

Midhurst Spread Eagle: Fit for a Queen

40 travelbeginsat40.com/2018/12/midhurst-spread-eagle-fit-for-a-queen/

December 7, 2018



Irene Caswell takes a micro-break to the Midhurst Spread Eagle in the West Sussex market town and discovers a hotel steeped in history that is truly fit for a Queen.

The weather is maybe a little misty, chilly and quite probably rainy in autumn and winter in the UK, but that's actually a good excuse to take a short break and indulge yourself a little. There is something very special about wrapping up in warm – and waterproof – clothing to explore the countryside in the autumnal light. A cosy hotel is a must and if you add some interesting and enjoyable activities into the mix you won't notice the weather – too much.

The South Downs National Park consists of 1,627 square kilometres of stunning countryside and coastline to explore. At the heart of the Park lies the historic market town of Midhurst located on the Cowdray Estate, indicated by local properties painted in the distinctive estate yellow, called Gold Cup.

A Historic Hotel, The Midhurst Spread Eagle

Nestled at the centre of Midhurst is The Spread Eagle, part of Historic Hotels Sussex an independent group of three luxury hotels including Bailiffscourt and Ockenden Manor. The hotel has a fascinating history dating back to 1430 when the foundations were laid. Just to put that in context, that is around 20 years before the Inca city of Machu Picchu was founded, a year before Joan of Arc was burned at the stake in Rouen and ten years prior to the start of the War of the Roses.

In 1591, three years after Sir Francis Drake's victory over the Armada, Queen Elizabeth I visited Midhurst. Good Queen Bess is reputed to have watched celebrations for her arrival from a room at The Spread Eagle now named inevitably, The Queen's Suite. The room has a wig cupboard and although there is no evidence to suggest that her majesty made use of said cupboard, nonetheless these many historical characteristics are undoubtedly what make the hotel special.

"The Spread Eagle of Midhurst, that oldest and most revered of all the prime inns of this world", quoted Hilaire Belloc.

Rooms at the Midhurst Spread Eagle



Midhurst Spread Eagle four post, The White Room credit Irene Caswell

Although the hotel dates back to the 15th century, and the floorboards do creak here and there, the pretty rooms feature contemporary mod cons, from plasma TV to WiFi, and enormous roll-top baths to walk-in deluge showers. There is no shortage of the extras expected in a luxurious country house hotel, including Nespresso coffee machine, homemade biscuits, heaps of warm fluffy towels, towelling robes and soft slippers.

If you are planning on visiting the UK then consider reading our [Essential Travel Guide to UK Holidays for the Over 40s?](#)

With 39 bedrooms including two suites, and two feature rooms with four poster beds and 'princess and the pea' style deluxe mattresses to choose from, I stayed in The White Room, which is the size of a small apartment, with entrance hall, spacious bathroom and ample

bedroom, decorated in elegant furnishings and antique furniture. Once you have slept in a four-poster you understand the attraction of creating a hygge-style nest of pillows and woollen blankets under the canopy.

Dining at the Midhurst Spread Eagle

As you might expect from a hotel with this pedigree The Spread Eagle features an inglenook fireplace in an oak-beamed lounge. A Gin Bar comprises Sussex-produced spirits, such as Blackdown Gin and Brighton Gin. The light-filled conservatory is perfect to while away an hour with a coffee, a good book or the newspaper.



The Gin Bar at the Midhurst Spread Eagle (c. Historic Sussex Hotels)

While many restaurants and hotels lay claim to using local produce, Executive Chef, Martin Hadden, has been foraging for over 20 years and food provenance is the foundation for his menus.

Martin was the youngest ever winner of the Roux Scholarship in 1989 and this early experience is evident in the menu, for instance in the beautiful sauces, such as the warm buttery colour and rich in woody flavour cep sauce, enriched with Madeira and vermouth. Martin has won a Michelin star at both the Ockenden Manor, The Spread Eagle's sister hotel in 2000, and at his own restaurant at The Priory House in Somerset in 2001.

