

British

boltholes



Somerton, Somerset The White Hart

"Is this Rapunzel's bedroom?" asks my four-year-old daughter as we are shown to our room at the White Hart. I can see where she's coming from: with its four-poster bed, embroidered throw, sparkling chandeliers and antique washstand and armchairs, it does have a touch of the fairytale princess about it.

We needed to break a long drive to Cornwall, and this handsome old coaching inn, freshly renovated and minutes from the A303, seemed to fit the bill. The new owners have form: they transformed the Swan in Wedmore (theswanwedmore.com), from a tired old pub into a stylish bolthole two years ago. I'd already stayed at the Swan and loved it, so I was curious to see whether they could work their magic again.

After a long drive, I'm dreaming of an indulgent soak in the cast-iron bath that takes centre stage on a plinth in front of a wall of artfully mismatched tiles. But my daughter has other ideas, jumping in with me and marvelling at how she can watch CBeebies from the bathtub.

Downstairs, the bar area is a large, airy space with lots of sofas and inviting nooks. This leads on to a modern conservatory dining room, which in turn opens on to a lavender-scented courtyard garden.

When we come down for dinner the place is buzzing with a mix of guests and dressed-up locals enjoying a pre-dinner drink. Who knew sleepy old Somerton had so much life? Within seconds of being seated, we're presented with a basket of homemade bread, plus a colouring book and pencils for our daughter. The menu, devised by former River Cottage chef Tom Blake, gives an

exotic spin to Somerset ingredients, the wines are well-priced and the kids' menu is a fish-finger-free zone.

My starter of stuffed tempura courgette with beetroot hummus is a thing of beauty, on the plate and on the palate. Lemon sole fillets are given a Middle-Eastern kick with a harissa marinade and spicy yoghurt dressing, and the sticky toffee pudding with clotted cream stays the right side of cloying.

After a good night's sleep, it's down for breakfast (served until

The menu is simple and earthy, wines are well-priced and the kids' menu is fish-finger free

11.30am) with high hopes, but the full English fails to impress. The bacon is dry, the scrambled eggs undercooked and the toasted sour-dough bread tastes of garlic.

It's disappointing, but not enough to stop us booking a room for our return journey. Our second visit, a week later, reaffirms what a find this place is. We've booked a small double this time: it's not a showstopper like Room 3, but light-filled and quietly offbeat.

Despite my warnings, my boyfriend recklessly opts for the fry-up for breakfast the next morning. Guess what? It's perfect.

● Accommodation was provided by The White Hart, Market Place, Somerton, Somerset, 01458 272273, whitehartsomerton.com. Doubles from £85

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