

The cool hotel guide

The White Hart, Somerset

Dating from the 16th century, the White Hart is the latest gourmet pub with rooms to open in Somerset — half an hour or so south of its sister property (The Swan at Wedmore) and the slick Talbot Inn in Wells. With parquet floors, exposed stone walls mixed with grey-wood panels, flickering tea candles and throw-cushions scattered on banquettes, the style is laid-back but smart. Lychee bellinis are offered at the bar, which leads to a long L-shaped restaurant with wooden tables, partly housed in a room that used to be a skittle alley.

In a nutshell

Expect good-value stylish rooms in a quiet town that was once the capital of Wessex — eight miles from Glastonbury (perfect for festivalgoers looking for a cool crash pad).

What are the rooms like?

The eight rooms have an eclectic, slightly bohemian look created by the imaginative designer, Ali Guttridge. Chandeliers hang in clusters illuminating old wood floors

partially covered by rugs. Patchworks of tiles decorate some walls, while old travellers' chests act as side tables and striking wallpaper with patterns depicting butterflies or balloons catch the eye. Rooms four and five are the smallest, starting at £85 B&B per night; of these, room five has both a bath and a shower, while room four only has a shower. Room number one, on a corner at the front of the hotel, has a good view of the town centre (£105 B&B).

Which is the best room?

Room number three has a claw-foot bath, a giant bed and a high ceiling and is in the oldest part of the building (£120 B&B).

What is the food like?

Although it's only been open a few weeks, the restaurant has a good following — a testament to the fresh ingredients and swift service. One of the owners is involved in River Cottage, the celebrity chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's cooking empire that focuses on the use of seasonal food. It's a simple menu with a handful of starters and mains. My Cornish mullet ceviche with a heritage-tomato salad



Room three has a claw-foot bath and a giant bed

(£7) followed by shoulder of Gloucestershire Old Spot with fennel-seed crackling (£15) was a filling and tasty Sunday lunch served in a lively setting. Prices are reasonable.

So who goes there?

It's early days, but Deborah Meaden of *Dragons' Den* has been, while Suggs from the pop group Madness is a fan of the Swan.

What else is there to do?

Somerton is a pretty town with some antique and lifestyle stores to investigate. There's also a wonderful carved-wood ceiling in St Michael

Need to know

The White Hart
(01458 272273,
whitehartsomerton.com)
Market Place, Somerton,
Somerset TA11 7LX; B&B
doubles from £85; three
courses about £26.

and All Angels Church, plus the fine old stone market cross by the elegant war memorial. Glastonbury Abbey is worth a visit (glastonburyabbey.com).

The highs, the lows, the verdict

Eight and a half out of ten

It's unpretentious, not too pricey, and well designed — though some noise from the bar can be heard in some of the rooms.

Tom Chesshyre

Do you agree?
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