

Travel deals

◆ If cruising is your thing then how about stepping aboard the Caribbean's newest and most spectacular fun ship Carnival Magic and see the hottest spots in carnival style. You can join a nine-night Caribbean cruise departing from Galveston, Texas, on January 21 from £979 per person. That includes flights between London and Houston, pre-cruise hotel night, transfers and a seven-night full-board cruise. The ship offers an amazing resort at sea with so many attractions and amenities plus some glittering evening entertainment. To book visit www.carnivalcruise.co.uk, telephone 0845 3510555 or see a travel agent.



◆ For good value, no frills, Winter sun Olympic Holidays is offering seven nights bed and breakfast at the two-star Senhor Angela resort in Calangute, Goa, from £435. The flight leaves on December 1. Telephone 0844 576 2386.

◆ Little Paddock, eight Scandinavian-style, cosy wooded lodges near the New Forest National Park in Hampshire, is offering four nights for the price of three until the end of January excluding Christmas and new year. Each lodge at the adult-only complex has been individually furnished and guests have shared use of two hot tubs, table tennis and a tennis court. A winter stay is from £98 per person. Phone 01425 470889 or visit www.little-paddock.com

◆ Bon Voyage is offering a good-value seven-night holiday combining three nights in the vibrant French quarter of New Orleans with four nights on The Strip in glitzy Las Vegas. The price of £985 per person (a saving of £215) includes flights from Heathrow, an internal flight, and room-only four-star hotels. It's on offer until December 15. Phone 0800 3160194 or visit www.bon-voyage.co.uk/spotlights

Local offers

Late holiday offers with flights from Norwich. Telephone Travel Norwich Airport on 01603 428700, e-mail enquiries@travelnorwichairport.co.uk to check availability or visit the website at www.travelnorwich.com

- ◆ **Tenerife** – December 13, four-star half-board in Playa Americas, seven nights, half-board, £419 per person, saving £172 per couple.
- ◆ **Tenerife** – January 24, three-star named Puerto de la Cruz, seven nights, half-board, £389 per person.
- ◆ **Turkey** – March 30, four-star named in Marmaris, seven nights, all-inclusive, £419 per person.
- ◆ **Jersey** – April 21, Hampshire Hotel, seven nights, bed and breakfast, £339 per person.
- ◆ **Malta** – May 1, three-star named in Qawra, seven nights, half-board, £369 per person.
- ◆ **Corfu** – May 4, five-star named in Kommemo Bay, seven nights, half-board, £469 per person, saving £120 per couple.
- ◆ **Turkey** – May 10, three-star named in Alanya, seven nights, all-inclusive, £379 per person.
- ◆ **Guernsey** – May 19 and 26, L'eree Bay, seven nights, half-board, £479 per person.

Prices correct at time of sending – all are subject to continuing availability and based on maximum occupancy.

Steve Downes

updated inoculations, had his passport stamped and crossed the border with Suffolk for a night at Aldeburgh White Lion.

In my younger days as a Norfolk activist, I would have cooked a snook at the idea of going to Suffolk for the purpose of pleasure. It was simply a barren wasteland that you had to travel through in order to either get somewhere nice or arrive back in the bosom of Nelson's County.

And the only way I thought I could find myself spending a night there was under duress, at either Blundeston or Highpoint prison.

Time must be a great healer, then.

For my wife, Yolande, and I set out not to pass through Suffolk, but to spend a night there. Voluntarily.

With humble apologies to my fellow defenders of the Norfolk faith, who will be distressed at this treachery, we went to the White Lion Hotel at Aldeburgh on the north-east Suffolk coast – close enough to the Norfolk border to make a dash for refuge if things turned nasty.

Of course, they did not turn nasty. In fact, they turned out very nice.

This seafront gem stands to attention on Aldeburgh's coast road, keeping a watchful eye on the weatherbeaten fishing boats and huts that punctuate the sweeping shingle beach.

It is owned by Thorpeness and Aldeburgh Hotels, which also owns The Swan at Lavenham and The Crown at Woodbridge.

In April, the White Lion reopened after a makeover from hotel design consultancy Design Coalition.

It has 38 bedrooms and 50 staff who are – according to the puff – “committed to delivering the highest standards of comfort, quality and service”. You don't say.

In our brief time at the hotel, the promise was kept, though.

Unlike too many British businesses where customer service seems to stretch to no more than a grunt and a sneer, the welcome at the White Lion was warm and genuine.

We had a room with a sea view, which was a relief, as I don't like to go more than a few hours each day without seeing the North Sea to get my bearings.

The freshness of the sea breeze was matched by the design of the rooms and dining areas at the hotel.

The designers had managed to pull off the neat trick of giving a new twist, while retaining the older, traditional feel of a hotel that has stood strong for centuries.

And the food was fabulous – helped by an EDP Shop Here-style philosophy.

Some supermarkets advertise ‘fresh fish’, even though its final journey was more than a couple of hundred miles in the back of a refrigerated lorry.

‘Catch of the Day’ at the White Lion comes from Dean Fryer, whose fish stall can be seen on the beach from the hotel window. Now that, Messrs Tesco and Morrison, is fresh.

Head chef Jason Shaw, formerly of London's Ritz and Kensington Marriott hotels, has drawn up menus featuring plenty of other local products – a policy that has synergy in a town that seems to pride itself on its self-sufficiency.



A roaring success

But enough about the White Lion. A hotel's only as good as its surroundings.

If the White Lion were in the middle of Ipswich, I'd sooner sandpaper my legs than stay there. But it's not, it's in a quite delightful town that I cannot believe it took me more than 37 years to visit for the first time.

