



FEELING PARTICULARLY PATRIOTIC I was inspired to plan a British break – there seemed few places more fitting than The Olde Bell. Just 40 minutes by train from Paddington, in the Berkshire village of Hurley, this timber framed five-star coaching inn is picture postcard-perfect. Back in the early days of the Queen’s reign Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, Cary Grant and Errol Flynn spent weekends here, and more recently The Olde Bell has played host to Rachel Weisz and Dame Judy Dench.

We were charmed by the uneven floors, crooked beamed ceilings and warren-like corridors in the main inn, parts of which date back to 1135. Our ‘larger’ room was spread over two floors, with a dressing room and bathroom – complete with claw foot bath, huge walk in monsoon shower and divine Aesop toiletries – down below, and the bedroom up top. Designed by Ilse Crawford, whose portfolio includes Soho House, the comfortable lodgings were pared back and simple; rush matting, sheepskins, Jakob’s wool blankets, bare floorboards, and neutral tones gave a rustic feel.

Much to my other half’s delight, upon heading for an aperitif before dinner, we discovered that the bar was a proper English country pub, complete with blazing log fire, board games and chatty regulars. He even sampled a pint of Rebellion, the local brew. We’d have been happy to prop up the bar all night, but dinner beckoned, and I’d heard great things about chef Warren Geraghty’s food. Having worked at a number of Michelin-starred establishments, his pedigree is clear. The menu champions seasonal, local produce (much of it from the hotel’s own kitchen gardens) with a focus on wild and foraged foods – we were in our element.

Waking with slightly fuzzy heads the next morning, we tucked into the impressive breakfast spread before borrowing wellies and walking maps, and heading out for a stroll along the Thames, armed with a picnic prepared in The Olde Bell’s kitchen. Eyeing the pretty properties along the river we were almost tempted to look into investing in a weekend home, but the knowledge that there are places to stay as wonderful as The Olde Bell made it all seem a little unnecessary. **LN**

Prices for a double room start from £185. High Street, Hurley, Berkshire SL6 5LX (01628 825 881; www.theoldbell.co.uk)



DON'T MISS...

Headlined by journalist and author Jon Ronson, ‘Bell Stories’ on 17 June will feature a series of fascinating author talks. Of particular interest is Stuart Evers, one of London’s most exciting new authors, who will discuss his much-awaited new novel *If This Is Home*. His short

story collection *Ten Stories About Smoking* won the London Book Award. We are also excited about hearing award-winning poet, Paul Farley, who will be reading selected pieces from his recent work, *The Queen*. Foodies will be in their element, too; Champagne picnics

will be available to pre-order, homemade baked goods will be sold in The Olde Bell shop and a vintage ice-cream vending tricycle will serve traditional ices created by pastry chef Jason Farr. *Tickets are priced between £5 and £10 and can be purchased from reception.*