The menu changes seasonally, autumn highlights include South Downs partridge salad, grilled breast of South Downs pheasant, braised ox cheek, and pumpkin, parmesan and fresh herb risotto. I chose the excellent grilled fillet of sea bass for my main course. Fish and seafood comes from nearby Selsey, Portslade and Littlehampton. Meat and game is courtesy of the organic Goodwood Home Farm and other local suppliers. The cheeseboard includes specialities Brighton Blue, Burwash Rose and St George and Levin Down. Award-

winning wine production in the Southeast of England is growing steadily and The Spread Eagle wine list boasts many regional wines. Even the bottled water is from South Downs Natural Water.

If you are more town than country, why not sample our [London Weekend Breaks at Haymarket Hotel](#).

Martin Hadden Masterclasses

As I was travelling solo, I booked on one of Martin's Masterclasses – Found and Foraged. It is a good idea to have some activities planned and an enjoyable way to meet people.

I joined seven other foodies to spend a pleasant couple of hours or so learning more about foraging for, and cooking with, autumn fungi and berries.

A delicious lunch followed with mushrooms on buttery brioche and the most delicious Pavlova I have ever eaten, with a soft marshmallow centre and slightly boozy berries. The talk over lunch was all about food and Martin prepared lunch, and then left the kitchen to eat with the group which was a nice touch.

The Spread Eagle Spa

At the centre of the compact spa is a swimming pool beneath a Scandinavian-style vaulted ceiling. A tiny sauna, six treatment rooms using luxury Temple Spa products, a relaxation room and a small fitness room.

In summer months, guests can enjoy relaxing in the recently created outdoor Japanese Garden but relaxing in the jacuzzi spa pool with a glass ceiling is perfect for stargazing on late winter afternoons.

Midhurst and Surroundings

Midhurst high street is a traditional modest market town with independent retailers and few national chains. It is perfect though for strolling and admiring the many fine buildings in the town centre with examples of *medieval, Georgian, Victorian* and *Edwardian* architecture.



Market town Midhurst_building painted in Cowdray yellow c. Irene Caswell

Sussex offers the traveller the options of both stunning countryside and coastline within easy reach. For food lovers the area offers a wealth of vineyards, a distillery, farm shops and farmers' markets where you can stock up. The [Cowdray Farm Shop](#) close by is open seven days a week with ample parking and wheelchair access.

The South Downs National Park is home to many beautiful gardens and parks for a brisk walk on an autumn day such as the 17th century Petworth Park (6.5 miles) and the award-winning West Dean Gardens (6 miles). The cathedral city of Chichester is about 20 minutes by car and is home to the renowned Chichester Festival Theatre, independent Chichester Cinema at New Park offering an eclectic programme and the Novium Museum. As you would expect the city is also excellent for shopping, including some independent shops.

Regular micro-breaks are such a good way to counteract the stresses of modern living – especially throughout the winter months – offering new experiences in small bites. I spent just one night in Midhurst but came away feeling revived and energised, and inspired with some new recipes and methods of cookery to try at home.

Stays at The Spread Eagle Hotel & Spa

Start from £119 per night B&B, based on two sharing a Standard Room, mid-week. Stays in the Queen's Suite are from £329 on a B&B basis. For more information or to book, click [here](#).

Seasonal Masterclasses at the Midhurst Spread Eagle

Masterclasses with Group Executive Chef, Martin Hadden include: *Game-On*. Learn how to

pluck, draw & prepare pheasant (8 November); *Shape and Lift*. Learn how to perfect The Spread Eagle speciality: twice baked cheese soufflé (21 March) and *Potty About Potatoes*. Take in the highlights of the potato: the ultimate mash, crispy potato galette, potato terrine (23 May). Prices £40 per person including a two-course lunch, a glass of wine and recipes to take home.

Advertisement

Related Posts:
