourist Information booth.

Moving off and wandering into Kempock St you will meet 'Annie' on her suitcase, the sculpture captures the heyday of Gourock as a holiday destination and embarkation point for the Clyde Steamers. Locals often dress Annie according to the weather or whatever is topical at that point in time!



The first of many bars is situated next which is Cleats and has been an institution for many years.

Passing two fast food shops which are very busy from early evening onwards you will come to the newest of Gourock restaurants, Buckley's. Featuring small plates in a wine and cocktail bar setting, the experience of the Buckley family owners dictates that this will be a success.



Next are two small interesting shops, The Pirate and Bluebelle Gallery and Original Artists, both selling a wide variety of local gifts and nicknacks.

Next is the very well critiqued Cafe Continental, this is a friendly and relaxed local cafe/restaurant with some stunning views of the River Clyde. Laurie, Emma, Joel and the staff will really take care of you whether it's for a coffee, breakfast, lunch, dinner or a beer served by Ian or Lucas (if he's not moonlighting at Wildfire) at the bar. The place has not changed for years and standing at the bar you will undoubtedly get chatting to a local just having a pint.

Or try the award winning Shipyard Gin, developed by Gourock's own Andy Samuel, who has used handpicked botanicals from the banks of the River Clyde that was once home to over 200 shipyards. You can also sample a whisky from Ardgowan Distillery soon to be situated at the end of Cloch Road. With Max McFarlane, a local Master Whisky Maker they are creating a series of whiskies under the 'Clydebuilt' label. The second of these whiskies - Shipwright - is now available to buy.



Across the road from the Cafe and up a narrow walkway next to the Post Office and accessible by steep stairs is the 'Granny' Kempock Stone. The Neolithic stone stands above Kempock Street and has a long and mysterious past. It dates back some 2,000 - 3,000 years and was used in religious ceremonies for the worship of the Pagan God, Baal. Allegedly a local witch Mary Lamont, who was burned at the stake, danced around the stone and tried to throw it into the sea. You can read about its fascinating past in Nigel Rennie's book *Granny Kempock*, which is available in local shops.

Back down the stairs and nearby there is plenty of food shops including Aulds the Bakers and Made In Italy. Don't miss Wildfire which is home to Alex & Lorna McGilp and top local chef Tony Reid. Deli style food, mostly made on the premises is available and is excellent. The coffee and homemade cakes are great too and highly recommended. So popular expect to queue outside at busy times! Try the goats cheese and roasted red pepper focaccia, the chicken and avocado rolls or one of Tony's homemade sausage rolls, all are outstanding!



Ladies boutiques are well represented with Straps, a ladies lingerie shop and Alexa Blu for fashion and hats, along with the popular Reds Footwear. So ladies you could easily be kitted out from top to 'bottom'!

Newly opened is Gourock's own Whisky Room, which is an independent, family-run specialist whisky shop. A friendly bunch of whisky officiados who can't wait to chat about drams with you. Get something a bit different from your standard supermarket options.

Also on Kempock Street are some more gift shops such as Coorie In and the Seagull Gallery which is the largest private Art Gallery in Inverclyde and houses established and new artists and designers.

Across the road from Coorie In is the ever popular Chinese take away and Indian restaurant which are really busy particularly at weekends. Also nearby is Nico's Pizzeria which is take away only but produces some excellent pizzas.

Gourock has a wealth of ladies and gents hairdressers and convenience stores. If you're staying at an Airbnb or other guest type accommodation there is The Big Night In and Sainsbury's Local where you can shop for everything you need. It also has the Kempock Cleaners run by Derek who will sort out any dry cleaning you require.

Once out of Kempock Street, the River Clyde opens up to you as does the Gourock Outdoor Pool which is a salt water public lido. It is the oldest heated swimming pool in Scotland having first opened in 1909 but gone through several regenerations and upgrades. The water is filtered, cleaned and maintained at a minimum temperature of 29 °C (84 °F). Facilities include an indoor gym open all year, managed by Ainsley Thomson, and a children's outdoor pool. It opens from early May to the first week in September.



Walking on west you will pass the impressive Gourock War Memorial standing 5 meters in height, it commemorates the locals who were lost to the First and Second World Wars.

Nearby are plenty of benches where you can sit and eat or drink your coffee from Wildfire or other local shops and take in the view of the river and any yachts, ships and other vessels sailing by!

Wander on by the tenements on the waterside and Gourock promenade appears in front of you, taking you a lovely walk along the waterfront. Again, some benches and shelters are available just to sit and take in the views of the yachts and if you're lucky the seals and porpoises. In mackerel season the gannets dive impressively for their catch.

Across Albert Road are the Cragburn Gate flats, built on the site of the former Cragburn dance hall where many of the older local's parents and grandparents met and courted on a Saturday night.

Passing the red sandstone tenement flats of Ashburn Gate and Gardens you reach the Spinnaker Hotel. Another fabulous institution, which has been in the McCartney family for generations. Stewart, Fraser and the dedicated staff serve up great homely food in a very cosy and friendly atmosphere. The hotel has stunning views and if you want to get your head down, very comfortable accommodation is available. On sunny days the beer garden at the front is very busy so get there sharp to secure a table.



Next is Ashton Stores, Jim and Shona provide a great service and must be highly commended on their home delivery service which was a genuine lifeline for many an elderly or vulnerable local during the pandemic lockdowns. Get your papers or an ice cream and sit across the road watching Archie White and the other open water swimmers, local canoeists, rowers, and Dunoon ferries sailing past.



At the end of the promenade is the Royal Gourock Yacht Club, although members only, it now houses various local clubs and associations but again has a stunning location and views to match. Manageress, Holli has made a real positive impact and her team's reputation is growing by the day.

If you keep wandering along the footpath your eyes will feast on the river and the beautiful Argyll hills beyond, nearly a mile later you will come across McInroys Point, the south side home to Western Ferries where you can take a trip to Hunters Quay just outside Dunoon and the gateway to the Argyll peninsula. Argyll Ferries (Caledonian MacBrayne) also offers a direct ferry to Dunoon but back at the Gourock transport terminus, oh a walk back through Gourock, now that will make you smile again!



Locals say that Gourock is 'all to one side', but the near two mile wander from the station to McInroys point is flat and takes in some stunning scenery, the very best of local shops, restaurants and bars. Don't forget to take your camera!

Please stop and take a wander through, don't just drive past. It may not be as warm as Barbados or Frigiliana but a Gourock wander will certainly make you smile!

Go on, Give Gourock a Go!

Calum Glenny