



THE SHEEP

Stow-on-the-Wold

WHERE WE WENT

The Sheep on Sheep Street, in the heart of the beautiful Cotswolds town, Stow-on-the-Wold.

STAYING AT THE SHEEP

Newly updated, The Sheep revealed its new look only four months ago and offers a warm welcome with friendly staff, sumptuous decor and big cozy armchairs. There are 22 well appointed rooms - a night here starts at £90. We were shown two of the rooms, both wonderfully warm, a superior room (£130) and a premium room (£150) - we loved the premium room with French doors opening onto its own patio garden, the biggest bed you can imagine, masses of space and a beautiful bathroom. But the superior room was just as lovely and we would have been very content to stay in here also - plenty



words: caroline jaques

of space, a super bathroom and, as with all the rooms, a Nespresso coffee machine and kettle with a selection of Birchall tea, as well as still and sparkling water.

There could not be a nicer place to come back to than The Sheep's cosy bar after a day wandering around this very pretty town. Laden with shopping bags (I defy you to return empty handed!), you can sink into a pile of cushions on a squasy armchair, or perch on a barstool and enjoy a cocktail or two, or a bottled craft beer, or one of the ten speciality gins, before drifting into the restaurant for a delicious meal. It's relaxed and unstuffy, and nothing has been neglected. The full length bar is

tiled with stunning ceramic tiles in deep continental blues, the restaurant is tasteful with an open plan, London brasserie feel, with bare wooden tables, comfortable upholstered chairs in subdued colours, lots of cushions and well considered lighting.

IN THE RESTAURANT

The most important thing for me the moment I sit down to a meal is to be offered drinks - it is so often forgotten, leaving diners feeling increasingly irritated and unloved, with empty glasses and no attention for a long time. Not so at The Sheep, they get this exactly right - drinks were offered straight away and we were then able

to mull over the choices on the extensive menu whilst enjoying our first glass and watching the smartly dressed chefs preparing pizza behind the bar. Perfect.

THE MENU

Nibbles start at £4 each, or three for £11 and include unusual combinations such as sautéed edamame beans in their pods with soy and sesame or fried pickles with blue cheese dip. Starters include bruschetta and slow roasted tomatoes with garlic & chilli oil (£4) and Gambas Pil Pil with Bloody Mary mayonnaise (£6).

To follow, there are three super sounding salads (all £7.95), a fantastic pizza menu (all well under £10), a grill menu including steak, chicken, lamb and even lobster, and a fabulous selection of large plates (up to £18).

The rather gorgeous dessert menu features chocolate, marshmallow and strawberry pizzetta, or oven fried plums with granola, whipped vanilla yogurt and Cotswold honey.



WHAT WE ATE

We opted for a mix of small plates to start. There were halloumi chips with jalapeno ketchup; salt and pepper squid with aioli; prawn spring rolls with sweet chilli; and Thai fishcakes with Asian slaw and Vietnamese dipping sauce. I would be hard pushed to select a favourite as they were all quite delicious. The halloumi chips were light, almost frothy, and the jalapeno ketchup had a kick that cut right across the richness of the cheese. The prawn spring rolls were full of succulent prawns in a lighter-than-light filo pastry, served with the sweetest of sweet chilli sauce. The batter on the salt and pepper squid was sheer perfection and the Thai

fishcakes were so light they were like devouring spicy air, with Asian slaw that was fresh and aromatic.

If I were eating at home, I'd have stopped there, pleasantly satisfied, with perhaps enough room for a few mouthfuls of this or that. But the main courses looked so delicious we were 'forced' to soldier on!

Disappointingly, the lamb (first choice for my significant other) was unavailable - but this provided two excellent alternatives - I promised roast lamb for Sunday lunch (eagerly accepted), and it encouraged his tastebuds to indulge in the Sichuan style pork belly with leeks, chillies and peanut dressed rice noodles. This could possibly be the best thing on the menu and I was tempted to steal a forkful every time he took his eyes off the plate! The noodles were beautifully fragrant and Barry commented that he could have eaten a whole bowl of them on their own - so if you prefer a vegetarian diet this would be an excellent choice. Happily though, they came with rich and melting pork belly, cooked Sichuan style, hot and spicy and coated with just the right amount of sauce. If only I could have somehow acquired an extra stomach I would

have ordered another portion to gobble up after my own main course!

I chose the Todenham Farm sirloin steak which comes simply prepared with

garlic butter, roasted vine tomatoes and fries. You can tell a lot about a kitchen by the quality of their steaks and, with only garlic butter alongside it, there was nothing for it to hide behind. I was delighted to find it perfectly cooked.

My dessert was a caramel and macadamia baked cheesecake with pomegranate ice cream. Oh Yes! How I loved this delectable combination - not too sweet, just perfectly balanced, creamy ice-cream with a sharp marbling of pomegranate. Our other choice was stilton and fruit cake - a big



slab of each, to be consumed a square of each at a time with a strong espresso coffee and perhaps a glass of port. It's unusual, but with just enough sweet and salt, and just enough texture and creaminess, this is an amazing combination.

WHAT WE DRANK

It was chilly, yet sunny outside so a nice, chewy red wine was definitely the order of the day. We drank a bottle of Le Sanglier De La Montagne Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve 2015, heralding from the sunny hills of the south of France. It was rich and fruity with hints of spice and a perfect partner for our meal. There was water as well, but the less said about that the better!

OUR VERDICT

The Sheep is a friendly, smart, welcoming place to be enjoyed for drinks, dining, or both. If you can, it is worth staying the night as well. The service is excellent and the Sichuan style pork belly dish warrants a visit in its own right. Highly recommended.

