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www.grangelodgehotel.com ★★ Metro

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The Venture Inn, Forest, Guernsey. Telephone: 263211

Let's go Dutch

How many times have you driven past Le Chene Hotel? Next time, drop in and give yourself a treat. Excellent food, tranquil surroundings and a certain continental za-za-zu await, as Jessamy Baudains discovered

IF YOU can't quite muster up the time or funds to hop over to the continent this spring, there is a small taste of European hospitality right on our doorstep.

The family-run Le Chene Hotel is one of those places many locals have driven past all our lives, thought, 'hmm, maybe one day, eh,' and then, alas, carried on with the glamour of school runs and rush hour.

Fortunately, a few hungry chaps and I had the chance to dive into this cosy little establishment one lunchtime and indulge in a spot of luxury. And boy, oh boy was it worth the wait.

The hotel's Dutch owner, Neik Van

Zutphen, greeted us and took us down to the hotel's bar, where we sipped on cool, crisp aperitifs. Black and white photographs of old Guernsey, vintage bottles of wine and plush, red velvet booths give the bar a certain European za-za-zu.

Neik speaks with that European twang that immediately puts you at ease and his passion for the establishment shines through. The hotel, he tells me, is the number one choice for Dutch visitors in the Channel Islands. In fact, it's a kind of home away from home for them apparently, due to its continental vibe. After a quick scan of the menu and a leisurely ordering of our dishes, we made our way into the dining area.

The low ceilings and cosiness of the bar area stand in stark contrast to this airy, peaceful and summer-like room. A conservatory-like set-up with beautifully laid tables, stunning views out to the pool and garden area and tranquil surroundings made it the perfect second act for our lunch date.

We couldn't wait to get well and truly stuck into the £12.50 spring menu, which is available for both lunch and dinner for the whole of April.

For starters, Steve opted for smoked mackerel, which arrived beautifully presented on a jet-black slate. We feasted our eyes on a flurry of light-pink fish, fresh salad and toasted Guernsey gache. The mackerel was smoked lightly and to perfection, and was served with a dill mascarpone cream, making the dish taste both indulgent and fresh.

Richard chose chicken pate, which was full of flavour and matched brilliantly with the accompanying toasted ciabatta and plum chutney.



Le Chene Hotel chef Steve Pollard puts the finishing touches to a dish. (7816640)

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YOUR LOCAL GUIDE TO EATING OUT IN GUERNSEY



Enjoying lunch at Le Chene Hotel. Left to right: Jessamy Baudains, Richard Griffin, Ilmar Korps and Jean-Claude Brun. (Pictures by Steve Sarre, 7816682)

Jean-Claude chose a classic – a good old Caesar salad – and he wasn't disappointed. Parmesan shavings, crisp radishes and a mango wasabi dressing made this dish a far cry from your average Joe Caesar. Having glanced at the dessert menu I'd decided to save room for pudding, and nibbled on some freshly baked rolls while the others tucked in to their first course. Warm bread and Guernsey butter equals the ultimate lunchtime indulgence.

More lime sodas and a touch of gossip later, the mains could be seen floating through the dining hall as our impeccably dressed (and mannered) waiter made his way to our table.

I opted for lasagne. Now, since I can whip up a pretty mean lasagne – it's my go-to in a spontaneous dinner party situation – I thought what better way to test the food than sample this classic Italian staple? Hand on heart, this was one of the best lasagnes I have eaten in a while. The meat was tender and full of herby seasoning. Cheese sauce oozed out as my fork went in for its first dive, while a tomato and balsamic salad added enough zing to make the palate sing. Truly spectacular.

Jean-Claude's panko-crusted cod and chips was served on a wooden chopping board, the fluffy chips inside a mini frying basket. With fresh tartare sauce, it was rustic, chic and delicious.

Steve and Richard went for herb-crusted chicken supreme, which came with a rich tomato and balsamic side salad and smooth leek and potato gratin. Last but not least – dessert time. We were teetering on the edge of being too

full to function, but there's always room for pudding, isn't there? Yes. It was leche flan for all. We quickly descended into sticky, caramelly (it's a word), creamy, raspberry heaven. Leche flan is the Filipino version of crème caramel, something very popular in the Netherlands according to our waiter. Finally, it was time for a caffeine hit and the chaps and I sipped on smooth Lavazza. Bliss.

But this hotel is about more than just the food. For those of you who fancy an overnight stay (£75 at the moment including dinner and breakfast), and are already thinking about your summer bods, crack out your Lycra because Nordic walking sticks are provided by the hotel for exploring the nearby cliff paths. In fact, a big draw for this hotel is the abundance of recreational equipment available, including Dutch and electric bicycles, an energy-efficient convertible and golf clubs. Complimentary fishing rods are provided too, and the chef will even turn your catch of the day into your dinner that night.

If you feel like treating yourself to some fine dining in cosy, quirky surroundings with impeccable service, the Chene Hotel is certainly worth a trip.

● The £12.50 spring menu is available every lunch and dinner time throughout April. There is also a large breakfast menu, afternoon tea menu (£10.50 per person) and light bites selection.



The 'truly spectacular' lasagne.



Chic fish and chips.



The 'full of flavour' chicken pate.

Classic Caesar salad.



Herb-crusted chicken supreme.



The 'heavenly' leche flan.

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Kob Koon Ka

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