

Townhouse chic, country house cool

In the first of our new series on close-to-home get-aways, Tessa Harris checks into Reading's latest hotel, The Forbury, and is impressed by what she discovers



THE FORBURY AT A GLANCE

Location: In the recently renovated Forbury Square. Near neighbours include Carluccio's and Forbury's restaurant.

Welcome: Valet parking and porters are ready to greet you and take your luggage.

Décor: The reception area has a real 'wow' factor. Things that will immediately catch your eye include the original marble floors, the Chesney fireplace designed by Kelly Hoppen, and the glass chandelier made with 84,000 glass beads that sparkle in the stairwell. It's contemporary chic with a country house twist.

Bedrooms: No two rooms are the same. King-sized beds, long-combed cotton satin sheets, extra large pillows – this is luxury with a capital 'L'. William Yeoward, the famous King's Road designer has created oak furniture especially for the rooms. The hotel is also very proud of its works of art – three originals in every room.

Bathrooms: Romantic double-ended baths and walk-in showers. There is even room for the ice-bucket by the bath!

Extra touches: So many, like the brown-hooded bath robes and Forbury chocolates, but the piece de resistance has to be the Welcome bag, packed with goodies such as slippers, tea lights and matches and even a rubber duck.

Eating in: Cerise is the name of the funky downstairs brasserie, where the honest food won't break the bank. There's a cosy cocktail bar too.

Tariffs: From £150 per room (room only).

Special offer until end of May: Two night stay of £400, breakfast, dinner for two and Sunday brunch.



Serious chic for people who know how to appreciate the finer things in life.

READING has definitely come up in the world in the last five years or so. The Oracle shopping centre and the luxury apartments alongside the river have changed the fortunes of this Berkshire town for the better and now comes the icing on the cake; the statement that says the capital town of England's Silicon Valley deserves the very best – a top class hotel right at its historic heart.

While the Madejski Hotel is an excellent corporate venue on the town's outskirts, The Forbury really is in a league of its own in Reading's centre. It's townhouse chic meets country house cool. It's relaxation, combined with unashamed luxury. It's all that's good about a city centre hotel, tempered with a more laid-back atmosphere.

Housed in the former Shire Hall, once home to Berkshire County Council, The Forbury's impressive Grade I Listed exterior is only surpassed by its stunning interior. Six million pounds may seem an awful lot to spend on a refit for such a small hotel – there are just 24 rooms and suites – but look at the quality of the fixtures, fittings and décor, together with the original works of art, and it is clear where the money has gone. The place positively oozes style.

Hotel director Andrew Thomason was Raymond Blanc's right hand man at Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons for four years and the attention to detail and service he brings with him is obvious. It was his idea, for example, to put a welcome bag in each room, containing all manner

of thoughtful delights. "Inspiring and delighting our guests excites me," he enthuses.

The rooms have all been thoughtfully constructed. Beds are decked with the finest monogrammed linen and you can even gaze into real flames in the fireplace, as you sip champagne.

As for the bathrooms, it would be worth an overnight stay just for a candle-lit soak in one of the double-ended baths thoughtfully sited opposite the fireplace.

The Forbury is a seriously chic hotel for seriously grown-up people who know how to appreciate the finer things in life. ■

The Forbury Hotel, 26 The Forbury, Reading, Berkshire RG1 3EJ, tel: 08000 789 789, www.theforburyhotel.co.uk