

More Lodore

The much-loved Lodore Falls landmark hotel on Derwentwater has undergone a £10 million facelift with a new spa the standout feature. Kit Graves and Dani Hope of family-owned Lake District Hotels tell the story behind the transformation

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Kit Graves and her daughter Dani Hope by the new Falls Spa, and the 16m infinity edge vitality pool

The Lodore Falls

Lodore Falls in Borrowdale has long been a tourism magnet. Early visitors would flock to see the waters of Watendlath Beck as they cascaded over boulders and down the fell, just as they do today.

Poet Laureate Robert Southey was moved to write a verse about the falls. Victorian travellers loved the spot and the Lodore Falls Hotel was built in 1870 next to the falls. The hotel soon became a Lake District landmark.

The waterfall, which is on the hotel's land, is still a must-see today, although one more recent hotel guest asked staff if they could turn it off, finding the cascade rather noisy.

Now, almost 150 years after it opened its doors, the Lodore Falls Hotel has undergone its most significant alterations.

A £10 million, three-year project is within a whisker of being finished – with just gardens to plant – and its owners, mother and daughter Kit Graves and Dani Hope, are able to proudly show off their achievement.

Kit and Dani, along with Kit's husband and Dani's father, Charles Graves, own and run six hotels through their Lake District Hotels business and have overseen the major scheme.

They're aware that the four-star Lodore Falls location, overlooking the lake and on the lakeside road, means the hotel's admirers have been able to watch, fascinated, as the familiar frontage has taken on a new and exciting look.

Kit says she's confident the end result will find favour from their fans.

"There's always a lot of scepticism from people, worrying about what are they doing, plus people obviously love this area and the hotel. But so do we – we're the biggest fans of the Lake District and we would never do anything to harm the environment."

Work began in 2017 with a complete renovation of the ground floor, followed by the addition of a function room and smart conservatory.

A new pan-Asian restaurant, Mizu, opened in 2018, along with four luxurious spa suites.

Finally, a new building was constructed to house The Falls Spa and a further 14 spa suites, opening last November.

Two new wooden footbridges, which have replaced a pair that were washed away in the storms of 2015, have been built across Watendlath Beck, for guests to access the stone, glass and wood-clad spa.

The spa has been constructed on the site of the former outdoor pool and tennis courts. Dani says they considered how they could upgrade and improve their existing fitness facilities, which included a small gym and changing room.

"In the end, we decided to knock it all down and flatten it and start again."

The work has brought the total number of hotel bedrooms up to 87 and created 30 jobs in The Falls Spa and Mizu, increasing staff numbers to 93 altogether.

Kit says that the Lake District is currently benefiting from huge investment, with several hotels undergoing major expansion and refurbishment.



Dani at the thermal suite, which has several wellness areas including a laconium heat treatment room; below: the hotel is famed for its dramatic setting in Borrowdale



Mizu, the new pan-Asian restaurant, which opened last year



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One of the 18 deluxe spa suites, this one overlooking Derwentwater

Together with UNESCO World Heritage status, it should help Cumbria compete on the world stage, she says: "It's brilliant for everybody, it's going to bring a lot more people."

Against that backdrop, Kit says they were keen to ensure they were providing a world-class experience at the Lodore, which they have owned for 14 years.

"We felt that we were doing very well now as a group and we want to be proud of what we have and in line with what's going on generally in the world and in the spa and wellness world."

She adds: "This place has had over £10 million investment in a very short period of time to bring it in line with what we feel is needed in this area and Cumbria."

Dani says they never stop thinking about their hotels and how to develop them. They'd bought and refurbished Keswick's Inn on the Square prior to the Lodore project and are now planning work at Inn on

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the Lake on Ullswater and Skiddaw Hotel in Keswick.

Both Kit and Dani say that spas are an increasingly important part of the hotel trade. The Falls Spa is already bringing in a new set of guests who haven't visited before. "It's the kind of facility people are expecting," says Dani.

The up-to-the-minute spa has a thermal suite, where visitors can move between a laconium heat treatment room, aroma steam room, herbal sauna, salt steam room, ice fountain, drench showers and heated relaxation loungers. If guests want to indulge in a rasul mud treatment there's an area for that, plus five treatment rooms and a Champagne bar.

Outside, a Finnish sauna has a floor-to-ceiling window for lake and mountain views.

The 16m infinity edge vitality pool is not to be missed. Heated to hot tub temperature and fitted with neck jets and a volcano pad to make the water erupt, it has views of Derwentwater and Catbells. It's very hard to argue with the marketing slogan that calls it, "possibly the best selfie location in the Lake District".

Kit and Dani have drawn on Kit's Danish background and the family's visits to Norway and their apartment in Copenhagen for Scandi design inspiration, which includes wooden floors and pale walls. Travels to Austria and Switzerland suggested the Swiss chalet-style of the spa with its wood cladding.

"We had to add a bit of British to it," says Dani. "Too Scandi style isn't comfortable enough for us Brits."

The Lake District has proved inspirational with colours from the landscape being used in the wallpaper and furnishings.

Local firms have been involved in the project including architects Unwin Jones Partnership, contractor Thomas Armstrong, chartered surveyors Hyde Harrington, interior designers Greyline, garden designer Bruce Walker of Westwood Landscape and Universal Ground Solutions for landscape work.

Dani says that after so many months of looking at plans, it's satisfying to see the hotel take shape: "The finished product really looks like what we were expecting from the designs."

Charles has been heavily involved in the building project and Kit and Dani, who was appointed marketing director in 2014, work on day-to-day hotel management and marketing.

Kit says that Dani, who studied sales and marketing at university and has a master's degree in social media, represents the future for the business.

"Don't forget we're family owned: we've not got a single share holder," she says. "We're solid, I think that comes across in everything we do. When you're a family you want to be proud of what you've got when you walk through the doors."



Kit with spa therapist Correna Sewell in the Falls Spa reception area



A hotel in history

- **1820** Poet Laureate Robert Southey penned his poem The Cataract of Lodore, about the waterfall.
- **1870** The main Lodore Falls hotel was built to the north side of an inn or public house which had existed on the site from an earlier date. The hotel proprietor was John Scott.
- **1888** Showman Colonel Cody, aka Buffalo Bill, stayed in the hotel while on tour with his Wild West Show and signed the register.
- **1890** The hotel was owned by Edward Cesari, followed by Miss Cesari in 1901.
- **1910** Ownership was in the hands of Mr Harker and the telephone number was Keswick 2.
- **1920** The hotel was managed and owned by Herbert Tom Pape until his death in 1937.
- **1947** The hotel was bought by Robert England and his Swiss wife Merthie Muggler. A talented hotelier, she put what was then called the Lodore Swiss Hotel on the map. From the Sixties Robert and Merthie were joined by their son, Tony England and his wife, Anita Gross. The family built a good reputation and even after it was sold, it was still affectionately known as the Lodore Swiss or Swiss Lodore. Some people continue to use that name.
- **1987** The England family sold the hotel to the Stakis Hotel group which was taken over by the Hilton Group in 1999, after which it traded as the Hilton Keswick Lodore Hotel.
- **2004** Charles and Kit Graves of Lake District Hotels bought the hotel, renaming it the Lodore Falls.