Aldeburgh's position on the eastern edge of England seems to have made it particularly resilient in rebuffing the march of clone shops and one-shape-fits-all houses.

Perhaps they run out of steam by the time they get this far. Or maybe the easterlies blow them off course.

Either way, Aldeburgh is an all too rare example of a place that has retained its own identity, and has flourished for that very reason.

Quirky independent galleries, cafes and shops stand in line along the main streets, offering much more than the identikit stores of so many towns.

There is a hint of the Hooray Henry about it as well, with Jack Wills on the High Street and plenty of that shop's disciples wandering about with their floppy fringes.

But enough of my inverted snobbery.

Caption: main picture, outside the White Lion Hotel at Aldeburgh which has completed a major makeover this year. Inset left and right, the refurbished bar and restaurant. Right, Yolande enjoying the delights of the restaurant. Far right, exploring the beach in the delightful town.



Log on

For more travel features online visit our website – www.edp24.co.uk/lifestyle.travel

Aldeburgh is delightful. And the White Lion is the ideal place to base yourself to explore and enjoy the town.

Now if I can only annexe it for Norfolk, it'll be perfect.



over border



FACTFILE
Aldeburgh White Lion, Market Cross Place, Aldeburgh, Suffolk IP15 5BJ.
Website www.whitelion.co.uk;
telephone 01728 452720; Facebook www.facebook.com/whitelionhotel;
Twitter – follow @HotelWhitelion
Twelve of the 38 bedrooms have sea views. Bed and breakfast for two for one night costs between £133 for a

double inland room and £196 for a room with a sea view. The bar and brasserie has a host of special events for guests or diners, including: Monthly ladies' luncheons. Thanksgiving dinner on November 24. Winter Wonderland dinner dance on November 26. Santa Sunday – a three-course Christmas lunch on December 18.



Location, location, this hotel really is Grand

Terry Redhead and wife Jayne stay at The Grand Hotel, Northumberland Avenue, in the heart of the capital...

We were quite a distance from our Nelson's County of Norfolk yet there was our hero, overlooking our sixth-floor room at The Grand Hotel in Northumberland Avenue in the heart of central London. From our room you could see Trafalgar Square and the greatest maritime hero of them all atop his column, just checking we were fine. Indeed location was exactly what The Grand was about. Within 20 minutes' walk from the hotel you could be everywhere a tourist or weekend visitor could want to be – the West End and Theatreland, Oxford Street and shops, Westminster and Buckingham Palace for history, Covent Garden for entertainment, and so on. The hotel itself makes available the rooms remaining after some have been taken up by Club Quarters members. Club Quarters is a membership-based full service hotel offering many complimentary services.

But for you and I, the hotel provides everything needed to make your capital stay first-class. The magnificent Victorian grade II listed building, Italian inspired, has been completely restored but has a wealth of history dating back to a first opening in 1887. From 1940 the building was occupied by the Ministry of Defence but a multi-million refurbishment has left it in superb condition, with just a refurbishment of Boyd's Restaurant and bar still taking place when we stayed. There is Italian marble everywhere. And the centrepiece of the building, and a must-see if you visit, is the magnificent ballroom. The sculpted, high-ceilinged ballroom was described by English



Top, The Grand Hotel in Northumberland Avenue, in the heart of London, and, above, the magnificent ballroom.

Heritage as: "The grandest example of a Victorian ballroom in existence today." Many of the original features have survived, including four bay isles to either side of the room, an Italian cinquecento-style carved apse and hand-painted stained-glass windows. The ballroom's grand interior caters for up to 1,000 guests. Standing inside, even when empty of guests and music, it was easy to envisage the flowing gowns and privileged politeness of a Victorian ball attended by royalty and nobility. Perfect for one of those BBC period dramas always screened on Sunday evenings. However, it is not all about the past. The Grand is a modern hotel although the rooms retain the essence of the building's remarkable history with features such as high ceilings. The surroundings are elegant, combining sophisticated décor and luxurious furnishings together with modern conveniences such as ergonomic workstations, internet access, iPod docking stations and multimedia connectivity. Dining in the hotel offers a choice

of Boyd's restaurant or Watatsumi. Boyd's was being refurbished during our stay but will be an opulent eating place surrounded by towering marble walls. Watatsumi is a new Japanese restaurant headed by Nobu-trained executive chef Peter Makohus. He uses the traditional ingredients and techniques of great Japanese cuisine alongside bold new recipes and the ultra modern minimalist setting contrasts effectively with the grandeur of the building. We were new to Japanese food and cooking but both agreed our meal was excellent. Now chopsticks are not everyone's cup of tea but don't despair. Have a go by all means but rather than let your food go cold, simply ask for cutlery if you must. Fish dominated the menu and we particularly enjoyed the sea bass as a main course cooked absolutely perfectly with a mixture of sauces with two many vowels to convey accurately to others! But if you think it is all about raw fish, you couldn't be more wrong. There really was something for everyone, even non-adventurous sorts from Nelson's County.

Need to know

- ◆ Nearest Tube station is Charing Cross, a two-minute walk away, while Embankment is a nearby alternative.
- ◆ 8 Northumberland Avenue was recently used as the backdrop to the film WE, co-written and directed by Madonna.

- ◆ Health-conscious visitors can make use of the complimentary 24-hour in-house fitness suite or can arrange for exercise equipment to be delivered to their hotel room.
- ◆ Visitors can benefit from complimentary WiFi and purified

- bottled water.
- ◆ For information and bookings for The Grand, telephone 020 7839 8877 or visit www.thegrandatrafalgarsquare.com
- ◆ To dine at Watatsumi, telephone 020 7036 8522 or log on to www.watatsumi.co.uk