

TravelWEEK

Theatrical splendour of ancient capital

WINCHESTER'S summer season of open air performances combine some of literature's best loved stories performed against the historic backdrop of England's ancient capital.

Guests visiting the city, which is just an hour outside of London by car or train, and just a 30 minute drive from Southampton Airport, can take advantage of summer rates at the centrally based Winchester Royal hotel. Prices start from £80 per room B&B until August 31. Book online at www.forestdale.com

Why not pick up a freshly-made

takeaway picnic from The Bridge Patisserie for £10-£12 (based on two sharing) and sit in the open air to enjoy some fine theatre in some of Winchester's most beautiful surroundings.

Here are just some of the upcoming performances:

● The Importance of Being Earnest at Wolvesey Gardens – 17 July at 7:30pm

The Rain or Shine Theatre Company presents Oscar Wilde's classic comedy of manners, morals and morality in the gardens of the ruins of Winchester's medieval Bishop's Palace. Tickets: £12.40

● As You Like It at Wickham Vineyard – 25 July at 6pm

The Villagers Open Air Shakespeare Group perform Shakespeare's popular comedy of love, mistaken identity, exile and return. Tickets: £6

● Pride and Prejudice at Winchester Cathedral – 5 and 6 August at 7:30pm

The resting place of Jane Austen showcases this imaginative adaptation of Pride and Prejudice performed in the Cathedral's inner close. Tickets: £12.50

See www.visitwinchester.co.uk for further performances.



More than just a view – the hotel has so much to offer holidaymakers

If you don't like your choice they'll change it and happily drink the remainder themselves!

A complimentary Devon cream tea on arrival is a simple, but really effective, touch as are the fact that meal times are not completely set in stone.

Anyone wanting tips on how hotel reception staff should look after guests could do an awful lot worse than sending a delegation to the Soar Mill Cove – really top class.

Below the hotel (about a five minute walk on the way down, but closer to 15 on the way back) is the

beautiful cove which gives the hotel its name. It smacks ever so slightly of the sort of place where the Famous Five might have had one of their adventures.

As well as the beach there are rock pools and caves – in short everything that a youngster needs for hours of endless fun.

The hotel boasts small indoor and outdoor pools, a grass tennis court, pitch and putt course and a beauty spa. It's also a great base for exploring that part of southern Devon.

Fact BOX

Prices start from £140 per room per night with bed and breakfast, cream team on arrival, rising to £270 for sea view rooms in July and August.
Dinner is £35 per person
Children's rate is £35 per night, bed and breakfast, or £40 per night, dinner, bed and breakfast.
For more details call 01548 561 566 or visit www.soarmillcove.co.uk

Salcombe is only a two-and-a-half mile walk while Dartmoor National Park is 30 minutes' drive away, as is Plymouth while Torquay can be reached in 45 minutes via a beautiful drive along the coastline.

Midlanders have holidayed in Somerset and North Devon for generations – but this part of Southern Devon is quieter and definitely well worth a visit. The Soar Mill Cove Hotel is an excellent base for exploration.

Tim Walters

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Soar above the cliffs of Devon at superb hotel

IF THE location of a hotel was the only criteria for its success then the Soar Mill Cove Hotel would surely be one of the finest in the whole country.

It is set in more than 2,000 acres of beautifully unspoilt National Trust land just outside Salcombe in south Devon.

Turn off into the charming village of Malborough and make your way down a couple of miles of those twisty high-hedged lanes that seem to be unique to Devon and Cornwall.

Stunning

And then all of a sudden it hits you as you turn a corner and are confronted by a stunning view over the Channel.

It's a view that's replicated in all the hotel's sea view rooms, its lounge and dining room and is simply remarkable.

Although the view is clearly a massive selling point the hotel has an awful lot more going for it.

All 22 rooms have enjoyed a winter refurbishment, boast big flatscreen TVs and DVD players and have super comfy beds.

The restaurant boasts two AA red rosettes and has a menu which really does change nightly.

On the second of our two-night



Dramatic views from the Soar Mill Cove Hotel make this a wonderful location for visitors

stay there were no dishes repeated from the night before. And of course you eat looking down over rugged coastline to the sea.

Often, deer come into view while birds of prey can regularly be seen circling, only to be chased away by attentive seagulls.

The food was of an excellent standard with a tumeric-battered piece of haddock on a bed of lentils with a spicy salsa as a starter being one of the highlights for dinner while the breakfast menu offers all the usual favourites as well as omelettes,

smoked mackerel and haddock cooked to order. Interestingly the chef didn't feel the need to have more than three starters, four mains and four puddings plus a Devon-based cheeseboard on the menu and that reflects the fact that Soar Mill Cove is very confident in its own skin.

The hotel and the staff know what they are all about and seem genuinely pleased to let their guests share in that confidence.

The wine list is reasonably priced and again the confidence shines through.