



## THE WELLINGTON ARMS THE GOOD LIFE IS ALIVE AND WELL AND HALF AN HOUR OUTSIDE OF BASINGSTOKE

All too often taking a city break doesn't seem worth the effort but I genuinely didn't want to leave The Wellington Arms. Or at least it gave me an idea that I might like to permanently break from the city and enjoy the good life they seem to have perfected so well here.

Located about half an hour out of Basingstoke, make sure you're going in the right direction – because about half an hour on the OTHER side of Basingstoke is another venue with the same name. Yes, I found that out in addition to another scenic taxi journey in the name of travel journalism.

It's an immediately welcoming scenario that greets you – a beautiful building surrounded by luscious greenery and the sound of birds. And the occasional chicken.

The Wellington Arms is owned by a lovely couple, Simon Page and Jason King, who couldn't be more

welcoming. It's co-inhabited by a gorgeous cat who, as cats do, knows that he runs the place.

Behind the main pub building there's a recently converted oak barn, housing the two guest bedrooms. They're so comfortable that you'll want to dive into the giant beds and sleep immediately. Perhaps not what your partner has in mind.

They were originally a 17th century hay store and scullery – now converted into two rooms, one labelled old, one labelled new and both beautiful, classic and stylish.

Both have slate flagstones with underfloor heating, as well as a rain shower – even a hayloft in the room we stayed in. As if I didn't already want to stay longer... There I am immediately planning what life would be like to live here.

Although it's perfect for a romantic getaway, the beds are so comfortable that while you might not want to get out of them, you'll be asleep quite quickly – much to the annoyance of your partner. But there's still plenty of other things to keep him occupied – there's a large selection of DVDs to pick from

in the bar to watch on the state-of-the-art entertainment systems.

In fact, so impressed was I with their choice of bedroom accessories that I actually went out and bought the exact same iPod dock from Conran...

Relaxing in the garden with a drink and taking a stroll as the sun goes down helps to add to an immediately calming atmosphere and gets you in the perfect mood for a fantastic dinner. Just looking at the menu again makes my mouth water.

It's an intimate dining area, where Jason – recently named The Good Food Guide chef of the year no less – takes control in the kitchen, serving up home-grown produce. Quite simply, it's no wonder they're ranked so high in the top 50 gastro pubs in the UK – our meal was fantastic.

Over dinner I chat to Simon – it turns out that he's a big Madonna fan, so we found common ground in being able to excitedly discuss her recent tour in the way that only real fans can. It gets nerdy. And after a few glasses of wine it also gets blurry, so I can't swear if I've remembered correctly that their cat is named with a Madonna reference. And why let truth get in the way of a good story?

I go to bed extremely well fed and sleep extraordinarily well – to rise to the blissful peace and quiet that only the countryside can bring. And, of course, a fantastically well-cooked breakfast by Jason as we're once again visited by the Madonna cat. And all too quickly that city break that seemed like it might be too much fuss to organise is over and I'm hurtling back from the perfect getaway wishing I could've had just one more night...

And maybe I will – the couple are currently adding The Apartment above the pub, their new B&B bedroom suite.

Even if you're not going to stay you really should drop in for dinner if you're passing. But hey, if you're passing why not make a night of it. Or maybe two... ■

Thewellingtonarms.com

