



TRAVEL, EDITED BY
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Out and about

Say no to Stansted – High times in Rye – The romance of a seaplane

Say no to Stansted

My brother and sister-in-law, David and Liz, live within a couple of miles of Stansted airport, and I've been hearing about their dismay at the new, second runway that BAA are planning on building. Not only is this a nightmare for people in the area, it is also an environmental disaster for the region.

Now the National Trust has launched a campaign to protect the important and ancient Hatfield Forest. The second runway at Stansted would potentially triple the number of passengers using the airport and dramatically increase the number of planes flying close to the

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forest, which is home to hundreds of ancient trees, several hundred species of rare moths, flies, plants, fungi and lichen, and no less than 65 species of breeding birds. I care about this not just because of David and Liz: when I was five my father left the army and we spent his first (horribly precarious) years in civvy-street living five miles away from Hatfield Forest in Harlow. From the age of five until I was ten, all my mid-May birthday parties consisted of a picnic with games under the shade of one of Hatfield's many splendid old oaks. It was there that my bird-loving father showed me my first moorhen's nest and I'd anxiously watch until the eggs had hatched, and the tiny birds, plus coots, mallards, geese and tufted ducks, set sail across Hatfield's many placid ponds.

There is an online petition which readers can sign at the National Trust. Go to their website and search for 'Save Hatfield Forest': follow the links and sign up!

Having a Rye old time

During that cold snap at the end of January, my friend Hannah Rothschild spent the weekend at The George in Rye,

which she found to be an excellent hostelry in an enchanting part of the country.

Many provincial hotels are overwhelmingly drab. They charge a lot of money for brown-stained furniture and tatty old carpets; for soulless silent breakfast rooms, flaccid sausages and greying eggs. The only interesting question is just how bad the bed will be. No wonder many of us are tempted by the Continent.

Happily, the George in Rye offers a totally different experience. This is a gloriously un-drab establishment. Owner/managers Alex and Katie Clarke have brought their respective skills as management consultant and set decorator to create a top-class, chic, small hotel. Everything from the solid oak bar tables to the writing paper, from bedside lights to bedside books, has been chosen with care.

Each room is different but comfort is the highest priority. Aveda products, showers with real power, baths with pillows, flat-screen televisions, a DVD library and broadband access make it hard to leave the room.

However, the first compulsory outing is all the way downstairs to the restaurant. Head chef Rod Grossman came

from Moro (owned by Alex's sister Sam). All ingredients are seasonal and sourced from local farms, fishermen and vineyards in Kent and Sussex. Rod's tremendous cooking is the antithesis of nouvelle. It's food to follow a great walk in blasting sea air.

Rye, a Cinque port, oozes history and Tudor and Georgian buildings jostle for space in picturesque cobbled lanes. The literary can visit Henry James's house, but gluttons might prefer a pub or even an Olde Tea Shoppe crawl.

For many the real local delights are some of England's finest gardens. They range from the grande dame of Arcadia, Sissinghurst Castle, to Derek Jarman's miniature masterpiece created in the shadow of Dungeness nuclear power station. The Bohemian can shuffle off to Bloomsbury shrine at Charleston, and none should miss the high priest's garden, Great Dixter, former home to recently deceased Christopher Lloyd.

Rooms cost from £125 to £175 including breakfast. Their telephone number is 01797 222 114.

Unusual ways to travel

I've travelled a lot and by most modes of transport (including an elephant) but I've never been in a seaplane. Whenever I see one I'm smitten by a romantic desire to be on board: I think of old movies (starring Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn) and imagine myself skimming into land on a lake in Canada or a sparkling bay off the Florida Keys. Now I won't have to travel so far. An enterprising former airline pilot called David West has just bought a seven-seater De Havilland Beaver to service the route from the Clyde in Glasgow to the Highlands and Islands. By road this journey can take up to six hours: the Beaver will make it in 45 minutes, landing its passengers in the lochs and bays of Inverary, Tobermory and Fort William. Mr West believes that his seaplane will put Glasgow on a par with the Maldives, Seattle and Sydney. I can't wait to try it out.

For full details of the service, due to start in April, call 0870 242 1457.



'Typical. It says "Made in China".'