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29 April - 5 May	£222	3 - 7 April	£145
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- Luxury return coach from local pick up points
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Laguna Hotel, Suffolk Road South, Bournemouth BH26AZ

www.lagunaholidays.com



• One of the dining areas at The George



• The handsome exterior of The George

Stowing away in the timeless Cotswolds

HAVING for some time harboured a desire to move to the north Cotswolds when I either retire or win the lottery, the latter obviously being the more exciting prospect, I never pass up an opportunity to take a trip up the lovely Roman Fosseway.

This particular section of the road from Cirencester used to have my children squealing with delight when they were young as we drove up and down the long, undulating roller-coaster of smooth asphalt. It's a fitting gateway to the magical, almost fairytale, chocolate box villages dotted along there between Gloucestershire and Warwickshire.

Stow-on-the-Wold is probably one of the best known of these small towns, famous for Scotts of Stow – yes, that Scotts, the glossy magazine that drops out of the Sunday newspapers convincing all and sundry that life without magnifying flip-up lids on our spectacles, a Portmeirion cake slice or an avocado cuber is a life less lived.

It's the highest of the Cotswold towns standing exposed at 800 feet high at its peak with, cobbled streets all crammed with fine antique shops and art galleries. One such example is Sheep Street, the location for

Hankering after a taste of her dream life, SUE SMITH heads to the honey-coloured villages just across the border

The Sheep, a quintessentially English building with its honeyed Cotswold stone and mullioned windows. But that's where old-style stops. Inside this has been turned into a stylish, contemporary affair where bleached wood meets mood lighting with up-to-the-minute interior design.

Previously known as The Grapevine Hotel, The Sheep reopened in June 2016 with the aim of bringing 'a slice of London' to the Cotswolds.

Revamped by the Brakspear group which specialises in 'doing up' country pubs in contemporary style while sacrificing none of their historic appeal, this restaurant with its boutique rooms is ideally placed for a meander around some of the best the south west has to offer.

Made up of three knocked-together cottages, it has a spacious, funky entrance leading into a bright but relaxing bar area featuring a wood-fired oven and an open kitchen, which flows seamlessly into the courtyard. The sun happened to be out on our arrival so it seemed rude not to bag one of the lovely loom chairs and peruse the cocktail menu.

All 22 bedrooms are typically boutique hotel, with soft muted colours on the walls and simple, clean lines that manage to look classy but retain a cosiness.

One Bramble (Hawthorn gin, Chambord, blackcurrant jam, fresh lemon juice) and White Russian (Stolichnaya vodka, Tia Maria, cream and milk) later and we had worked up quite an appetite.

The menu has a strong Mediterranean influence and the wood-fired oven is perfect for popping out a selection of pizzas.

Gambas Pil Pil with Bloody Mary Mayonnaise and salt and pepper squid kept us going until the arrival of whole seabass Thai-style with garlic, chilli and greens and a superfood salad with quinoa, kale, avocado, almond and



• Some of the plentiful eating options at The George

ginger dressing, roast beetroot, feta, orange and grain salad – yes it was a bit late to try and rein in the healthy stuff, granted, but I already had my eye on an espresso martini.

The stay and the food were faultless barring one breakfast the next morning which was billed as smashed avocado, bulgar wheat and poached eggs.

My friend said it was more guacamole than smashed avocado and I agreed but then I didn't really care as I tucked into my breakfast from heaven, eggs Florentine.

Stow is the ideal starting point for many Cotswold walks, and if you are there in May or October the famous Gypsy Horse Fair is a sight to behold.

It's ideally placed for three of the country's most famous gardens, Hidcote, Kiftsgate Court and Sezincote, and home to the Cricket Museum with a dazzling collection of artefacts from all over the world.

There's a farmers' market on the second Thursday of each month and St Edward's Church, dating back to the 11th century, is worth a visit for its amazing stained glass windows.

For a weekend jaunt there are plenty of places to be fed and watered. We popped into The George Townhouse at Shipston-on-Stour the following day, just a short drive away.

