

OUT OF TOWN

NEW FOREST

A trip to the most picturesque part of the country proves more than just a chocolate-box treat. by Natasha Rothko

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First-time visitors to our shores often seem to have distinct ideas of how we British live. The expectation is of a rigid class structure, with the rich in their stately homes and castles and the peasant classes in fudge-wrapperesque, thatched roofed cottages. However, if the travellers in question had only ever visited the New Forest, then we could easily forgive them for this vision of Britishness.

As a recent visitor to the area, though not for the first time, I was overwhelmed by its beauty and tranquillity all over again. I doubt I could ever become nonchalant about the wild heaths and shrouding forest. Nor could I ever cease to be excited by the local wild ponies standing in the queue at the post office.

BEAULIEU We started our mini-break in Beaulieu. Home to the famous National Motor Museum, Beaulieu village sits prettily on the Banks of the River Beaulieu,

and is overlooked by the magnificent Palace House.

Being a non-driver, I can't say I was blowing my top with anticipation of a trip to a museum devoted entirely to motor vehicles. I was, however, pleasantly surprised to discover the vast collection included a number of cars from Hollywood blockbusters. Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, the Delorian and a selection of James Bond's cars were all on display. And my male car-loving companion was almost moved to tears by the extensive collection of classic sports and racing cars.

LYMINGTON ON THE SOLENT

Lymington on the Solent holds extraordinary appeal with its marinas bursting with fantastic sail boats and yachts, sea water swimming pools and quaint bric-a-brac boutiques and tea rooms. It was from here that we embarked on one of the greatest thrills I have ever experienced. Courtesy of EMG Entertainment,



kindly arranged by the events team at Carey's Manor, we took a breathtaking rib boat ride around the Solent, hugging the coast line of the Isle of Wight and getting up close and personal with the White Cliffs and the Needles. This was not for the faint hearted. The boat bounced from wave to wave and we rode the swell as though riding a feisty horse. Dave, our skipper for the afternoon, was a star guide, slowing down at intervals to give a description.

ACCOMMODATION Without a doubt we struck gold when we selected our places to stay. Our first night, in Beaulieu, was spent at the Montagu Arms. This beautifully designed establishment has every hospitality award worth having including a Michelin starred head chef, Matthew Tomkinson.

The rooms and suites have

been carefully designed in a manner that stays true to the venue's 250 year history, providing both comfort and stylish flair.

Dinner in the Terrace restaurant was sensational. The Matthew Tomkinson tasting menu is a real showstopper. Seven outstanding dishes, ranging from a delectable veloute of cucumber and horseradish served with smoked salmon and caviar, to the most tender rump of English lamb, were each as fantastic as the last. However, with two luscious puds to complete this extravaganza, it's not for those with birdlike appetites.

Moving across to Carey's Manor and SenSpa – sister hotel to the Montagu – our expectations of quality were met entirely. Having a full day to unwind and take full advantage of Carey's spa facilities, we

began to forget the working week before and the one ahead. The facilities include a state-of-the-art hydrotherapy pool with several thermal treatment rooms and showers ranging from a tropical storm shower to an ice room. It's tempting to stand experience showers until you turn into a wrinkled prune.

Carey's really know how to look after their guests. For those who can't sit still or for corporate groups, the Carey's events team is on hand to organise a variety of experiences ranging from museum visits to thrilling land, air and sea adventures.

FOOD Do not visit Lymington without eating at the Haven Restaurant. The Haven is a seafood restaurant that offers a wide selection of delicious and remarkably high quality dishes, all to be enjoyed while being beautifully looked after by the proprietor Rob Smith and his flawless team. It is situated slap bang in the middle of Lymington Yacht Haven, with spectacular views across the Solent to the Isle of Wight, and serves the best crispy chilli squid I have ever had.



Beaulieu Palace

ACCOMMODATION

MONTAGU ARMS

(Beaulieu, New Forest, Hampshire, SO42 7ZL. www.montaguarmshotel.co.uk, 01590 612 324)

Luxury country house hotel with a Michelin starred restaurant.

CAREY'S MANOR HOTEL & SENSPA

(Brockenhurst, Hampshire SO42 7RH. www.careysmanor.com, 0870 751 2305)

Elegant hotel spa with three restaurants, combining English and Oriental traditions.

SEE ALSO...

THE HAVEN RESTAURANT

(Lymington Yacht Haven, King Saltern Road, Lymington Hants, SO41 3QD. www.havenrestaurant.co.uk; 01590 679 971)

Seafood restaurant/bar/café with views of the Isle of Wight.

NATIONAL MOTOR MUSEUM

(Beaulieu, Brockenhurst, Hampshire SO42 7ZN. nationalmotormuseum.org.uk; 01590 614 650)

Promoting motor history with a famous collection of vehicles.

FURTHER INFO

WWW.THENEWFOREST.CO.UK



Lymington