



# Summer Lodge

## Country House Hotel & Spa

Uniqueness mixed with a dash of eccentricity is what we found to be the case at the **Summer Lodge Country House Hotel, Restaurant and Spa** ([www.summerlodgehotel.co.uk](http://www.summerlodgehotel.co.uk)) in the charming Old-World-reminiscent town of Dorset, England (think thatch-roofed homes and shops).

First, there isn't traditional check-in. We arrived in the living room/bar area and proceeded to walk through a small hallway

(complete with grandfather clock) to a small private desk, where we checked in. Along the way, we noticed that the walls were covered in fabric. The owner and designer decided paper was not warm or traditional enough for this house, designed in the 1800s by the great English author, Thomas Hardy. When he wasn't writing *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Hardy was an architect. He designed the extensive house and grounds as

a "Dowager" residence, meaning the elder lady of a landed family lived here, along with her pets, extensive gardens and panoply of servants.

That feeling is very much alive today, not only in the main building but in the small village that surrounds it. Evershot, in the Dorset countryside, is an idyllic hamlet often used by film companies to recreate Victorian or Georgian England because there is nothing modern or

hectic about it. In fact, Emma Thompson chose the town to quarter cast and crew during filming of *Sense and Sensibility*. Thompson, Hugh Grant, Kate Winslet and Alan Rickman all stayed at Summer Lodge during the shoot.

What your clients will find when they check into Summer Lodge is a feeling of exclusivity and privilege, without the stuffiness. Henry Digby, son of Lord Digby, who lives at nearby

Minterne Abbey, told us it is that very quality he and his family cherish on visits here. Even though the family lives a stone's throw away, they often dine at Summer Lodge in the top-rated Dining Room, and rely on Sommelier Eric Zwiebel's expertise and extensive wine cellar. Note: Small groups of luxury travelers can book tours of Minterne Abbey and its treasures, hosted by Lord Digby himself. Ask General Manager Charles Lotter (clotter@rchmail.com; 011-44-1935-48-2000)—also the booking contact for luxury travelers—to help arrange these exclusive visits.

Other nearby attractions include miles of pristine beaches with charming Victorian seaside architecture (Lime Regis is particularly lovely for an afternoon outing) and the picture perfect-village of Cerne Abbas, whose influx of tourists is due to the Stone Age "Giant," a fertility image of a naked hunter, possibly etched into a hill before the Druids arrived. (Note: The chalk etching does border on lewd, so parents should take pause before bringing kids.) Cerne is also home to some of the best pubs in Britain. Sting is said to have a country home near here and when he's playing "English country squire," he frequents traditional establishments like the ones in Cerne.

Summer Lodge is also very close to the local port of Weymouth, which will host the sailing events in the 2012 Olympics (book your clients well in advance). Summer Lodge is starting to get seaworthy in advance of the games by offering luxury travelers special yachting rates with **GB Yachts** (www.gbyachts.com), the leading skippered charter operator in the area. Catering for groups of up to 10 on its 46-foot Bavaria rac-

**A FIREPLACE** in the Drawing Room (right) and warm décor in the Master Suite (below right) are some of the amenities that define Summer Lodge (opposite).

ing yacht includes a buffet lunch or upgraded extras like gourmet picnic hampers and vintage champagne.

Each room at Summer Lodge, bookable on the GDS, is unique (the house was designed in the 1800s, remember). Although many hotels make this claim, Summer Lodge is the real thing. Suites have fireplaces, small rooms have charming breakfast nooks and mid-sized rooms have wonderful garden views and cozy details like teddy bears and love seats with embroidered pillows. We truly felt as if we were staying in a house with its own personality. Note: Our personal favorite is the Ivy Cottage, a charming stand-alone cottage adjacent to the main house, custom-furnished for two (honeymoon couples love it) and with its own hot tub under a garden gazebo in a private back yard.

Since the hotel also owns the pub and the local bakery just down the lane, guests who like the vintage feel of the Ivy Cottage, but who number more than two, can take rooms in the rustic Acorn Pub, said to have inspired Hardy's *Tess*. The imposing Master Bedroom is truly king-sized, filled with art and antiques and expansive lounge and leisure space.

Out back, Summer Lodge's pool is as charming as the rest of the property. It's Olympic sized, but not at all sterile. Housed in the old greenhouse, it is surrounded by white washed garden furniture and heated year-round. Just around the corner is the Summer Lodge spa, a small treatment area where guests can receive a full range of spa ser-



vices. In-room massages can also be arranged.

One of the nicest touches of Summer Lodge is the feeling of warmth we got from being in a great English country house. Encourage clients to plan downtime

in the hotel itself. An afternoon spent chatting with locals over a fine whiskey in the horses-and-hounds-motif bar is one of the great pleasures that luxury travel can afford.

— Gretchen Kelly