

# Join the green welly brigade

**Gravetye Manor** offers open fires, country walks and fine dining... By *Abigail Butcher*

**L**OOKING for a country hotel a stone's throw from London often throws up the usual suspects – of which Gravetye Manor is not one. East Grinstead doesn't sound as sexy as the Cotswolds or the New Forest. But there's fresh air and open space in this rural pocket of Sussex, and a gorgeous hotel.

I'm here to sample Gravetye's 'Dirty Green Wellie Weekend', which includes return transfers from the station, sumptuous dinners, a packed lunch to take on walks and the use of some very smart Hunter wellies.

Gravetye Manor was built in 1598 and has been a hotel for around 50 years. Since taking over in 2010, new owner Jeremy Hosking has ploughed money into Gravetye. The 17 rooms are real 'country house hotel' with antiques and comfy furnishings mixed with modern luxuries, such as coffee machines



**Wintry retreat:** Sumptuous gardens and cosy fires at Gravetye Manor



and homemade biscotti. Lunch for the welly brigade is pork pies, cheese and hot soup. Breakfast and dinner in the dining room are a joy, all starched white tablecloths, crystal wine glasses and silver cutlery. Head chef George Blogg doesn't have a Michelin star yet but it's only a matter of time. My hand-

dived Cornish scallops followed by local partridge were to die for, as was the chocolate fondant pudding with buttermilk ice cream. Divine.

This is a real wintry retreat; oak panelling, stone floors, fireplaces with roaring fires and shelves full of books and board games.

**USP:** Gravetye has an extraordinary

Victorian walled kitchen garden, in which all the produce used in the hotel kitchens is grown. There are chickens and peach trees. The wider gardens are regarded as among the most influential in English gardening history and head gardener Tom Coward writes a column for Country Life magazine.

**Who goes there?** Couples and overseas visitors just in from Gatwick – which is only a 20-minute drive away.

**Venture out** Enjoy myriad walks on the estate and surrounds, including good old English pubs such as The Cat. The hotel will supply laminated and easy-to-follow maps. If gardening is your thing, then Wakehurst Place, Borde Hill Garden and High Beeches Garden are all less than ten miles away. Families will enjoy the Bluebell Railway, a heritage steam line running through the countryside with a station on Gravetye's doorstep (bluebell-railway.co.uk). This is Winnie the Pooh country, so take a 15-minute drive to the village of Hartfield to visit the famous Pooh Bridge.

**Getting there:** The Green Wellie Boot Package includes two nights in a deluxe category room. Tasting menu dinner for two on the first evening, a la carte dinner for two on the second evening, al fresco picnic lunch on the first day and a full English breakfast on both mornings. It costs £525 per night.

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