

# Smooth Sailing in the New Forest

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Lymington is a pretty coastal town on the southern edge of the New Forest, famous for sailing and smugglers. Giselle Whiteaker strolls its cobbled streets.



Boats bobbing at the Old Town Quay

***“The Mayflower has views over historic Lymington harbour, making it the perfect Hampshire base for a relaxing retreat by the water.”***

It's stopped drizzling by the time the train pulls into Lymington, in the New Forest and my mother Judy and I stroll through the Old Town Quay, our small suitcases bumping over the cobblestones as we pass the quaint Ship Inn and a collection of cafes. Sailing and fishing boats bob in the river along the waterfront and the sun breaks weakly through the clouds, bathing the late afternoon in a warming glow.

Behind the Royal Lymington Yacht Club, one of two sailing clubs in the town, we find The Mayflower, part of The Epicurean Collection, a group of boutique countryside inns dedicated to the finest in British food, comfort and culture. Named after the original radio beacon ship responsible for beaming the first radio signal to the Isle of Wight, The Mayflower has views over historic Lymington harbour, making it the perfect Hampshire base for a relaxing retreat by the water.

Our first impression of The Mayflower is one of cosiness and comfort. Our gorgeous twin room, called Windflower is one of only six. The maritime theme is clear, with simple, white

Egyptian cotton sheets on the beds, which are backed by teal wood panelling topped with a black and white image of sailing boats that runs the width of the room. The black-and-white tiled bathroom features a rain shower, with a message on the shower wall written in Scrabble-style tiles that reads “Wash, soap, soak.” Thick white robes hang on the front of the oak wardrobe and an old-school brass clock sits on the bedside table.

Meandering back into the centre of town, we wind through narrow streets, lined with pretty period cottages and houses. We've missed the local market held each Saturday, which dates as far back as the 13th-century, but we peruse the stores on Lymington High Street, once home to Captain Arthur Phillip RN, First Governor of New South Wales and founder of Sydney, Australia, when he returned to England.

When the light fades, we walk back to The Mayflower, ready to sample the classic dishes made from locally sourced ingredients, showcasing the country's freshest fare. Seated at a wooden table in the bustling weatherboard-panelled





restaurant, we peruse the menu, deciding to share the country pate and salt and pepper squid for starters. The smooth pate is served with onion chutney and chunks of light, fluffy loaf that look like Brioche. The fresh Asian slaw is the perfect counterpart to the crunchy-coated squid, along with a squeeze of lime, and the home-made chili sauce adds richness and depth.

Judy opts for the catch of the day for mains, fillet of plaice, with crushed new potatoes, salad and Salsa verde. It's a lovely, light dish, seasoned perfectly, with the sweet overtones in the salad complementing the tender fish. I'm in a wintry mood, so I choose the slow-roasted pork belly, dished with a hillock of creamy mashed potato, seasonal vegetables, Bramley apple puree and a light gravy. The meat melts away from the satisfyingly crispy crackling, the tart Bramley apples cutting through the rich pork, filling the belly and warming the heart.

The portions are generous and we know we should stop. "There's a really nice selection of cheese," Judy muses, "... but I just can't fit it in." I offer to share a bite of the intriguing Toffee apple donut and salted caramel ice-cream dessert that has piqued my interest. This is a caramel-lovers dream. A donut coated with sugar-dust sits on apple slices, the plate drizzled with caramel sauce, and the creamy Purbeck salted caramel ice-cream sits on a mound of caramel and chocolate crumbs. It is pure decadence.

Gazing through the train window at the free-roaming ponies grazing on the New Forest heathland as we make our way back

to London the next day, we are both relaxed and pensive. We didn't have time to explore the countryside of the New Forest, where opportunities for outdoor activities are abundant. Perhaps next time we'll walk the Solent Way footpath along the coast, taking in the touted views of the Needles and the Isle of Wight, or take a cruise along the Lymington River to see the protected saltgrass marshes, which are a haven for seabirds. A sailing adventure is also on the list, which grows longer by the minute. One thing is certain – this is not a one-off visit. Lymington and The Mayflower are well worth returning to.




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The Epicurean Club offers a selection of carefully curated experiences based around a superb collection of boutique inns, including The Mayflower. Whether it's to discover something new or explore special interests, every Epicurean Club experience is designed to help you get the most out of your countryside stay, and includes a stay for two people on a bed, dinner and breakfast basis. [www.epicurean.club](http://www.epicurean.club)