

ENGLAND

# Inns for foodies

A restaurant with rooms is a long-existing concept, but a new wave of hoteliers is focusing on local ingredients as the main draw

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For a wave of hotels across England, “hotel” is actually a misnomer: These emerging enterprises are not measured by the size and sumptuousness of their bedrooms, their linen threadcount or toiletries. For them, food is the focus.

“We describe ourselves as a restaurant with rooms and we try to overdeliver on that promise,” says Robin Hutson, owner of the Pig in southern England. The restaurant opened in 2011 in New Forest National Park Forest and quickly evolved into a small chain. “We’re more informal and approachable than a traditional country house hotel, and if we sound like a pub that’s a good thing.”

A restaurant with rooms isn’t a new concept; the French *auberge*, or inn, has long seduced clients with a decadent meal followed by a comfortable room to sleep it off (without a check-in desk, stuffy lounge or concierge in sight). Old-fashioned British pubs offered lodging as an antidote to a night of drinking, but the food served was often underwhelming. The Pig, and foodie inns like it, have upped the ante.

“There’s been a huge revolution of food in the U.K. during my career,” Hutson says, having previously created and sold the Hotel du Vin group, a chain of luxury boutique hotels in Britain. “It’s not about crisp, white linen and pretentious dishes. People now care about ingredients. We centred the whole idea of the Pig around our kitchen gardens, with a principle to try and source other food from within 25 miles.”

Each of the four Pig restaurants in southern England – with another opening next year – serve honest, seasonal fare in a relaxed, bohemian environment: think mismatched furniture, vintage cutlery and glassware, and bric-a-brac found by Hutson and his wife Judy at junk shops and auctions. The cozy chic



Russell’s, in Broadway, England, serves a modern British menu that uses local ingredients where possible.



Foodie inns, such as the Pig on the Beach, are catering to clients who care more about the food than the linen threadcount.

bedrooms at the Pig are also uniquely designed with their personal touch.

Another good place for a well-fed sleeper is the family-run Russell’s of Broadway. When you walk through the front door, you’re immediately in the dining room, and a barman or waitress will hand you a key to one of seven cheerfully decorated bedrooms. Just two hours by train from London, Russell’s has been open in the Cotswolds since 2004.

Russell’s modern British menu is market-based using local ingredients where possible, such as Evesham asparagus, Gloucestershire apples or mallard and venison in game season. The restaurant hasn’t had a lull in the past 12 months.

“We’re trying to capture the French ethos of eating out more, not just on special occasions,” proprietor Andrew Riley explains.

With room rates that include a full English breakfast, there’s no excuse to dine, drink and drive – guests can simply retire to their room above the restaurant.

Special to The Globe and Mail

The writer was a guest of the Pig on the Beach; some travel was provided by the Great Western Railway. Neither approved or reviewed this article.

WHILE YOU’RE THERE

Instead of driving out of London, try the Great Western Railway. For the best value, book tickets in advance at GWR.com.

**The Pig on the Beach, Dorset:** Perched above Dorset’s Jurassic Coast cliffs, the Pig has epic views on its doorstep. The enchanting greenhouse restaurant is where you’ll savour rock oysters and fish caught that morning, slow-cooked shoulder of home-reared lamb, herbs, salads and vegetables foraged or plucked from the walled garden, with homemade ice creams and “piggy fours” for pudding. From £129 (\$260) a night (room only). [thepighotel.com](http://thepighotel.com)

**Dean Street Townhouse, London:** Located within a connected pair of fine Georgian

townhouses, this is an irresistible Soho hot spot. Guests come for the comfort food and they stay next door for the roll-top baths and retro furnishings. From £230 a night, includes breakfast. [deanstreettownhouse.com](http://deanstreettownhouse.com)

**The Wild Rabbit, Oxfordshire:** This is an intimate inn with roaring open fires and chic, neutral interiors. The kitchen uses produce from Daylesford Organic Farm, and offers dishes such as crisp pig’s head, Daylesford Aberdeen Angus beef seared in a charcoal-burning oven, and homemade cheeses with bowls of peaches, plums and pears. From £130 a night, includes breakfast. [thewildrabbit.co.uk](http://thewildrabbit.co.uk)

**Russell’s of Broadway, Worcestershire:** Set within the

postcard-pretty village of Broadway, Russell’s balances refined menus with a relaxed atmosphere. Think smoked breast of wood pigeon with cherries, chocolate and foie gras, followed by pan-fried turbot with lobster ravioli and shellfish bisque. From £120 a night, includes breakfast. [russellofbroadway.co.uk](http://russellofbroadway.co.uk)

**The Talbot Inn, Somerset:** The Talbot has eight airy bedrooms set around a cobbled stableyard. Guests can wash down duck hearts on toast with homemade Talbot Ale in the bar, and on weekends feast on whole suckling pig spit-roasted on a fire in the Coach House Grill Room. From £95 a night, includes breakfast. [talbotinn.com](http://talbotinn.com)

Stephanie Drax

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