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The Lugger Hotel, Truro, Cornwall

Mid February may not seem an ideal time to be packing my disastrously unstylish and unhelpfully small weekend bag in order to make way to an English seaside destination but as my girlfriend and I endured the pitfalls of escaping London by car on a Friday we ended up thoroughly pleased with both the awaiting weather and more importantly the intended destination.

As a huge fan of the Pirates of the Caribbean ride at Disneyworld, if not the uninspiring film adaptation franchise, I was delighted to discover that the Lugger's heritage dates back to a 17th century Inn that was reputed to have been the haunt for many local smugglers, one of which was in fact the Inn's very own Landlord, the wonderfully named Black Dunstan, who was caught and hanged for his smuggling activities in the 1890's. I am told that the original buildings, which now make up the Lugger Hotel, have changed little externally over the years even if the insides have been smartened up somewhat. Certainly on our visit the only thing that seemed to be smuggled inside were the extremely happy faces of the hotels residents.

From the instant of our arrival we were treated with great warmth and hospitality by the staff who together with the stylishly intimate interiors go some way to creating the atmosphere that you are staying not in a hotel but in a good friends house. A good friend with immaculate taste. The twenty-two rooms are adorned with whitewash walls and Portuguese wood as well as equipped with ensuite bathrooms and appealing touches such as homemade biscuits. The feeling here is simple and unpretentious but also extremely warm and welcoming.

If we didn't stay long in the rooms it is because the Lugger is set in one of the most beautiful and romantic settings I have ever encountered. The hotel sits right at the water's edge, part of the sleepy fishing town of Portloe in a fabulously secluded cove. Surrounded on all sides by cliff tops the feeling is both of immense privacy and intimacy but also of great curiosity as to what is waiting over the cliffs. It was this curiosity that quickly pulled us out of our rooms, into our walking boots and onto the slightly muddied footpath leading up to the headland. The walk was hugely enjoyable, including a beautiful national trust house and stunning coastal vistas. We returned invigorated but also deeply relaxed.

If in need of further relaxation then the hotel also provides a small spa that offers an array of treatments from massages to Reiki and reflexology. Sadly we didn't quite have the time to indulge in any such pampering as I was rather occupied with instructing Lola as to the crucial matter of England beating France in a rather important rugby match. Happily for her, she was more than content to ignore my bleatings and read her book and happily for me, England won the match.

Having already delighted in the Hotels delicious scones as part of a highly recommended afternoon tea we were very excited to see what the AA rosette awarded restaurant would offer. We were far from disappointed. Head chef Didier Bienaime (who surname presumably translates roughly to an appropriate ‘like well') has crafted a menu with combined English and European influences but with a heavy and commendable emphasis of local produce such as shellfish, lobster and crab. I was torn by the Cornish sea fish chowder with poached river Fal oyster but opted instead to start with scallops. Happy days that I did. I have had many scallops in my life but I can never remember enjoying them so much. Cooked to absolute perfection and served with a delicious reduction they allow me to use an over-used dramatic food expression and say with absolute conviction that they melted in one's mouth. Rather inexplicably whilst in a restaurant that

looks right out onto the sea only a matter of metres away; I decided to have the duck. It was perhaps a tiny bit overcooked for my taste but perhaps served me right. Lola's fish stew was, if not quite as stupendous as my scallops, very delicious indeed. A perfect bread and butter pudding with homemade custard finished off one of my most enjoyable meals of the year to date and after first teaching Lola how to play chess and then losing to her at it, we retired to our comfortable bed extremely happy indeed.

The Lugger hotel undoubtedly offers an extremely organic experience. 90% of its food is sourced locally and one cannot help but feel intimately connected with the powerful natural setting in which it resides. In terms of sustainability the hotel is committed to recycling any waste, to applying strict heating and electrical control systems and to conserving energy wherever possible. Not unusual standards and as such those looking for an extremely eco-friendly hotel might be better suited elsewhere. But for those looking for a hugely welcoming and breathtakingly intimate and romantic experience, not to mention surprisingly superb food, then the Lugger Hotel is more than worth the five and half hour journey it took us from London. I'd go again just to have those scallops.

Posted: Thursday 3 March 2011

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