
#WINTERHAVEN

A WIGHT WINTER

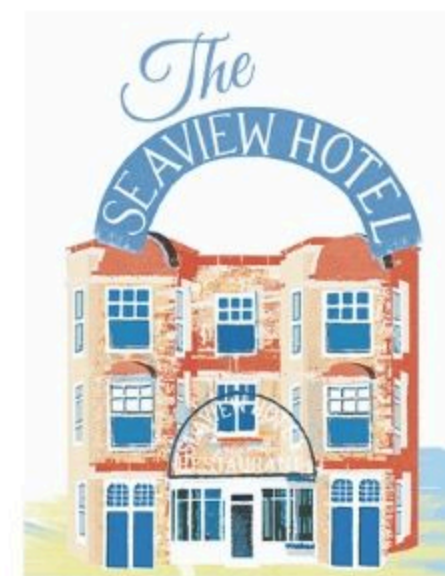
Author and journalist Mark Rowe writes about a recent winter visit to the Seaview Hotel



Yester-year charm

Mark Rowe

Independently owned and blissfully chain free, the Seaview hotel exudes charm from the minute you step across the terrace and through the front door into the conservatory. To your left is a snug lounge with deep, inviting sofas that prompt you to make a mental note to get down early before dinner to enjoy a glass of wine, a beer or a cocktail. The hotel works hard to retain and emphasise its yester-year charm, yet there is nothing stuffy or dated about the Seaview; every square inch of chintz has long been exterminated. Rooms are immaculately stylish, some with sink-in-all-afternoon baths; in others bay windows invite you to gaze at the activity on the Solent. For families, the top-floor apartment is perfect: spacious, with three rooms and lounge that seems to have been designed to play board games in, or just loaf, read and – yes, I know it’s going out of fashion – chat.



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If you can pull yourself away from the interior charms, the hotel rents out electric bikes to guests and non-residents and will provide bespoke routes that keep away from the busier roads. The hotel also offers free bus passes (no age restriction). Consider taking this up: Island buses are good and you can get anywhere and back easily in a day and fill the gap in between with a decent walk.

Dinner at the Seaview is something of a treat. You can choose between the bar and the restaurant. The bar is often bustling (if you need a little tranquillity, you can dine in the Naval Bar at the front of the hotel) and offers top-class classics such as fish and chips and burgers and crab ramekin, served with salad, lemon and sourdough. Alternatively, the restaurant really is excellent and is the only one on the Island to boast a Michelin rating known as the Bib Gourmand. This accolade is for food pitched just below the quality of a Michelin star but which offers creative and affordable food, with an emphasis on local and regional sourcing. Three courses are typically priced at £28 and can include crumpets with ox cheek, plaice with prawn tortellini, and mouth-watering crumbles and bay leaf ice cream for dessert.



If you can, it is really worth heaving yourself out of bed early one morning and strolling along the adjacent shoreline. Look out for bats flitting in and out of nearby eaves. In the clear, still dawn light, they seem surreal, rather like broken umbrellas jerked up and down by an invisible hand. Lines of cormorants fly east along the Solent; honking geese follow. Even a modest amble will sharpen the appetite and breakfast at the Seaview is likely to reinforce your life-enhanced mood. Phillipa, the head waitress, runs a laid-back, easy-going regime and the menus, printed in Art Deco text and perused amid a nautically themed dining room, are another example of the hotel's tasteful, light touch. spirit. I end up in a pleasing agony of indecision – cooked or vegetarian breakfast? Or perhaps salmon and scrambled eggs. Or eggs florentine? I could always stay a second night....

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