

A WEEKEND AWAY

# THE RECTORY

SET ON THE EDGE OF THE COTSWOLDS, THIS COUNTRY HOTEL BLENDS ELEGANCE AND ECCENTRICITY

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LUXURY LONDON  
ESCAPE

If it weren't for glimpsing a Norman church at the end of Flisteridge Road (which, during spring, sees the adjacent forest floor become a sea of bluebells), I may not have found The Rectory. There's just one sign, easily missed, and the only indication that there's something out of the ordinary beyond the gravel driveway is a discreet sceptre-like symbol either side of the entrance. It used to be an 'R', but I prefer it this way – guess feel like one of the lucky few in the know, and nod conspiratorially to each other in the corridors.

Despite a feeling of exclusivity, The Rectory has retained a feeling of home – albeit that of your poshest aunt. It was originally built to accommodate Crudwell's rector and his 14 children (no wonder he turned to God), and owner and first-time hotelier Alex Payne has also instilled a sense of domesticity in the digs. Families with young kids are welcome, as are dogs, and on a high-capacity evening you get the sense that everyone treats the place like their own. There's an honest bar on the second floor, where you can enjoy the adult version of a midnight feast or collect fresh milk for a morning brew in bed. Regulars plan visits around the availability of their favourite rooms; dogs curl up by the fireplaces.

It's not all tweed sofas and black labs, though. The Rectory's art collection, in particular, prevents it from sinking into stuffy-country-sober. A print in the conservatory entitled *The Tem* by Bob and Roberta Smith is a favourite of art dealer Angus Maguire. "The brief Alex gave me was for a private country house. We wanted it to look like the art had been cobbled together over generations," Maguire explains. "I loved the bright colours of *The Tem*, the wry phonetic misspelling that winks at Estuary English, and the fact that the hotel is about seven miles from the Thames headwater. It's one of those pieces that throws out a question, but doesn't provide an answer." You'll

also spot a Tracey Emin in the bar and a Chapman brothers pen-and-ink piece in the restaurant. "It's quite a disturbing image, juxtaposed in such a polite space. I think that kind of sums up British contemporary art, though – contradictory, playful, with a dark side." Hung in an 18<sup>th</sup> century silver gilt frame, it is a piece you'd be forgiven for missing, especially while distracted by the menu.

It's meat-heavy (partridge with hasselback potatoes; venison; braised ox cheek) but we went off-menu and were pleasantly surprised by a chicory salad with knobs of roquefort and sashimi-thin slices of pear, plus a velvety celeriac soup with Welsh rarebit (a great improvement on the standard crouton that should be universally adopted), and ribbons of hand-rolled pappardelle with mushroom, walnut and gouda topped with crispy tarragon. Breakfast is served in the conservatory, with bubbles on ice and DIY Bloody Marys balanced with homemade granola and farm-fresh yoghurt. Those in search of hearty rural fare will also like sister restaurant the Potting Shed, a few minutes' walk away.

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#### HOW TO GET HERE

The train from Paddington to Kemble takes 1 hour 12 minutes

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#### WHAT TO BRING

Aspirin to wash down with your Bloody Marys – the bar can get raucous at weekends

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#### WHAT TO WEAR

Your polo club's hoodie and knee-high boots

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#### WHERE TO GO

Tisbury nearby is brilliant for antiques. Kids will love the town's Blue Zucchini brasserie for its scribbled-on walls and Nepalese prayer flags

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Retiring upstairs, you realise how busy the hotel can be – non-guests come for supper and stay for cocktails, and there's a constant stream of music in every communal space. The bedrooms, by contrast, are deliciously quiet

– the faint sound of footsteps (or the odd Mercedes G-Class) on the gravel outside is the only noise to slip through. Traditionalists won't like the baths in bedrooms, but romantics will find the roll-top tubs hard to resist. There's no information in the bedrooms, no phone, no written rules or regulations – distancing The Rectory further from the hotel template. The WiFi password drily tells you to 'goforwalkininstead', but we preferred sitting in the lobby and people watching, peeping out over the top of a glossy, the latest of which are spread out for perusal. That said, it's worth a wander round the property, particularly in the evening light when the oolitic limestone is at its best. ■



From £130 for a double room, including breakfast; [therectoryhotel.com](http://therectoryhotel.com)

