

Soar Mill Cove

Decades ago a young couple, on holiday from Oxfordshire, found a run-down hotel building at Soar Mill Cove. It had originally been the cinema to Bolthead Airfield. They saw the dilapidated hotel's potential, bought it and made improvements to create this upmarket hotel. Now, in the 21st century it is run by the third generation of the Makepeace family.

From the car park we walk alongside a grass tennis court towards wide sloping lawns that narrow as they go down to the cove. One cannot see what lies below the sea's slightly ruffled surface, but daily, men dive down to pick scallops for the kitchen.

We continue our walk past grass roofed self-catering villas which are just some of the hotel's 24 bedrooms. The main hotel is set back from the South West coastal path and as we walk up to the main entrance, we pass a sign for 'Castaways' which is the popular Soar Mill Cove walkers' cafe.

We have come for dinner and are soon in the lounge holding glasses of Prosecco until our table is ready. Diners favour a table by the window, but ours is back from the window and we can still see the sea. The decor is light and unfussy; and a pianist plays his repertoire of easy-on-the-ear favourites.

Our starters arrive – one is a chowder with crustaceans that are heaped in the creamy fish soup and the other has 4 scallops on a bed of leeks. The sauce is superb.

As I finish spooning the last of my chowder, I think I may have eaten the best there is - that nothing will quite match it for flavour. Then our steaks arrive – mine with a jug of port sauce which is superb. The rib-eye steak has peppercorn sauce. I remember an old adage: "the test of a chef is his sauces".

Waiters pass by and enquire of our satisfaction. There is ample port sauce and its flavour with the medium rare steak and treble cooked chips, is memorable. The square plates double up as trays, we observe, as the waiter carries many items away!

Over and beyond the row of diners by the window, the sky's colours change as the sun sinks. Those windows frame a picture of a silhouetted rocky promontory that partially hides the sunset.

For desert, the Pavlova is lovely and was created for Audrey Hepburn who was a regular. I opt for the chocolate fondant. It's served in Master Chef style with red berry fruits, clotted cream and chocolate sauce. Chocolate fondant has that satisfyingly soft smooth centre. The restaurant was busy so it went unnoticed (well I think so) that I dug out the residue of thick sauce that wouldn't pour from the base of the narrow little jug.

The chef has been with the hotel for decades and it doesn't surprise us that this hotel once won the Outstanding Country Establishment award. Coffee, with a handful of chocolate petit fours, in the lounge quietly concludes the evening.

A "table d'hôte" dinner is priced at £35. You may want to sign up with Travelzoo to receive special offers by email for a relaxed evening with fine food at a special price.

For more information contact Soar Mill cove hotel at 01548 561566

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