

Weekend

Home

Two Chapel Lane, Ketton, Rutland

Sally Shalam

“Modern comforts in a beautiful rural setting,” says Two Chapel Lane’s smart website. This new self-catering cottage looks good on screen – it’s like flicking through an interiors magazine. Modern comforts, though, I expect as standard these days. Self-catering cottages have raised their game (and prices in some cases) to such an extent that I’m in danger of turning into Simon Cowell. He expects hopefuls to sing in tune; I expect cleanliness, a decent shower, adequate heating, good bed linen and something comfy to sit on. But what I really, *really* want is the X-factor.

What we find at Two Chapel Lane is a pretty cottage, two-up, two-down, whose owner has obviously put a lot of thought into the decor. Granite, slate and scrubbed pine in the kitchen, Cath Kidston in the bedrooms, two good sofas, one good shower and the inspired addition of several original paintings by a Polish artist.

We arrive in the dark, and only the graphic rose-print blinds give the game away. “A plaque saying Two Chapel Lane and a location map wouldn’t go amiss,” I mutter uncharitably as we dump our bags in the hall.

The lights and heating are on, though,



and there’s a jug of fragrant yellow roses, sweet peas and lavender on the kitchen table. “This is tastefully done,” says my bloke. “Nice and simple.”

It doesn’t take long to explore this stone terrace before we retire to the larger bedroom. The smaller is blue and rather sweet, but this room’s slightly French with its white iron bed, white bedspread, little pink bedside rugs and enamel jug and basin set.

Next morning the peace and quiet is disturbed by the neighbours’ dogs barking, but nothing interrupts our fine view of the church spire. Downstairs we have eggs, toast and

tea, then take an early stroll around the village. Locals greet us as they pass.

We poke our noses into the church, which is full of ladies arranging flowers. They all say hello, too. I feel as though I’ve disappeared into the pages of a Miss Read novel.

Or perhaps that should be George Eliot, as later we visit Stamford, just over the border in Lincolnshire, where we watch stags rutting among the ancient oaks and chestnuts in the grounds of Burghley House.

It’s no drama when, returning from a simple pub supper of steak and chips and Lincolnshire sausages and mash



at a pub called the Collyweston Slater, we find the dishwasher has leaked and the electricity tripped. A quick mop and a call to find out where the fuse box is puts that right. But it’s irritating that there’s no washing-up liquid, or kindling to help get the woodburner going.

It’s hard to define the X-factor, but having all bases covered is part of it. Two Chapel Lane is still like a show home – the owner needs to arrive in the dark and live in it themselves to get the fine-tuning right. Oh, and it turns out I didn’t look at that smart website carefully enough. I skipped a section entitled “two extra”, assuming

it was about additional bedding for families. It isn’t – it’s the bit that offers special breakfast hampers and ready-made meals for late-night arrivals. Don’t tell my bloke – he’ll tell me I’m not through to the next round.

● 01780 444298, twochapellane.co.uk. Three-night weekend stay, £350. Dinner at the Collyweston Slater (01780 444288), around £19.50 for two courses excluding drinks. The Olive Branch (theolivebranchpub.com) in nearby Clipsham (Travel, November 18 2006) is Michelin Pub of the Year 2008, book well ahead if you’d like to eat there. sally.shalam@guardian.co.uk

Away

Flying visit Rome

Why now? There are tons of (non-Christmassy) **festivals** this winter, plus **plays and concerts galore**. Drink quality Italian vintages at the **Sensofwine Show** (lucamaroni.com) until December 2. **What Romaeuropa** – an arts, dance, music and theatre extravaganza – runs until December 15. Stanley Kubrick’s cinematic genius is celebrated in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni until January 6 and pop art (pictured) at the Scuderie del Quirinale until January 27. **Getting there** **Ryanair** (ryanair.com) flies from Stansted from £20 return. **Where to stay** Surrounded by parkland but within walking distance from major sites, the baroque **Sant Anselmo** (0039 06 570 057, aventinohotels.com) has decadent, richly draped, theatrical rooms from £114 a night. **Where to eat** **Sud** (+06 442 02701, sudristorantebar.com) for southern Italian stuffed swordfish.



Dam cheap

It sounds like a spoof. “The towels are rarely cleaned, the lightbulbs are replaced irregularly, the hotel water runs cold earlier than the guest would wish for . . . even the hotel sign saves energy by only having one letter lit up at night.” But the publicity blurb isn’t for a Fawlty Towers-style retreat, it’s Amsterdam’s Hans Brinker Budget Hotel’s brutally honest statement of its eco credentials. The managers say they have only just realised the hotel – which opened in 1970 – has been “accidentally eco-friendly” all along, and are now targeting green travellers. It’s an ultra-basic hostel near the Van Gogh museum with 500 beds in dorm rooms but it’s hugely popular and super cheap (from €21 a night). We’re not sure anyone other than cash-strapped students would actually want to *stay* there but it’s refreshing to see a hotel taking a stance against the greenwashing guff that many hotels are churning out. 0031 20622 0687, hans-brinker.com.

Christmas craic

Aer Arran’s (0870 876 7676, aerarran.com) Luton-Galway service operates three times a day all winter, from £76 return. Galway’s pubs are



Reindeer forecast . . . Helsinki in winter

unbeatable for a jolly winter’s night, and The Twelve (00 353 91 59 7000, thetwelvehotel.ie) in nearby Bearna has an eclectic mix of furniture and posh rooms from £87 a night.

North star

Drink some hot *glogi* in Helsinki’s fairy-lit Senate Square, pick up Finnish goodies such as jewellery and blown

glass in the 25 streets of the “Design District” and treat yourself to dinner in one of the three restaurants to be awarded a Michelin star this year, such as intimate Chez Dominique (0035 89 612 7393) which has two stars – one of only three in Scandinavia to do so. Return flights from Heathrow and three nights’ B&B at the hip Klaus K hotel cost from £399pp with Black Tomato. 020-7610 9008, blacktomato.co.uk.

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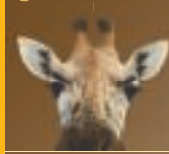
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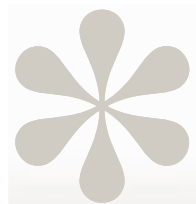
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