Chipping Campden, Broadway and Moreton-in-Marsh are also close, as are Stratford-upon-Avon and Warwick Castle.

It was easy to spot we were back in a Brakspear establishment as there is definitely a theme running through these revamps. We recognised the plush velvet chairs and the general air of simplicity we had just left behind in Stow.

However, each place had its own bit of quirkiness, the designers here having managed to mix Grade II with a smattering of upcycled and recycled antique and modern



• The dining area at The Sheep



• The bar at The George

TRAVEL FACTS

- Rooms at The Sheep, in Sheep Street, Stow-on-the-Wold, start at £90 per night for cosy/snug to £150 for a premium room. Two of the premiums have hydrobaths while another has its own private patio garden. Call 01451 830341 or visit thesheep.co.uk.
- At The George, 8 High Street, Shipston-on-Stour, cosy/snug rooms start at £80 per night to £170 for a superior. Call 01608 661453 or visit thegeorgehipston.co.uk.



• The stylish Sheep; and right, one of the bedrooms



national competition run by the leading industry magazine, The Morning Advertiser.

There will no doubt be more awards to follow because despite the fairly formulaic refurbishments they are definitely on to something here.

Just because a place has history it doesn't have to stay stuck in a time warp.

Both these places have been dragged into the 21st century and are currently relaxing from a vantage point on some lovely padded seats.



• The bar at The Sheep



• The outdoor area at The Sheep

TRAVEL TAKE-OFF

Last-minute availability

NORWAY: Iglu Ski (www.igluski.com; 020 3811 6381) offers a four-night ski holiday in Oslo Winterpark at Holmenkollen Park Hotel (B&B) from £432pp (two sharing). Includes transfers and flights from Stansted on February 23.

ZANZIBAR: Tropical Sky (www.tropicalsky.co.uk; 01342 886 941) offers seven nights at the five-star Essque Zalu Zanzibar (half-board) from £1,149pp (two sharing) - saving £850pp (42%). Includes transfers and flights from London. Valid for travel April 24 and May 31. Book by March 31.

ALGARVE: Cheapflights (www.cheapflights.co.uk/hot-travel-deals) offers seven nights at the four-star Clube Praia Da Oura Apartments (self-catering) from £204pp - saving up to £88pp (30%). Includes flights from Liverpool on May 2.

DUBAI: Teletext Holidays (www.teletextholidays.co.uk; 020 3001 0682) offers four nights at the four-star Jannah Marina Bay Suites (B&B) from £468pp (two sharing). Includes flights from Heathrow on February 20.

TORONTO: Travel Trolley (www.traveltrolley.co.uk; 020 8843 4400) offers four nights at the three-star Ramada Plaza Hotel (room only) from £572pp. Includes flights from Heathrow on February 24.

VIENNA: British Airways Holidays (www.ba.com/vienna; 0344 493 0125) offers two nights at the four-star Exe Vienna Hotel from £149pp (two sharing). Includes flights from Gatwick. Valid for travel February 19-March 25. Book by February 16.

MAJORCA: Teletext Holidays (www.dealchecker.co.uk; 0117 347 8317) offers five nights at the four-star Hotel Marina Torrenova (all-inclusive) from £169pp (two sharing). Includes flights from Stansted on May 13. Book by February 28.

DUBLIN: HotelsCombined (www.hotelscombined.co.uk) offers four nights at four-star Trinity City Hotel on a room-only basis from £792 (based on two sharing), saving £342. Price is based on accommodation only and stays between February 22 and 26.

SAN FRANCISCO & ALASKA: Cruise Nation (www.cruisenation.com; 0800 408 0760) offers a full-board 12-night cruise calling at San Francisco, Juneau, Skagway, Glacier Bay, Ketchikan, Victoria and San Francisco with two free nights in San Francisco (room-only) from £1,599pp (two sharing) - saving £400 (22%). Includes flights from Gatwick on May 6. Book by February 19.

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