



Staying the night here would almost be like sleeping in an enchanted castle – it's the genuine article. One room is supposed to be haunted (of course).

They have a thatched tree house, situated in a sycamore tree in the grounds where you can have dinner and almost anything else it seems, as it's called 'an adult space'. I didn't have look inside, it would be a bit too grown-up for me!

None of this comes cheap. We are supposed to be in the grip of a major recession, which doesn't seem to have reached Amberley yet – rooms start at **£165**. Part of my philosophy is never to pay the brochure or 'rack' rate – ask for a deal. You will be very surprised at what you can get.

The management is all local, which is a change. Amberley Castle is a member of **Relais & Châteaux**, the worldwide grouping of luxury hotels, and it is run as an independent hotel although part of the **Von Essen Group**.

Go for tea or lunch for a special treat – you know you're worth it.

www.amberleycastle.co.uk
www.amberleymuseum.co.uk



AMAZING SUSSEX BY THE SEA

It's all about recession chic these days. It's smart not to make pointless journeys to places no one can really afford when there are large parts of Britain that are still largely empty and utterly beautiful. Roger Wheeler ambles to Amberley

Just a few miles north of Arundel is **Amberley**, a tiny village noted mainly for its working museum – a 36-acre open-air exhibit dedicated to the industrial heritage of the South East. A few minutes up the road is **Amberley Castle**, almost out of sight of the road and not actually a castle, more a fortified manor house. It is more than 900 years old.



Just 24 miles from Brighton, this is an amazing place. It's been a hotel since 1988 and has now gone very 'country house', and try as I might I can't find anything to criticise. This place is not something you expect just a few miles from home; it's a beautiful old house, all moats, lakes, gravel drives, ancient castle walls, gardens, lawns, and even a working portcullis, in case any guests want to do a runner without paying the bill, perhaps.

It has 19 rooms all named after local towns or bishops of Chichester. All are, of course, decorated and furnished to the ultimate in comfort and good old-fashioned style – nice almost beyond words. All the bedrooms have the wow-factor (such an overused expression)

with four-poster beds and lots of heavy drapery, antique furniture and whirlpool baths. Some have their own sitting rooms and access to the battlements.

There's a suit of armour standing guard at one end of the 12th-century hall, which has a high barrel-vaulted ceiling. Star of the dining room is Kelvin the sommelier, a gentleman aged somewhat like the wines he treasures with a real twinkle in his eye and a very knowing smile. They have a special lunch offer for £20 – extremely good value for money.

The chef, **James Dugan**, is aiming for a Michelin Star and so the presentation is artistic and creative. There is some mean lamb and a – wait for it – **Carrot Compression, Stinking Bishop Fritter with Cardamom Influences**, followed by **Lemon Dacquoise Veil** and **Peppermint Cream**. You have really got to smile at such pretentious nonsense to describe some carrots with a bit of cheese and a lovely lemon mousse. The menu is not huge and most of it is in English you can understand, while the food is excellent, well cooked and lots of it.

