



MYSTERY GUEST WE SEND A WRITER UNDER THE COVERS...
THIS WEEK: BEECH HOUSE, CLIPSHAM, RUTLAND

OUR stay was billed as "One Night in Aubergine", which sounds rather like a Forties film noir. It could have been "One Night in Chocolate" or "One Night in Double Cream", as all six rooms at Beech House have edible names. This risks tweeness, but who cares? The place is a delight.

Clipsham is a quiet village near Stamford, with views over the rolling Rutland fields. It has long been on the foodie circuit, thanks to the Olive Branch, the Michelin-starred pub-cum-restaurant at its heart.

Last summer the owners fitted out Beech House across the road, a grown-up Georgian doll's house with a latticework porch. So now you have a restaurant-with-guest-house, an interesting variation on restaurant-with-rooms.

As at the Olive Branch, this is no place for airs and graces. We arrived at teatime and, with no paperwork to fill in, one of the enthusiastic young bar staff simply took us across to the honey-coloured house.

He led us up a staircase quietly resplendent with Farrow & Ball colours, pointed out the fridge on the landing for fresh milk, opened the door to Aubergine and said: "If you want anything, just give us a ring." And that was that.



Village life: Beech House promises a cosy country weekend

The room, more lilac than aubergine, balanced feminine comfort with Art Deco-ish elegance: 1920s double bed, mirrored furniture, wardrobe, chest of drawers, flat-screen TV, DVD player and, glory be, a Roberts radio.

The black-and-white bathroom was similarly stylish, with heated towel rail, bathrobes and even a glittery casket of tampons (thoughtful, but no thanks). We lay back on a sumptuous snowdrift of bedding, dozed off and awoke just in time for dinner.

The Olive Branch was buzzing with a civilised, comfortably off crowd having a good night out. With its foie gras and "roast leg of local hare", the menu is hardly geared to vegetarians, who choose from just one starter and two main options. But it mixes locally sourced tastes and textures imaginatively.

Roast cornet pepper stuffed with fennel and goat's cheese and served with couscous was superb, while the fish and chips (with minted peas) was an unexpectedly gourmet

experience. The service was well paced and friendly.

Breakfast was fine, if a bit of an anti-climax. It included four-star kippers, but was let down by lukewarm toast.

Stephen McClarence

Bottom line: Doubles from £80, breakfast included. Stephen McClarence paid £100 for Aubergine.

Sampling the fare: Two-course dinner for two, with coffee, cost £42.95, plus £20.60 for drinks.

What we think: Ideal base for a cosy country weekend.

Best thing: Arriving.

Worst thing: Leaving.

Access all areas: Ground-floor room with wheelchair access.

Need to know: Beech House (01780 410355, www.beechhouseclipsham.co.uk), Main Street, Clipsham, Rutland.

Room: 10 out of 10.

Food: 9 out of 10.

Service: 9 out of 10.

Value: 9 out of 10.

Have you stayed at Beech House? Do you agree or disagree with our review? Go to www.timesonline.co.uk/aplacetostay and **Post a Comment.**