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Berkshire Bell

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One of autumn's greatest pleasures for a weary Londoner must be escaping to the countryside of a weekend to seek comfort by a roaring open fire. Updating the traditional coaching inn into something much more interesting for modern travellers is The Olde Bell, Berkshire.



The bar at The Olde Bell, Berkshire

Located in the pretty village of Hurley The Olde Bell dates back to 1135, making it one of the oldest inns in England. Sloping, creaking, oak floors, beams and inglenook fireplaces combine with modern, stylish flourishes from designer Isle Crawford to create a warm but paired-down unfussy aesthetic. Much of the furniture, textiles and design features are supplied from local craftsmen both in the communal areas and the 50 luxurious bedrooms.

As well as boasting good looks The Olde Bell is also a draw for foodies. The bar serves a good range of local ales and hearty dishes but the main restaurant is the real focus.

Archived Travel

Africa (3)
China (2)
Countryside (1)
England (1)
Europe (3)
France (1)
Hotels (2)
Luxury (1)
Morocco (1)
Paris (1)
Peru (1)
Skiing (3)
South America (1)
Switzerland (1)
Turkey (1)

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Media Contacts

Editorial contact:

Joanne Glasbey

jo@showmedia.net

Fashion contact:

Tamara Fulton

fashion@showmedia.net

Advertising contact:

Duncan McRae

Duncan@flyingcoloursmarketing.com

Production contact:

Chris Madigan

production@showmedia.net

The restaurant at **The Olde Bell**

Executive chef Warren Geraghty, formerly of the acclaimed West restaurant in Vancouver, is passionate about wild food and foraging and has transformed the kitchens and menu since taking over late last year. As well as buying meat and fish from local suppliers, the inn boasts its own walled kitchen garden which, Geraghty intends, will provide half of the restaurant's vegetables, fruit and herbs by next summer.



The Olde Bell's walled gardens

Head chef Andrew West-Letford and pastry chef Jason Farr complete the restaurant's impressive team, serving mouthwatering seasonal dishes such as roasted red leg partridge with spiced aubergine, caramelised chicory and pomegranate; rolled pork belly with sage polenta, chorizo broth and cocoa beans; glazed figs, sultanas and marmalade ice cream; and pear and chocolate bread and butter pudding with apple, and vanilla ice cream. An impressive, interesting wine list with a French focus and a surprising number of bottles under £30 completes the considered, elegant but unpretentious feel of the restaurant, making it unsurprising that The Olde Bell is as popular with Berkshire locals and visiting foodies.

Rooms £160-£350 a night. Meal for two with wine and service, around £100. The Olde Bell, High Street, Hurley, Berkshire, SL6 5LX, 01628 703 505, theoldebell.co.uk

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