



AN OASIS ON THE BATTLEFIELD



Clockwise from top: A river view of Tewkesbury; the exterior of Tewkesbury Park; the lobby lounge; a space for relaxation.

TEWKESBURY PARK MAY OVERLOOK THE SITE OF THE AD1471 BATTLE OF TEWKESBURY, BUT THE FAMILY-RUN HOTEL IS A PLACE OF PEACE, PAMPERING AND PLAY. GISELLE WHITEAKER HEADS TO GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

The sun is beaming and golfers are on the fairways on either side of the driveway when my mother Judy and I drive into Tewkesbury Park, on the fringe of its namesake in Gloucestershire. Set in 163 acres of undulating parkland and commanding an enviable position overlooking the famous site of the AD1471 Battle of Tewkesbury, the hotel completed the second phase of its extensive three-year renovation last year at a cost of £9 million. The money has been well spent.

Light streams into the open-plan lobby lounge, which feels like a greenhouse or conservatory, with its wooden floors, Wisteria-blue panelling, and parquet-style tables, topped with three Bonsai trees in glass containers. This theme continues into the cocktail lounge and onwards; several guests sit in comfortable lounge chairs and gaze into the distance.

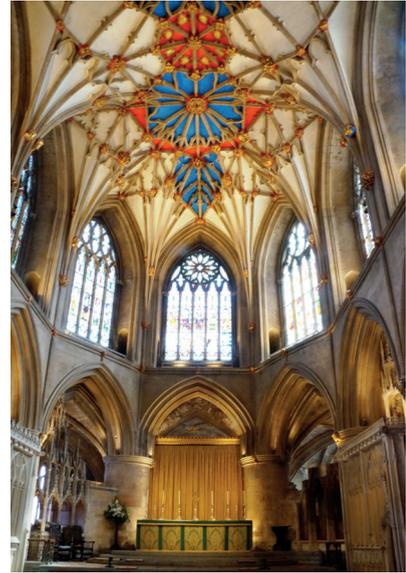
The area's story is artfully woven into the décor. The suites take their names from key characters who fought in the Battle of Tewkesbury, when the Yorkists defeated the Lancastrians – we check in to the Duke of Somerset, which is decked out in soft country tones and has a generously proportioned modern bathroom. It's the little touches though, that make it special. The plush fox used as a "do not disturb" sign makes me smile.

We spend the evening in the orangery section of the restaurant, overlooking the croquet lawn. Here, Executive Chef Anuj Thakur dishes up appetising, locally sourced plates with a dash of creativity. Several dishes hint at his homeland of India, such as the roasted curried aubergine roulade, with tandoori-spiced ratatouille, gazpacho purée and a potato crisp. Others are undeniably British – Revills Farm Vale of Evesham asparagus served with a free-range poached egg, black truffle, and prosciutto crisp; heirloom tomatoes and award-winning Cerney Ash goat's cheese with Bloody Mary jelly, cucumber and basil sorbet; Grafton Farm slow-braised shoulder of lamb with crispy polenta, fricassee of pea, broad bean and smoked pancetta; and free-range Gloucester Old Spot pork rib-eye with buttered mash, local sweet carrots, and caramelised peach purée. The commonality is that they are all fresh, superbly seasoned, and mouth-wateringly good. We consider finishing our meal with a somewhat less British fondue au chocolat, but instead I opt for the trio of chocolate mousse with home-made pistachio ice cream, while Judy consumes the summer berries pudding. The home-made clotted cream ice cream is a highlight.

In the morning, after breaking our fast at the hotel's breakfast buffet, we drive the short distance into Tewkesbury and admire Tewkesbury Abbey, which dates back to the early 12th century. The abbey was host to the



Tewkesbury Abbey.



Inside the abbey.

aftermath of the Battle of Tewkesbury, a decisive battle in the Wars of the Roses. A reminder can be found in the quire, where a plaque commemorating the burial spot of Edward of Lancaster, Prince of Wales, gazes up at the Sun-in-Splendour badge of his vanquisher, Edward IV of York. Despite its macabre role in history, the abbey is a delight, one of the finest examples of Norman architecture in Britain, with what may be the largest Romanesque crossing tower in Europe.

Tewkesbury itself shares the abbey's charm. Situated where the rivers Severn and Avon meet, its medieval streets are packed with black and white half-timbered buildings

The abbey was host to the aftermath of the Battle of Tewkesbury, a decisive battle of the Wars of the Roses.



Above left: The rooms are decked out in modern country tones. Below left: Light streams through the windows in the rooms.

Regardless of the level of play, the views of the abbey over the fairway are worth the effort.



Roasted curried aubergine, with tandoori spiced ratatouille, gazpacho puree and potato crisp, Tewkesbury Park.



Revills Farm Vale of Evesham asparagus, free-range poached egg, black truffle, prosciutto crisp, Tewkesbury Park.



Grafton Farm slow-braised shoulder of lamb, gratin potato, pancetta, pea and broad bean fricassee, lamb jus, Tewkesbury Park.



Hazelnut and praline parfait, with caramelised banana and salted caramel ice cream, Tewkesbury Park.

and the high street is lined with independent shops. The picturesque market town can be explored from the waterways on a short cruise, and there are a number of riverside walks and country trails for exploring the area on foot.

Afternoon finds us back at Tewkesbury Park and I slip into the spa for a relaxing massage, while Judy alternates between swimming in the indoor pool and lounging in the sun in the adjoining patio area. It would be all too easy to while away the rest of the afternoon here, but we've discovered the hotel has a par 3, three-hole golf course and it's the perfect day for a round.

The friendly golf pro assembles a set of clubs and leads us out to the start of the course. I'm not a golfer, but I'm keen to see if I absorbed anything in the lesson I took last year. Despite a few slices – two balls lost and two found – and a couple of complete misses, by the final hole I'm keeping my head down and lifting the ball off the ground, sometimes in the right direction. Regardless of the level of play, the views of the abbey over the fairway are worth the effort.

Ensnared once more in the orangery, a glass of sauvignon blanc in hand, we watch the sun set over the pretty Gloucestershire countryside. It feels like we've been here for a week – each of the staff members greets us like friends who have popped over to visit, asking about our day with genuine interest. It's clear they enjoy being here almost as much as we have. Parting will be such sweet sorrow. ■

INFO

To celebrate the return of the steam train to Broadway Station, Cotswolds, the team at Tewkesbury Park has created the Full Steam Ahead Experience. Guests can now take the train from Cheltenham Racecourse to Broadway, with stops at some of the Cotswolds' prettiest chocolate-box villages, and enjoy a little piece of quintessential British history. The Full Steam Ahead Experience is £380 and includes two nights' accommodation in a Touch of Class room, daily Cotswolds breakfast, a three-course dinner, afternoon tea and Rover tickets. For more information about this experience or Tewkesbury Park see www.tewkesburypark.co.uk.



A view of the abbey beyond the green.