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The historic hostelries staging a comeback



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These traditional coaching inns once provided a rest stop for weary travellers. Now their crackling fires and ales are complemented by gourmet menus and hotel-style bedrooms, says Aoife O'Riordain

AOIFE O'RIORDAIN | Tuesday 30 October 2012

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As children, Hugh and Steve Ridgway, the new owners of The Royal Oak Inn (01548 810 313; theroyaloakbigbury.com), enjoyed their first bottle of ginger beer and ready salted crisps at this traditional Devon hostelry. So when the opportunity arose, the local boys jumped at the chance to take over this inn in the village of Bigbury. Also the proprietors of the successful St Moritz hotel in Cornwall, the Ridgways have used their expertise to restore this newly reopened inn. The inviting bar and restaurant serves traditional favourites – Welsh

rarebit and beer-battered fish and chips – while the four rooms have been done in a light, contemporary style with a nostalgic thread that extends to retro board games and BTC bedside lamps. Doubles start at £60, B&B.

What's the attraction?

Once a place where horse-drawn travellers could break their journey and bed down – with the added bonus of dinner and a pint of ale – the British inn has come a long way. Damp walls and a Ploughman's no longer set the standard. Around the country, historic hostelries are becoming destinations in their own right, luring a new generation of guests with the promise of award-winning food and Farrow & Ball colour schemes. Retaining their charm and sense of history, these quintessential inns have an informal atmosphere, but the attention to detail is high. Cosy up by a crackling log fire, enjoy a dinner of locally sourced ingredients and slip between Egyptian cotton sheets for a restful night's sleep.

Shrop til you drop

You can huddle up with a pint of Shropshire Gold ale in the inviting surroundings of the Inglenook bar that forms part of The Lion and Pheasant (01743 770 345; lionandpheasant.co.uk), a coaching inn that dates from Tudor times in the centre Shrewsbury. During its early days, the inn served as stopping-off point on the arduous route between London and Ireland. These days, it's more of a destination in its own right. There are 22 guestrooms spanning eight historic houses, all done in a lightly Scandinavian-chic style, complemented by wonky staircases, nooks and wood-beamed ceilings. There's also a restaurant offering traditionally inspired dishes with a twist. Doubles start at £95, B&B.

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