



BATH TIME

Roger Wheeler has found England's most romantic place

It will soon be Valentine's Day and so there is a lot being written about romantic weekends, usually by female journalists, who want to be wined and dined in some smart hotel in the heart of the countryside. Most men would not openly admit to being romantic, but privately, most of us probably are.



As it was our sixth anniversary, we decided to see exactly what a romantic weekend could be. Bath has been a favourite place for weekends for over two thousand years. The Romans knew about such things and we drove down to darkest Somerset to find out more. North East Somerset, which is virtually part of the Cotswolds, is packed with very picturesque little villages with equally picturesque names, like **Limpley Stoke**, **Little Cumberwell** and **Hinton Charterhouse**. Just six miles south of Bath, we found the 19th Century manor, **Homewood Park**, a luxury country house just off the A36, set in 10 acres of parkland, in the lovely Limpley Stoke Valley, an area of outstanding natural beauty. The atmosphere reflects its peaceful surroundings and well-manicured grounds, but there's nothing imposing or stuffy about this fine house which dates back to 1832.

We had a junior suite, almost a small flat, modern and traditional at the same time. The bed was so sumptuous that we found it impossible to get up in the morning. The bathroom was huge with a large freestanding tub, a separate big shower and two wash basins; we could shave together – ahh.

The head chef, **Daniel Moon** has won loads of awards including *Country Restaurant of the Year* in the *Good Food Guide*. I had lamb done three ways – no need to do it quite so often I thought but it was very good if not particularly lamby. Mike had venison which was great. Absolutely no complaints about the food; breakfast also terrific.

You do need to watch out for small extras though. On arrival the very charming young receptionist, who seemed to be there the entire time, offered us tea now and how about some in the morning, she also asked if we would like a morning paper. Yes please we said, what she didn't say was that this was extra. Tea for two was £7, afternoon and morning and the paper was charged at normal price. Not a lot of money but at a hotel of this quality it should have been complimentary.

Outside there's a small swimming pool open during the summer and the 10 acres of grounds are really lovely to stroll around. All this is surprisingly reasonable with three-course dinner from **£48.50 per person**. Rooms range from a **Classic at £125 per night; Deluxe £165; Junior suite £205** and a **Master suite from £245**.

This place has to be what a romantic weekend is all about, we loved it and we really wanted to stay in the mood so headed to Bath. And feeling extremely romantic we booked into **The Royal Crescent Hotel**. This is a world of pure fantasy and completely over the top old



fashioned luxury. We were lucky and got upgraded to a suite. Of course there was a huge sitting room, dressing room, vast bathroom and a bedroom with the biggest bed I have ever seen with a snowdrift of white pillows and duvets. The cherry on the cake was when the concierge lit the fire in the sitting room. All we needed was a kitchen and there would have been no reason to leave. Bathroom freebies were from Culpepper, which is not surprising as the hotel group happen to own Culpepper, good product placement! The spa is called **The Bathhouse** and is across the beautiful gardens. This is really unusual. They have a smallish swimming pool, all black granite floors, two large barrel type tubs with



hot and cold water and a sauna steam room. The restaurant is called **The Dower House** and is, of course, lovely. In fact everything you would expect in a five star hotel. Nothing is ever perfect, our dinner was extremely good but my pudding was not nice and when I mentioned this to the waiter he really wasn't particularly bothered.



The Royal Crescent Hotel is fabulous, it can be very pricey but it appears to be busy; it's loved by the Americans and wealthy tourists. It's part of **Relais & Chateaux**, officially the most beautiful hotels in the world. Rooms can vary in size and can in fact be quite reasonable; the whole place exudes tradition, go for a one-off weekend or a very special occasion. The big bonus is that you get to see Bath, one of the loveliest cities in the country. The Royal Crescent Hotel is owned by the **Von Essen** group, who have a collection of 30 or so hotels, most of which seem to be of a very high standard.

www.homewoodpark.co.uk
www.royalcresthotel.co.uk
www.vonessenhotels.co.uk
www.visitbath.co.uk