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Blue Lion Inn, North Yorkshire

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The Blue Lion hotel, North Yorkshire ... a short stagger from restaurant to bed

Credit where credit's due. I pinched the Blue Lion Inn from Angela Hartnett's list of favourite places which recently appeared in Guardian Weekend. So handsome was the Blue Lion on the net, I couldn't resist. What's more, 15 rooms are divided between the original coaching inn and a newly built annexe, so whatever Hartnett-rated indulgences take place in its restaurant, bed will be only a short stagger away.

The inn stands tidily at the roadside, just before a bend, as if in introduction to East Witton's village green, an unfurled carpet up ahead, flanked by little grey cottages and picket fences. Leaving Tim to unload, I slip through a back door to reception. Two minutes later we are shown to rooms in the annexe adjacent to the car park.

"Nice touch - Yorkshire, see?" says Tim, deftly throwing his room key, which has a full-size cricket ball as its keyring, up in the air. We like the rooms: high-ceilinged, with exposed beams, kitted out in cream, dark wood and leather. There is a restful symmetry and each has a decent bathroom. "That's even big enough for you," says Tim, opening the door of my giant wardrobe to reveal just four lonesome hangers.

Notes tell me that fresh milk, an iron and ironing board can be supplied, and in a drawer I find the hairdryer (oh, and someone else's old hairbrush). A pot of Twinings over the evening news (reclining against plumped-up pillows), then I join Tim in the bar.

"Well timed, you've just missed the rabble," he says. "There was a shooting party in here a moment ago." We order Black Sheep draught beers. "Oh my God," he groans, halfway through the second pint of Riggwelter. "It's 5.9%. I'm going to be trashed."

Supping our beer, we are soon lulled into a state of total contentment, but even if the barrels had run dry and there was only flat Coke for sale, I would still want to be in this bar because it is perfect in every way. From low lighting which contrives a Dickensian atmosphere ("Bring on winter's short days," it seems to say), to a ceiling pocked with old hooks; from the menu, full of promise, chalked up around its perimeter, to an ancient, curving settle of wood, leather and horsehair, and newspapers hanging by the door, it is most emphatically my Bar of the Year.

With sound steering from owner Paul Klein, we order, and cross the hallway into the restaurant to sit beneath a crimson ceiling and indulge.

Cooking is a serious matter here, with game high on the agenda right now, though I could just as easily have gone for the special vegetarian menu (in the end, we share a

sublime starter of tagliatelle with wild mushrooms, parmesan, cream and thyme sauce).

The tables are a generous girth - no balancing acts or elbow-banging. Staff, in black and starched white, and the manager of 10 years, Craig Turner (who will tell tall tales at the bar if you let him), are the sort who make running a tight ship look like plain sailing.

Yet, despite all the attention to detail, it isn't the least stuffy - and no one can put that to the test better than Tim and I. We don't do reverential whispering at the table; instead we're doing our own version of the Monty Python Mr Creosote sketch and competing - over a degustation pudding plate for two - to say "waffeur" in the most exaggerated French accent. It probably isn't what a top London chef does on her visits, but no one seems to mind in the slightest.

• East Witton, Nr Leyburn, North Yorkshire (01969 624273, thebluelion.co.uk). Doubles from £89 B&B in main house, from £120 in coach house (single discounts only midweek). Check for autumn/winter offers. Expect to pay around £30 a head for three-course dinner excluding drinks (which could be a very drinkable glass at less than £6). The Blue Lion Inn is a member of Great Inns of Britain (greatinns.co.uk).

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